

Annex B/02/054a

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## **SENIOR CIVIL SERVICE RECRUITMENT : WOMEN'S VIEWS**

You commissioned a survey of the views of women to find out what it was about last year's SCS posts that failed to attract more women applicants. In particular, to establish whether there are any real or perceived barriers to progression for women to these and other SCS posts within HSE and to obtain views generally about the way in which we conduct recruitment campaigns for posts in the Senior Civil Service.

There were 73 responses to the questionnaire (69% B1 & 65% B2). I had originally divided the responses between the two groups in case there were different issues. However, there were very few so I have merged the findings into one document (annex attached). Where there are specific differences, these are made clear.

### **Main issues**

- ◆ Although few women applied for the posts advertised last year, most (who responded to the questionnaire) would consider applying for other SCS posts that may be advertised in the future.
- ◆ Debunking the mystique surrounding the SCS. Very few had any clear understanding of what the differences are between an SCS job and other posts and most wanted more clarity on roles and responsibilities.
- ◆ Most don't perceive the SCS culture as attractive. Most feel that the SCS generally are poor role models who set the mould in HSE the attitudes and behaviour of some senior women themselves has not helped. Many do not want to be associated with most of the SCS women they have met.
- ◆ The long hours culture is seen as counter-productive. The amount of control over hours of work and methods of interaction with others is deemed an important factor as is more flexible working opportunities.

- ◆ Location is a big issue. For most of those who don't live/work in London/SE, it is seen as a financial "no go" area. Many would be encouraged if more SCS posts could be based in locations away from the capital. For those who currently live/work in London mobility issues are equally relevant, but moving out of London/SE is also seen as a one stop shop. Many are unwilling or unable to move home in these circumstances and don't see career advancement being worth the disruption to their family life. Favoured alternatives that might be considered, in order of preference, are: North West; North East; Midlands; Wales & SW; East Anglia; and working from home!
- ◆ The whole question of work-life balance is much more of an issue now. The requirement to relocate (or relocate yet again), together with the long hours culture is a powerful disincentive.
- ◆ Encouragement, support, positive and constructive feedback were top of the wish list. Unfortunately, many seem to have worked for managers who give no encouragement. Positive female role models are necessary.
- ◆ Many Band 2's believe that the first hurdle is to get to a Band 1 post before considering further progression. Very few consider the leap direct to SCS as a realistic expectation, unless they had been encouraged to do so by someone in a position of influence. The lack of encouragement or apathy of line managers is a consistent theme. Many refer to managers showing little interest in their upward careers.
- ◆ The recruitment arrangements seem to be shrouded in mystery. There is the impression that SCS in HSE is an exclusive "club" for which outsiders don't know the rules. It would be helpful to have the process and purpose set out somewhere that is easily accessible.
- ◆ There are polarised views between technical, operational and administrative expertise about types of SCS posts which may be of interest. There is a wide gulf between those in technical specialisms, operational roles and administrators. Each group seems to believe that posts are aimed at the "other" groups and, that without experience of the "other", they will be unable to progress.

Finally, many feel that the issues are equally applicable to men and women. It is not a gender issue. Many are more interested in doing a job they find interesting, fulfilling and worthwhile than in seeking advancement.

I hope this is helpful. I am copying this note to Peter Lunn as he has lead responsibility within Personnel Division for SCS recruitment and will no doubt have an interest in the issues.

**LINDA BUXTON**  
Head of Equality Team

## SENIOR CIVIL SERVICE RECRUITMENT

### WOMEN'S VIEWS : B1 & B2

#### 73 RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRE

#### 1. Advertising

Only **75%** recall seeing the global message. **67%** felt a “global” is an appropriate advertising medium.

However, many individuals felt that global messages are only OK assuming they come out in plenty of time - deciding to apply for an SCS position needs careful consideration and adequate time to prepare applications. Globals need to be clear in their title about what is being advertised, as messages can get missed when people are on leave or away from the office. They are perhaps a waste for those who are not eligible. Some issues have been highlighted surrounding those on loan/ secondment, maternity leave, career breaks etc who did not have the message passed on to them in their absence. These people should be sent a paper document, preferably flagged up. Equally, there were some difficulties for people with disabilities who use adapted IT equipment (eg VRS users) as it could have printing/privacy implications.

#### **Other ways SCS posts could be advertised**

Some felt that “globals/another e-mail” is something people just want to be rid of and tend to get ditched. Most favoured *Personnel News* entries. These were seen as helping to break down differences/elitism between SCS and “the rest” and would bring all vacancies together in one place, therefore becoming more open and transparent. A “Special section” in *Personnel News*, or a separate flyer (in a different colour) ahead of competitions, were also popular suggestions as were: SCS Web site; Intranet “Vacancies in HSE”; individual mail shots (too resource intensive?); vacancy notices direct to eligible candidates; a letter, memo etc detailing the competencies needed could help to spark people into considering an application; personal message to all eligible staff; a tray drop to eligible staff; messages targeted at relevant bands would be helpful as it would reinforce eligibility.

It was also suggested that publicity which gave examples of successful candidates (especially those Band 2's who have leapt to SCS - both male and female) would help in building confidence to apply for such posts.

The cascade method of advertising SCS posts in OGD's through existing SCS members was particularly disliked. This is whereby it is left up to those SCS members whether they circulate the advert any further so, in effect, many Band 1's and Band 2's

may not see them, even though these posts are available on promotion. This “system” is seen as completely inadequate and unfair.

**2. Considered applying for one or more of the advertised posts**

Yes, and subsequently submitted an application	<b>9%</b>	B1	
		<b>2%</b>	B2
Yes, but subsequently decided against applying	<b>46%</b>	B1	
		<b>7%</b>	B2
No, did not consider applying		<b>46%</b>	B1
		<b>81%</b>	B2

**3. Would consider applying for other SCS posts that may be advertised in the future**

**82% B1      73% B2**

**4. Recruitment process**

Clarity of the recruitment process for SCS posts

Very	<b>0% B1</b>	Fairly	<b>73% B1</b>	Not at all	<b>18% B1</b>
	<b>2% B2</b>		<b>36% B2</b>		<b>55% B2</b>

Things that could help to make the process clearer

The arrangements seem to be shrouded in mystery. There is the impression that SCS in HSE (and beyond?) is an exclusive “club” for which outsiders don’t know the rules. Why is SCS different and what “elitist” messages does this send?

A few know about the process from previous applicants or personal applications. Most feel that it is not open or transparent and don’t know where to find information about it or conditions associated with the jobs. It seems to be more of a “we know him and he’s a good egg” and the “old school tie” than anything based on competency like the DCT process. It would be helpful to have the process set out somewhere that is easily accessible (as part of, or alongside, the DCT Guide for Bands 1-6 on the Intranet or in the Staff Handbook). Providing a reference in the advert to where guidance on the process can be found would also be useful.

The guidance should be reviewed and made as widely known and discussed as the current vacancy filling process for other jobs. For example, document the process, the scoring system, how decisions are made about whether the post should be advertised externally or in OGDs as well as HSE. Individuals also want to know more about the elements of the process re the application form, purpose and nature of the

psychological assessment and presentation at interview. Perhaps a non specific job summary could be sent out for reference. An indication of the timing and summary of relocation package could be included. More support and advice from Personnel and line managers etc was felt necessary.

For those who have been through the process, feedback to those who were unsuccessful suggests that there is a lack of clarity about what is looked for in applicants examples. It implies that examples illustrating the competences are not enough in themselves, but that linkages need to be made to how these justify fitness for promotion. Whilst this is understandable in the interview context, it is not in terms of the application itself. It should be clear that interviews are conducted against the competencies, that proper records are kept of the interviews with marks for each candidate against the competencies, and that the competencies/person specification and key criteria are those of the SCS. An indication of JESP scores would be useful.

Many B2's were unaware that they were eligible for SCS posts or, of those that were, had any chance of being successful in competition with Band 1's as they don't believe they yet have a wide enough range of experience to provide convincing examples. Perhaps the point that Band 2's can apply could be made clearer. The cross HSE/HSL boundaries need to be explicit and eligibility explained properly.

A waiting list is often convened, meaning those who applied for the first posts would be considered for any further posts which became available. This causes confusion, and has prevented some from applying for posts they would have applied for in the past. This system often works well for lower grades, but is perceived as less useful at SCS level.

Rumours persist that some or all D/Ds have a secret list of "high flyers" who are to be fast tracked and that acts of favouritism by senior management towards certain individuals (eg giving them T/P or desirable posts without competition) leads others to believe that they are not competing on a level playing field.

It would be worthwhile inviting women to, say, a short morning "seminar", conference or briefing to describe "life" at the next level, to discuss the recruitment procedure and provide general encouragement. It's not the written information - it's having someone to talk it through with that's important. If this is seen as discriminatory, then the exercise could be extended across the board to both men and women. Some "practice opportunities", particularly for the psychological assessment would be welcomed - but could defeat the purpose.

#### Things about the recruitment process that would put individual off applying.

Application form

0% B1

11% B2

Interview (including presentation)	0% B1	8% B2
Psychological assessment	9% B1	15% B2

### Others

There is a wide gulf between those in technical specialisms, operational roles and administrators. Each group seems to believe that posts are aimed at the “other” groups and, that without experience of the “other”, they will be unable to progress. There seems to be a particularly limited range of interesting SCS posts in comparison to other Government Departments. Overall, good/better career planning is felt necessary to enable talented staff to develop the wider range of skills that is seemingly needed to prepare them for promotion to SCS level.

Some feel disadvantaged by not being as “in the know” in comparison to others (eg Rose Court based) who may be more au fait with what happens.

The mechanics of filling in an application form or undertaking presentations may disadvantage those with special needs in relation to Disability Discrimination Act, as it makes the process less easily accessible and more time or other “adjustments” may need to be made.

### Things that can be done about it

There is suspicion about the competence and motives of some interviewers. People wanted to ensure interviewers are properly trained, follow correct procedures, and stop showing favouritism.

In relation to job related expertise (eg technical, policy) more questioning at the beginning of the process about competences and, more particularly, requirements was felt necessary. Some D/Ds have been, rightly, challenged for requiring unnecessary specific job related expertise in recruitment adverts and for vacancies on promotion. It is felt that the challenge may be insufficient for SCS posts.

There were mixed reviews about the application form and competency based structure. On the one hand, it is felt to be a necessary tool with some wanting more emphasis on recent past achievements and track record, with less hanging on performance on the day, whereas others felt it is a tedious and restricted approach and favoured a return to the old (hypothetical) interview scenarios.

The idea of providing training/assessment centres to prepare potential applicants was muted, with some sort of promotion assessment at development reviews to help encourage applications possibly (ie like the old fitted markings).

## **5. The posts**

SCS posts in 2001:

Matched skills and knowledge	<b>64% B1</b>	<b>29% B2</b>
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Provide a potential career development opportunity now or in the future	<b>64% B1</b>	<b>55% B2</b>
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### Other types of SCS posts which may be of interest

Polarised views again here between technical, operational and administrative expertise. Those with specialist/technical skills feel there is little opportunity to develop sufficient management skills to get even Band 1 posts - never mind SCS posts and therefore little hope of career progression beyond Band 2. On the other hand, those in administrative roles felt that they had little chance of success without an inspection background or specialist technical skills. Many queried the need for specialist job related skills.

Administrative and/or cross-HSE roles (eg change/corporate services/general management, strategic planning and policy roles) featured prominently, as did operational, scientific and technical posts. However, potential barriers relating to loss of premium pay were an issue for this latter group.

## **6. Location**

Locations that would have been an attractive proposition

London/South East	<b>36%</b>
Bootle	<b>41%</b>
Scotland	<b>19%</b>

### Reasons why these locations are not attractive.

With most SCS posts being located in London, although SCS is a “mobile” grade, mobility seems a more difficult option for women, who are frequently still the mainstay support for families. It is an obvious problem, though not just for women, and, for those who live/work outside London, they may not wish to abandon their families/friends/quality of life in the interests of their careers. Many would be encouraged if more SCS posts could be based in locations outside London. For example, moving policy jobs to Bootle.

For those who currently live/work in London the mobility issues outlined above are equally relevant but moving out of London/SE is also seen as a one stop shop - it would be impossible for most to move back again later and regain their previous quality of life. It would need serious economic consideration as many would wish to maximise/maintain their investment in property.

London/SE is seen as a financial “no go” area by those who could not afford, even on SCS salaries, to buy property there that would provide for an equivalent quality of life. Most would have to commute in from too far to be able to live somewhere half decent. Also, as those applying for the SCS are generally over 40 years, the mortgage

repayments involved would be excessively high for many to pay back before retirement. Those who have already made the move away from London feel they would be significantly disadvantaged financially if they had to return to the South East as most equivalent properties would now be completely out of their reach.

Some have already moved home a number of times to accommodate the Civil Service and advance their careers, have been very flexible about working hours and travelling away from home and/or were part of major relocation exercises away from London some years ago, alongside promises of better career opportunities. It leaves them feeling bitter that opportunities away from London have not materialised and they do not feel inclined/or able to move back to London for advancement, with the upheaval to family and the considerable financial loss involved. They feel it would be unfair to expect it, given their responsible attitude to moving in the first place. A major irony is that having relocated away from London, many seem to spend half their time travelling to London for meetings with those who didn't relocate! More role models who are not London based, or those who will travel Northwards for meetings are considered necessary. Many feel that if HSE is genuine in its need to save money, that costly London posts should be moved elsewhere, saving on expensive premises & London Weighting.

Many are restricted to current locations because they either have children settled at school (with established family/support mechanisms and it is important that they can be kept close and be nurtured), have caring responsibilities for elderly relatives, a spouse/partner with a secure job/career/business. Many are unwilling or unable to move home in these circumstances and don't see career advancement being worth the disruption to their family life. Although most have no wish to live apart from family for long periods or undertake long distance commuting and would not do a job that is not within easy daily commutable distance their home, a few would be prepared to undertake long-distance commuting, perhaps stopping overnight as necessary, perhaps mixed with some hot desking in a different location. It gets more difficult to handle and endure and the returns less significant for the effort involved. Also, the hassle of travelling in the SE puts too much stress on people and other factors affecting quality of life. Some feel that the considerable travelling involved with SCS would have a detrimental effect on family life.

#### Other HSE locations that might be considered

Favoured alternatives, in order of preference, are:

North West (Manchester; Preston); North East (Leeds; Sheffield; York; Carlisle); Midlands (Birmingham; Marches; Nottingham; Northampton); Wales & SW (Cardiff; Bristol; Poole); East Anglia (Norwich); and working from home!

#### **7. Other factors**

Areas which could potentially have an impact on decision on whether to apply for a SCS post:

Job content	<b>84%</b>
Skills and experience	<b>86%</b>
Hours of work (long hours culture)	<b>67%</b>
Location	<b>86%</b>
Remuneration	<b>43%</b>

### Other

Many see SCS members working ludicrous hours and feel that those in the Senior Civil Service should get a grip and set a better example. The long hours culture is seen as counter-productive. The amount of control over hours of work (patterns and amount) and methods of interaction with others (video/telephone conferencing) is deemed an important factor as is more flexible working opportunities.

The challenge of the job/job satisfaction and sense of achievement, recognition and fulfilling potential is important.

Many felt there are artificial barriers and discrimination surrounding the requirement for an administrative or, alternatively, specialist/inspection background. It should be possible to think more broadly about the transferable skills of potential applicants. There is dissatisfaction over inspectors and specialists being paid more than administrators even when doing the same job, yet also concerns from specialists about losing their premium pay. Some specialists were reluctant to give up the highly technical content of their jobs and still wanted to use their particular skills on Safety Regulation - very few SCS posts fit this criteria.

There were concerns about the people they be working for/what SCS colleagues would be like and whether they would be compatible. Line management support was considered essential as was operational support.

## **8. Things that might make SCS jobs more attractive**

Debunking the mystique surrounding the SCS. Very few had any clear understanding of what the differences are between an SCS job and other posts and most wanted more clarity on roles and responsibilities. The grading system within the SCS isn't clear. Jobs might be more attractive if the necessary skills and qualities required were more transparent, and information on these more accessible. Shadowing opportunities/development opportunities to experience the work and to develop the necessary skills and competences at both Band 1 & band 2 could be a way forward. More insight into what the jobs involve and how much control over worklife balance was wanted and information about the process of getting into the SCS. Knowing what support mechanisms might be available to a successful candidate - what are the expectations from a new entrant to the SCS. Sponsor or mentoring system to help support individuals through the transition on promotion was seen as being helpful.

Emphasis on HSE core values including the importance of management skills was considered essential. There is some despair at the apparent absence of these skills in line managers and a perceived low value placed on management skills in HSE. Many SCS posts seem to be short-term occupancy giving plenty of opportunity for ideas and change but not much for consolidation and achievement. The leadership role is seen as important, but this necessarily takes time to develop - time often not given in the SCS structure.

It was felt that there was little commitment to life/work balance or understanding the responsibilities of working mothers or those with other domestic commitments. More personal performance jobs that could, perhaps, be done from home or locations outside London/SE were suggested as an option, as were more flexible working patterns and flexibility on location. People could see no justification for posts to be linked to London anymore. A clear HSE policy on homeworking alternatives, remote working/access to HSE information systems would help encourage applications. Some had concerns about how juggling work/life might be regarded at a more senior level.

There are aspects of the SCS jobs that cause concern. For some, it is the enormity of the jobs. For others, the different contractual basis of it can be off-putting - having to go to SCS conferences twice a year and confusion over the pay and performance management system.

The perception, especially from Band 2's, is that much more experience is needed before considering SCS posts, along with encouragement and improved self-confidence. Many Band 2's do not see SCS as realistic without having gone through Band 1 first. For some its not so much the attractiveness of the posts but having the examples to create and effective application. More information on what selectors are looking for would be helpful - this would also help in planning future career development.

For some, the posts they are interested in have never been advertised, having been filled from waiting lists. This has been off-putting, because the waiting list lottery may mean being offered a post they would not wish to accept. Posts that don't need individual to sell your soul and ethics to get to the top.

**9. Have discussed the possibility of applying for SCS posts during your development reviews with line manager**

B1 64% B2 16%

Reasons for not doing so

**Band 1**

Some do not yet feel ready yet, but for many the line manager did not cover the subject in appraisal reviews. There is a presumption from this that they are not deemed suitable to apply for SCS posts.

## **Band 2**

Many Band 2's believe that the first hurdle is to get to a Band 1 post before considering further progression. Very few consider the leap direct to SCS as a realistic expectation. There is also a nervousness about discussing SCS posts with Band 1 line managers, as some feel that it would not be taken seriously. Many assume that the competition from Band 1's would be too great. The chances and opportunities for development to Band 1 level are regarded as minimal, so some feel there is no point even discussing Band 1, let alone SCS. Some believe that those who currently work on a part-time basis would not be considered for SCS posts. There are also many Band 2's who are relatively recently promoted to the Job Band and don't think that they are yet in a position to consider applying for a Band 1 or SCS position.

Lack of encouragement or apathy of line managers is a consistent theme. Many refer to managers showing little interest in their upward careers. No detailed development reviews or discussions about developing my competencies have taken place in some instances. Discussions about future aspirations seem relatively rare.

## **10. Management styles that particularly encourage/discourage applications for SCS posts**

### Encouraging

Encouragement, support, positive and constructive feedback were top of the wish list. Only one individual reported having worked for managers who actively encouraged and supported career development, including applications for SCS posts. This had given her confidence and reassurance that such aspirations were reasonable. It was thought that proactive discussions from management (ie line and appraisal managers) can be very thought provoking and encouraging. Transparent and supportive management systems would be helpful in ensuring that managers met their obligations.

Positive female role models are necessary - senior females who make it clear that those skills traditionally regarded as strong in women (eg communication, management) are valued and that the expectations of SCS can be dovetailed with a full family life. There was clear admiration for those (few) who have the courage, probably to the detriment of their own careers, to practice what they preach by reducing long hours, taking time off and daring to say "no". Ideally, women would like to see more role models and have the opportunity for job shadowing or being mentored.

### Discouraging

Many have worked for managers who give no encouragement - those who discourage applications, are silent on subject of applications, give over-critical negative feedback, make the person feel undervalued. It seems to be the exception to come across a manager who takes an active interest. Over emphasis on academic background in

HSE (if you're not a "Dr" you're nobody mentality). But there is also a perception that many SCS posts are "reserved" for non-HSE staff from, for example, Whitehall, whose outlook and approach appear often to be different from people who came through the HSE "ranks".

## **11. Factors that could explain the under-representation of women at senior levels**

Most don't perceive the SCS culture as attractive. SCS is seen as competitive (with each other) and can appear very macho/laddish in culture, with a tendency to promote in their own image and where diversity is just lip service. It is seen as rather formal and with an expectation that everyone speaks the language. There is a strong feeling that the SCS generally are poor role models who set the mould in HSE and provide every reason not to follow them. The management styles of many SCS members are thought to sit uncomfortably in terms of HSE's values, desired corporate behaviours or leadership qualities. The attitudes and behaviour of some senior women themselves has not helped (eg buckle under pressure from male colleagues, work long hours, expect others to do the same, bully and intimidate those who don't) - and they are berated by all. Some felt it was easy to find examples of senior staff who cannot work together or corporately. Sometimes men are seen as having a "stronger" view or could be more capable of leadership, only because these are qualities that are associated with "traditional" male roles and role models. It may not be the job that a woman could do is in question, just that a man is seen as having automatic authority to do it. There is a general expectation that those "in the limelight" will get chosen. Women are a little more unwilling to get involved in the in-fighting and jealousies that always seem to surround applications for SCS posts. Men who "get on" seem to be more "pushing" in their approach. Many women said they do not have any desire to work at this level and in this way. They felt that the "values" of the SCS seem to encourage personal ambition often at the expense of teamworking and understanding staff concerns.

In the main, impressions of SCS managers are that they are remote from Band 1 & Band 2 staff and have a poor knowledge and understanding of what they do. Detachment from "sharp end" activities comes over as weak leadership. Some were seen as more interested in how they look to their own senior managers than gaining the respect of their staff. There is a strong perception that the old boys club operates to a certain extent. Confrontational management styles in the SCS are tacitly encouraged, yet the more supportive/non-confrontational styles - where women are stronger - are not valued/encouraged (may even be seen as weak). The masculine style seems to be more valued in the organisation ie firefighting is more highly valued than preventing the fire in the first place.

There is a noticeable lack of role models of women who balance life's responsibilities. Groups such as the Civil Service Women's Network help, but HSE could do something itself to promote confidence and support for female managers. There are almost no women in HSE who have successfully combined their careers with family life - almost all senior women seem to be single, married no children, or divorced. There are few obvious positive examples of flexibility in working hours/conditions as a role for other

women to follow. Many do not want to be associated with some of the SCS women they have met.

It is possible that the current system, with its emphasis on the “I” word, is not as attractive to women as to men. Women tend to prefer to apply for specific jobs they like rather than making general applications just to get promoted. This is not helped when exercises to fill 3 or 4 SCS posts give rise to “waiting lists” (not mentioned prior to the exercise). Women still have to run that bit faster than men in terms of achievement/promotion/recognition of ability etc. This is despite all the advancement in equality/equal opportunity. Women only tend to apply for jobs they already have skills for and, in general, don’t tend to push themselves forward. They may be less ambitious - more interested in doing a good job than getting on, and sticking with existing good working relationships.

The whole question of work-life balance is much more of an issue these days, and some feel that women are more sensitive to this - although the vogue within recent years has been the image of “super woman” balancing family commitments with a demanding job. The general perception is however that the level of commitment, travel, long hours culture etc is just too great. Family commitments keep many women tied to a particular location and there is a lack of alternative working patterns at senior grades. For many, the time “lost” to deal with parenting has meant that their career has taken a “back burner” for some years. There is a feeling that there may be a swing back, certainly among younger women, to wanting more family time when children are young. There is also a perception that our more senior managers dedicate all to work and have no other life. Also, a very real apprehension that career enhancement may simply create many more burdens than benefits. HSE needs to develop itself into a more family friendly organisation. Most feel that the remuneration and satisfaction offered for senior posts are not worth giving up other interests and activities.

Belief in own their abilities can limit some women. There is a lack of confidence to apply and the tendency to believe that the stereotypical senior male civil servant is the most likely to succeed. A is the belief that anyone who does not fit this type needs to be even better to achieve SCS status. Progress to senior posts for many women requires development of expertise and self confidence.

There aren’t enough women yet in the feeder grades, either in policy or technical disciplines, and that will inevitably reduce the number of female applicants for SCS posts. Yet there is a tension between specialist/administration. For women with technical backgrounds, this could be a reflection of fewer women in such areas in the higher education system (with the possible exception of women working in life sciences). Also, HSE is a very technical organisation with many engineers and technical professionals in the operating divisions. Thus the “pool” of female technical specialists has been arguably small. On the other hand, there is also the perception that there are fewer jobs available to administrators and policy staff than to inspectors, and as many women rising through the ranks have administrative or policy backgrounds, this results in fewer women administrators in the feeder grades. Administration staff are led to believe that many posts are not open to them due to lack of health & safety professional qualifications and/or related operational experience.

Professional qualifications held by admin staff (eg in personnel, IT, management, business etc) are not felt to be generally recognised or taken account of in HSE.

Many would appreciate a more formal approach to mentoring within HSE so that more women could share their experiences and advice on working at a senior level. Some thought it might be useful to get together small focus groups of B1 & B2 women to discuss these issues with a female SCS member facilitating. Some also felt that coaching from SCS members and personnel professionals would be useful for eligible women. There were also concerns that not all messages about opportunities reach all parts of the organisation - some find out only when notices are forwarded by colleagues elsewhere in HSE.

## **12. Barriers to women's advancement to SCS posts**

The barriers are not felt to always be overt - they are institutional. Changing attitudes would help including, from the top, showing commitment that we are a diverse organisation and at the forefront of organisations in terms of equality. Equal pay would be a good start.

When SCS managers are asked to provide lists of those suitable for promotion, seemingly without criteria, or consultation or staff involvement, this makes promotion of the same more likely, and perpetuates the current culture. It is felt that the "old school tie" brigade is very much alive - if you are not like them, you can't be part of the club - and until these dinosaurs are removed or retire, nothing much will change.

Requirement to relocate (or relocate yet again) and long hours culture is a powerful disincentive. Until more SCS posts are seen in other locations (eg outside London), there will not be many applications from women. There are many women in HSE who have Whitehall experience but do not live and work in London now and feel particularly abandoned by HSE. Many relocated with high hopes of better things. But as the years have passed and opportunities have not been forthcoming, their expectations have dimmed. It is a waste of talent and denies opportunities for those who can offer much at senior levels.

The HSE culture does not favour women who chose work/life balance. Those with family commitments are perceived to be less committed to their careers as a result. Some feel that choosing alternative working patterns may create a barrier and the treatment of people on career breaks is pretty poor. HSE could start here to help people. Most women taking time out to look after small children feel they are simply forgotten by HSE. Some of course will be potential SCS material. More should be done to promote part-time working/job shares for SCS members and move jobs into the Divisions - ie make locations flexible. There are other barriers in terms of opportunity - people near Bootle or Rose Court can easily move between operational and policy jobs (most now within the same offices at both locations), whereas people further away can only do this at the expense of their personal lives because of the travelling involved.

HSE needs to get the admin/inspection culture sorted out. Both view the other as being more favoured and feel that there is a great pool of talent (either way) that is largely

ignored or undervalued. Realistically, many administrators (in London) feel they are more likely to find a post in another government department as they believe that promotion to SCS is geared to inspectors and specialists. There needs to be some recognition that other people could be trained and/or learn more to do with the different structures in policy and ops directorates. The assumption too is that B0's will have progressed through B1. As there are very few B1 posts, there is strong competition. These posts do not necessarily require the same competencies as all B0 posts but are still seen, by inspectors particularly, as a necessary step. Perhaps the creation of temporary B1 posts in policy, for those who might be considering application for B0 policy posts, might attract some interest. Many wanted to get first hand experience of the jobs by either doing individual elements of the job or seeing at close range how it's done. The lack of management experience opportunities for specialists is considered a barrier. There needs to be a real commitment to alternative ways of working that allows posts to be elsewhere.

Some felt that more emphasis on an individual's management capabilities and less on their apparent breadth of experience (in terms of where in HSE they have worked) would help. The organisation tends to focus too readily on the immediate past, and no longer values experience demonstrated across a variety of jobs and situations. Poor academic achievement for some means they are not perhaps as able to sell oneself as vigorously as others. For some, it is too late to do anything to change their circumstances and more support and interest over the last few years by management might have produced a different outcome.

There is still a certain amount of apparent sexism and unnecessarily aggressive behaviour from some men at senior levels (as elsewhere in HSE) towards women in general and, in particular, those with family commitments.

Lack of opportunity to develop new skills especially where seniority rules are rigidly applied in relation to temporary promotion. Since the audit of pay shows that most women are clustered around the bottom of the pay scale, women are generally going to be the losers on seniority. Although this isn't a macro issue, it still denies many women the opportunity "to see and be seen".

Very few women at band 2 level would apply for an SCS post, unless they had been encouraged to do so by someone in a position of influence. Any that do are perceived as having very powerful sponsors. It might be argued that if these staff are talented does it matter if they had help? The answer is yes, because there are other equally or more talented staffed who could be passed over. Favouritism by senior management towards other individuals in the field is seen to exist. There should be more open management and active work to develop wider range of HSE's staff - not just for the "chosen few". Many people in the field also believe that people in HQ are "in the know" about jobs coming up and can facilitate their internal moves more easily. They do not consider that DCT/MAP has fully opened up the system and that patronage is still alive and well within the organisation.

It would be helpful if the job related expertise was applied more diligently at Bands 1&2 and for attachments to give opportunities to a wider range of staff in preparation for SCS posts. The observation is that the requirement to constantly move jobs to gather

“expertise” has become a culture within HSE in all grades, not just senior levels. This results in a lot of staff with a large number of “competencies” and “management experience”, but a shrinking number of staff who have an in-depth knowledge of any part of HSE business. Some do not feel able to subscribe to this philosophy, and the fact that they have not joined in with the “career movement” system has made them believe that it would not be worth applying for a SCS post.

Full career development programme should be introduced for all staff, including those with potential to become SCS members. Currently there is too much emphasis on the individual doing the process and relying on “opportunity”. A planned career programme for staff at Band 2 would help to identify posts that would allow staff to develop skills needed for the SCS.

No barriers are insurmountable - if women really wish to move into SCS posts they will try for them. The reality is possibly that the majority do not wish to. It’s making it a sufficiently attractive and flexible proposition that is necessary.

### **13. Additional comments/observations**

Many feel that the issues are equally applicable to men and women. It is not a gender issue. None are specific to women only. Both men and women have children, elderly parents, partners with professions/careers not just jobs, interests outside of work etc. Some feel resentful that these “problems” are perceived as being applicable only to women. HSE needs role models (male and female) who break the old Civil Service mould! Until the whole picture is opened up it will be difficult to judge whether women are particularly adversely affected.

To achieve SCS grades it appears that individuals need to get promoted rapidly move around continually which does not always fit with family commitments. Without some TLC, potential SCS women on maternity leave/career breaks may be lost to HSE or seek greener pastures.

Many are more interested in doing a job they find interesting, fulfilling and worthwhile than in seeking advancement. Their families and their well being matter a great deal, so promotion (plus move) is something most are very wary of. The TUs could have a role in encouraging women to apply for SCS. Women are perhaps more ready to recognise when they have achieved their optimum level. Men tend to be more competitive and will put themselves forward even if they might be out of their depth in the higher grade.