

COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

Date: 25th November, 1999

Time: 9.30am

Venue: Committee Room 1, National Assembly Building

Title: Secondments to European Institutions

Purpose

1. To explore the issues relating to securing a greater number of secondments to European and Brussels-based institutions that would be of benefit to Wales.

Recommendation

2. Committee members are invited to note the content of the report

Background

3. The European Strategy Group's report, published in December 1998, made a number of recommendations regarding increasing the number of secondments to European institutions. In particular it recommended that the Assembly should second officials to the United Kingdom's Permanent Representation, that a small core of staff should be established within UKRep, and that the Assembly should strengthen its presence in European institutions, in particular Directorates General within the Commission.

4. The purpose of seconding staff to European institutions is to provide the individuals concerned, and in turn the Assembly, with experience of working closely with the European policy-making process. The aim is to increase knowledge of how European institutions work, and how governments and interest groups are able to influence decisions. It also provides an opportunity to specialise in a specific area of European policy. An important element of a secondment is networking – getting to know people in various institutions, and maintaining contact with them at the end of the secondment. The expertise which is built during a secondment is important if the Assembly as a whole is to develop its understanding of the European Union and respond effectively to policy developments.

Past Participation

5. The National Assembly currently has two people seconded to Brussels-based organisations – one in the Wales European Centre and one in DG Regional Policy. Last year there were four Assembly officials in Brussels – one in Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs, one in Directorate General for Development, one in the European Parliament and one in the Wales European Centre. Prior to this the Assembly seconded two people to the United Kingdom's Permanent Representation.

Opportunities for Secondments

6. There are many opportunities to second people to European institutions and organisations which influence the European Union. Whilst all provide an opportunity to enhance the secondee's experience of the European policy-making process, the nature of the experience will vary depending on the type of secondment. The main opportunities are:

Assembly Representation – the proposed representative office in Brussels will liaise between the Assembly and the United Kingdom's Permanent Representation. This will provide an opportunity to understand how Member States participate in the policy-making process through their Permanent Representations, and observe the workings of the Council of Ministers and COREPER.

United Kingdom's Permanent Representation – Assembly officials will continue to have the right to apply for posts within UKRep. The remit of these posts is UK-wide and will focus a specific area of policy. Posts are advertised occasionally as vacancies appear.

European Union Institutions – secondments are possible to a range of European institutions, and are not limited to the Commission. Different types of secondments are possible depending on the nature of individual vacancies. These range from five-month secondments for trainees to three-year secondments for those who have an expertise to offer. These provide an opportunity to gain inside information on the operation of individual institutions.

Identifying Individuals and Opportunities

7. The key to arranging secondments is to be aware of opportunities as they arise, to identify suitable individuals and match these to the opportunities available. It is important that the Assembly is aware of opportunities as early as possible. These will be monitored by European Affairs Division, which will inform Personnel Management Division. The draft service agreement with the Wales European Centre provides for WEC's assistance in identifying secondment opportunities.

8. Personnel Management Division are in the process of identifying individuals who are

interested in being seconded to Brussels. They will work with these individuals over a period of time so that the full implications of living and working in another country can be explored. Language training requirements will be identified and provision made. A list of interested staff will be held centrally, and used as the basis for identifying suitable individuals when opportunities arise. Staff at all levels will have an opportunity to participate in secondments.

9. A re-entry process will be developed so that the expertise gained during a secondment can be put to good use on return to the Assembly. All Divisions should have an understanding of how European policy affects their work, and every effort will be made to ensure that staff returning to the Assembly have an opportunity to use the experience within Divisions which require expertise.