

# The Network

Issue 11



Inside this Issue:



Focus on the Ministry of Defence

Charity events

CS Local updates



Plus much more...

# Welcome to Issue 11 of The Network **What's Inside**

[Your Voice](#)

Thanks for your feedback!

[Focus On](#)

Ministry of Defence

[Charity Abseil](#)

MOD's Barry Stone

[Neil Green](#)

A GIAA Leader

[Charity for Civil Servants](#)

Jean Cooney talks volunteering

[CS Local @ 5](#)

CS Local around the UK

[CSNW Local Pages](#)

What's happening in the region

[Cycling for charity](#)

John Bentley goes to France

[Problem Page](#)

Our panel is here to help

[The Plea Page](#)

Opportunities for all!

[Cross-Department Quiz](#)

The holidays are coming...

[Just For You](#)

The feature nobody mentions

## Editor's Note

Welcome back to The Network, in this bumper issue we cover all kinds from learning about the Ministry of Defence to getting you ready for Christmas with a Christmas quiz!

Read updates from around the north west in the CS Local pages including a run around other regions in the UK!

An abundance of charity work has been taking place across the region. Get up to speed with several activities and initiatives.

GIAA's Head of Counter Fraud and Investigation Neil Green talks about his role and involvement across various departments in the north west as well as a DOGdy case...  
#ruff

The ever popular Problem Page features with our team of dedicated Agony Aunts being represented by Auntie Glyn for this edition. He is ready to help so please send us your questions and we will endeavour to obtain the answers for you so get in touch. No subject is taboo!

Don't forget to check out the regular features; Plea Page and Just For You!

## Editorial Team - Contact us - [thenetworknw@gmail.com](mailto:thenetworknw@gmail.com)

Glenn Atkins (DfE)

Jane Cunningham (HMRC)

[glenn.atkins@education.gov.uk](mailto:glenn.atkins@education.gov.uk)

[jane.k.cunningham@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:jane.k.cunningham@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk)

Jen Frankish (DWP)

Robbie Roberts (DfE)

[jennifer.frankish@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:jennifer.frankish@dpw.gsi.gov.uk)

[robbie.roberts@education.gov.uk](mailto:robbie.roberts@education.gov.uk)



Civil Service Local is committed to ensuring that wherever possible our events are accessible to all participants. If you have any specific requirements that will enable you to fully participate, please let us know and we will endeavour to make any reasonable adjustments.

Welcome to our new feature...

# *Your Voice*

As we are feeling really optimistic and excited about working even more closely with Civil Service Local, we wanted to share some of the positive feedback that the editorial team have received over the past few weeks.

As always, we take all comments on board so feel free to continue to send them in as we look to constantly improve The Network for your reading pleasure.

The place to read random stuff about people you've never met. **Ellie (Manchester)**

Sorry, on the phone, very busy woman. **Rhianna (Bolton)**

Great to see the magazine is still doing so well. Keep up the good work laa **Stephen (Liverpool)**

Finished off the phone now...  
**Rhianna (Bolton)**

Great detail product, light-hearted and easy to read...  
**Peter (Blackburn)**

Good way of getting to know what's going on across the civil service and the opportunities available. **Rhianna (Bolton)**

# Focus On... Ministry of Defence

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has permanent and casual civilian personnel, including Royal Fleet Auxiliaries, Trading Funds and locally engaged civilians .

The UK regular forces comprise full time trained and untrained personnel in the:

- Royal Navy
- British Army
- Royal Air Force

Full personnel information can be found in the following publications:

[MOD civilian personnel quarterly statistics](#)  
[UK armed forces monthly service personnel statistics](#)

*We protect the security, independence and interests of our country at home and abroad. We work with our allies and partners whenever possible. Our aim is to ensure that the armed forces have the training, equipment and support necessary for their work, and that we keep within budget.*



## Ministry of Defence

*Our priorities 2015 to 2020 are to:*

- *protect our people*
- *project our global influence*
- *promote our prosperity*
- *maintain a strategic base and integrated global support network, and manage the Department of State*

*Read our [Single Departmental Plan](#) to find out more about how we are performing against our objectives.*

*We have 7 military tasks:*

- *defending the UK and its overseas territories*
- *providing strategic intelligence*
- *providing nuclear deterrence*
- *supporting civil emergency organisations in times of crisis*
- *defending our interests by projecting power strategically and through expeditionary interventions*
- *providing a defence contribution to UK influence providing security for stabilisation*

MOD ministers are:



Sir Michael Fallon MP; SoS for Defence



Earl Howe; State for Defence



Mike Penning MP; State for the Armed Forces



Mark Lancaster TD MP; Parliamentary Under SoS and Minister for Defence Veterans, Reserves and Personnel



Harriett Baldwin MP; Parliamentary Under SoS and Minister for Defence Procurement

## Taking serious leave of my senses!

### Ministry of Defence's Barry Stone tell us about his Charity Abseil



How else would you describe someone who would willingly walk to the top of Liverpool Anglican Cathedral for the sole purpose of coming down, dangling on the end of a rope?

It all came about due to a link to a Local Animal Charity via a CSSC bulletin. Among other activities, they were promoting was a Charity Abseil. I decided to apply and was eventually sent a registration pack. I completed this was then given a jump off time.

All that remained now was to tell my colleagues what I was up to, and ask would they like to sponsor me? Most, having seen the posters dotted around the building, were all willing, and maybe one or two were a bit too willing, once they were told about it! After that there was nothing else to do but wait for the day to arrive, and hope that just for once, the weather would actually remember that it was supposed to be summer, and would behave accordingly.

Upon arrival at the cathedral I registered and was then helped in to the safety equipment. There was time for some photos with my son, with 'his hero' whoever that was. It was then time for the journey to the top and out on to the platform. Just about time to admire the view of the city, the weather conditions were ideal. It's a brilliant view as long as you've got a head for heights, and remember that you're only stood on a temporary platform. A few final instructions, then off you go!

*"I kept it pretty quick, just stopping occasionally so as not to burn my hands..."*

The worst part over, all that remains now is to decide how quickly to descend, which probably depends on your sanity! This was my second ever attempt, so as soon as I was 'airborne' I knew what to expect. Unfortunately, I couldn't take advantage of the view again; as I was dropping facing the wall, and thought that if I tried to twist myself around I might end up spinning, as it was a free-fall abseil i.e. no wall to push against. As I didn't want to risk tiring my arms dropping down from 150 feet (approx. 45m), I kept it pretty quick, just stopping occasionally so as not to burn my hands, possible even wearing safety gloves. And then, before I realised it, I'd landed.

A great experience and a wonderful way to spend a Saturday afternoon if there's no football on! Would I go again? Yeah, I pretty much reckon I would.

#### Getting to know...

#### Barry

- 1. What books would be found on your bookshelf?** Lord of the Rings, Bravo Two Zero, The Odessa File, The Inspector Morse collection, any Hillsborough Autobiographies, 44 Years with the Same Bird, An Epic Swindle
- 2. What is your favourite food?** Steak, Chicken & Chips, Pizza
- 3. What is your favourite sports team?** Liverpool FC & Pittsburgh Penguins
- 4. What was the last film you watched and provide a two word review?** Bridge of Spies, understatedly excellent
- 5. Who would be your 5 ideal dinner guests?** Bill Shankly, Bob Paisley, My wife, My son, (probably for the light relief) Tony Benn



## Getting to know... Neil Green

*Head of Counter Fraud and Investigation at the Government Internal Audit Agency (GIAA)*



### *Can you tell us a bit about yourself?*

I live in Chester and head up the Counter Fraud and Investigation team for GIAA. For most of my career I have worked in Central Government and have had a variety of roles from benefits processing to finance to contract management. For the past 15 years I have worked in criminal and civil investigations.

Although based in the North West, my team of 40 is located across the UK, so I spend a lot of my time in other parts of the country.

My team joined the Agency in April 2016 from the Department of Work and Pensions, where our primary responsibility was investigating internal fraud by staff and contractors. This is still a key part of our work in GIAA, but the scope and span of our counter fraud and investigation services is now much wider and involves working with a number of departments and agencies, including the Department for Education.

One of the most exciting aspects of moving to GIAA has been the opportunity to lead the creation of a recognised counter fraud specialism at the heart of government. One of my objectives is to improve both the quality of counter fraud services provided in government departments and ensure skilled resources are deployed efficiently and targeted where they can add most value.

Working with such a wide range of different customers and understanding their business areas, places us in a unique position to help strengthen defences against fraud across many aspects of public expenditure, whether that is fraud by a member of staff, a contracted supplier or provider, or by an external third party.

### *What brought you into fraud investigations?*

Probably an unfortunate encounter with an Alsatian in the 1990s! I spent two weeks shadowing a fraud investigation team and on a home visit a claimant refused to answer the door. He didn't take kindly to the letter telling him his benefits would be suspended and as we left, a dog came charging up the garden path. It's very hard to get two people through a garden gate at the same time, but luckily we escaped with only a couple of bites and torn trousers!

Despite this experience, I really enjoyed the two weeks and it had a lasting impression. Some 15 years later I grabbed an opportunity to join a fraud team and to make a real difference tackling fraud and abuse against public money.

### *What does the Counter Fraud and Investigation team investigate?*

My team investigates allegations of fraud, suspected illegal activity, serious misconduct, or a serious breach of the organisation's ethics or standards of behaviour. This includes cases causing serious reputational damage e.g. leaks of sensitive information, malpractice and concerns raised through whistleblowing channels.

Our work is not just about investigating when things go wrong though, and we work very closely with Audit colleagues and others to help prevent and deter fraud, advising on revised processes and ensuring lessons from past investigations are learned and shared.

### Jean Cooney: Benefit Services Directorate ESA, DWP



I have been a Campaign Volunteer working in the North West Benefit Services since July 2016 and prior to that in North West Working Services. I have volunteered for the Charity for a number of years. I became involved in my role as a Wellbeing Champion firstly in Merseyside Working Services Directorate. In September 2016 I attended the Charities Annual Volunteers Conference and was asked to speak and give the other volunteers my top tips for promoting the Charity in my own workplace and wider.

**Top tip 1** is to forward the 3 weekly volunteer e-mail which tells people about the Charity's services and it can help, through the network of people involved in the Health & Wellbeing of individuals I have built up over the years approximately 50 people. The Charity has been able to capture just how many people have read the bulletin from my emails to those 50 people and at it's peak recently reached over 1,800 people reading about the Charity from forwarding just one e-mail!

**Top tip 2** I also encouraged the other Campaigners representing all Civil Service departments to try and network with other colleagues who are part of engagement, diversity or wellbeing groups in their workplaces and get their help in telling more colleagues about the Charity, and the services it offers, on a regular basis.

I believe that although I don't know exactly who I am helping by spreading the word, as long as at least one colleague gets help in their time of need, that's definitely worth it!

Just a few weeks ago I found out I had been nominated for a Volunteer's Award and have been invited to Grocer's Hall in London to receive the award on the 8<sup>th</sup> December at the Volunteer's Awards Ceremony. Whilst surprised, I am very proud that the work I have done in promoting the Charity has been acknowledged in this way.

If you want to know more about the Charity and Volunteering read on...

[The Charity for Civil Servants](#) supports all civil servants, past and present, throughout their lives, with whatever problems they may have. And we really do mean whatever problems. For example, if you're struggling with debt which in turn is putting a strain on your relationship, the Charity is here to help. If you're caring for a relative who needs specialist equipment or support and the situation is beginning to take its toll on your own mental health, the Charity is here for you.

In fact, the Charity can help in many more ways than those outlined above. They have trained advisors who are there to listen and help you cope with life's unexpected challenges. Read some [moving stories](#) of those who've been helped in their time of need. And if they can't help, they'll know someone who can.

[More about the Charity](#)

[Relationships](#)

[Domestic Abuse](#)

[Money Advice](#)

[Mental Health](#)

**The Charity for  
Civil Servants**

for you

by you

You may find it helpful to visit the Charity's website [www.foryoubyyou.org.uk](http://www.foryoubyyou.org.uk) to learn more about its help and advisory services or to see how you can get involved, or call 0800 056 2424 for further information.



Civil Service  
Local

@ 5

**Finding  
Innovation and  
Value in  
Everyone**

*Last month we celebrated 5 years of Civil Service Local, with a focus on our own region – the north west. But did you know we're only one of five regions? Here's a quick taste of what our colleagues do across the country to support the Civil Service Vision and help transform government services...*

## Midlands



We're Civil Service Local Midlands! We cover all of the Midlands from east to west and base ourselves mainly in Birmingham and Nottingham as these areas have the largest concentration of civil servants in our region. We're led by our regional co-ordinator Andrea James.

We've recently run several 'How to get that job' discovery sessions, looking at competency writing and interview techniques. Feedback from these sessions has been great, we wouldn't have been able to deliver these sessions without the help of our networks. We currently have two Academies, one each for east and west of our region, so in the new year, we'll be merging them and running the first ever 'joint' Midlands Academy.

## Eastern, South East and London

Our regional coordinator is Ian Barton, ably assisted by Susan Coles and Nafesa Salah-ud-Din.

We cover a very diverse area from The Wash round to the Isle of Wight. Our patch ranges from quite isolated sparsely populated rural market towns to the densely populated cosmopolitan capital city of London, so there's no one size to fit all! As a region, we have the most civil servants (145,000) and most if not all government departments have a presence in London.

Our most recent success has been our Aspiring Leaders Academy aimed to support the development of staff in our junior grades.

*Hi I'm Leo Castledine and I am the head of Civil Service Local, leading teams based in eight locations around the country. Our challenge is to identify, develop and deliver practical solutions to help make the CS a great place to work; and to help turn the aims of the Civil Service transformation plan into real and meaningful activities for civil servants in their regions. I am truly inspired by the work we do and immensely proud to head up such a diverse team as CS Local.*







## North East Yorkshire and Humber

We're based in Longbenton, Newcastle Upon Tyne, led by Co-ordinator Michele Crawford, Assistant Co-ordinator Richard Armstrong supported by Anne Hunter Executive Support and Kelly Roush Admin Support.

We offer various opportunities to existing Civil Servants covering engaging our schools including a Primary Reading scheme with volunteers going into local schools to help children with reading or to listen to children read.

Also we run a scheme called Work is Fun which involves volunteers going into schools promoting different careers in the Civil Service sharing information about their jobs in an active and fun way.

We've established a number cross departmental networks across the patch. These are on Learning and Development, Redeployment, Attendance Management, Continuous Improvement and Engagement. They provide a great opportunity for colleagues to share ideas, knowledge and best practice.

Like all our regions, we also run regular Discovery sessions on various topics such as Discovering Parliament, Discovering Devolution, Operational Excellence and Dementia friends. We also source volunteers and support local careers events at local schools.

Our take on the Academy model is the Modular Academy. This is for existing Civil Servants in Administrative roles or first time Managers. It's a one year programme comprising of four two day modules and involves working on a project. Each participant is matched to a mentor throughout the duration of the programme from another department.



## South West and Wales

Hi, we're the South West & Wales Civil Service Local Team.

Led by Nita Murphy our Regional Co-ordinator and Heidi Stephens Assistant Co-ordinator, we're also supported by 3 staff working for us on loan, Danielle Eyre and Louise Ferris from DWP and June Shearing from HRMC. We cover a wide geographical area from Wales, all the way down to the far South West of Cornwall. The breadth of departments and agencies in our patch is significant with some being unique to our area, for example UK Hydrographics, DSTL (Defence, Science & Technology laboratory), Intellectual Property Office, Met Office and the Office for National Statistics.

*We offer civil servants in our region different learning and development opportunities and ways to network. This is through job shadowing, half day learning events, volunteering opportunities in schools or with vulnerable groups as well as the usual Academy and networks.*

*You can find out more [from our leaflet](#) or by [visiting our blog](#) to see what we have coming up next.*

## 2015 Academy families round-up

**It's been 12 months since the 2015 Academy families began their respective projects. Here's summary of their projects and a peak at what they'll do next ...**

### The Pandas: Civil Service Champions



The Pandas' idea was to help our various departments deliver the Civil Service transformation plan by becoming more aware of one another and their work. To do this, they recruited 32 Civil Service champions across eight departments. By sharing their stories through digital media, the champions' everyday roles were used as case studies to explain the work of their departments. The Pandas also hosted a successful open day to promote their message to a wider audience. Now, they hope to carry on their awareness work across new platforms to extend their reach.

### The Giraffes: The Learning Tower

No matter which department you're in, as a new manager in the Civil Service, you will face similar challenges. So, the Giraffes decided to bring new managers together to share ideas / experiences, helping each other to grow into their leadership roles. Following a successful pilot, three further workshops were held. The project's sponsored by Stephen Lovegrove, Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Defence.

### The Otters: Frontline Exchange

By providing frontline colleagues an opportunity to observe and work on the frontline of another department, the otters aimed to support government reform by sharing understanding and creating stronger links.

For the team, simply working on the projects itself was the highlight of their group experience - which relied on hard work and collaboration.



## 2015 Academy families round-up continued

### The Panthers: In Your Shoes



The Panthers planned a joined-up approach to answering enquiries from service-users across the board. The idea was to enable signposting across all departments to allow citizens to access all the services they need. The Panthers researched user needs and built a database of contacts for call handlers. Their new inter-departmental directory has been well received and has been refined to align with information available on GOV.UK

### The Penguins: SID – a cross-government recruitment resource



The Penguins set out to increase consistency in the job sifting and interviewing process across the Civil Service. They set out to pool resources from a range of departments to create more inclusive recruitment panels. To do this they came up with a Sifting and Interviewing Database, affectionately known as SID!

2015 Academy families round-up continued

The Zebras: Learn to Lead



The Zebras organised day-long leadership events involving staff at different grades who are encouraged to 'leave the grade at the door'. Their objective was to promote the sharing of good ideas and experiences by removing the barriers that can sometimes be created by grade structures. This has led to better collaboration across both our hierarchies and departmental boundaries.

## 2015 Academy families round-up continued

### The Bears: Pride of the Civil Service North West Awards

The Bears wanted to recognise and reward the great contributions by civil servants to their communities across the region by creating and hosting an awards ceremony. The tagline was 'ordinary people doing extraordinary things'. The day itself was a great success, with 14 colleagues recognised for the difference they have made to people's lives. The ceremony was a huge success with Ruth Owen, head of the Operational Delivery Profession among the high-profile guests who presented awards. Following evaluation, the plan is to consider replicating the idea in other regions across the country in the future. You can read about the winners in this edition of The Network.



### The Wolves: PEP-UP

The Wolves' project stands for Promoting and Engaging with People to Uplift Perception. They produced two films to show citizens some of the amazing work being done by civil servants.

One of the films highlighted the work of a specialist team from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The Special Rules for the Terminally Ill team carry out very challenging work. The film showed how they engage with and support the people they serve.

Attitudes towards civil servants were measured before and after they watched the two films.

Before watching the films, 54% of citizens rated the Civil Service as 'good', but this then climbed to 82% after they had seen some of the work that civil servants actually do.

The next step is to make more films that show a broader range of activities across the Civil Service to further improve public perception and to drive better engagement between the Civil Service and the citizens we serve.

They've all come a long way since that initial pitch!



### Celebrating the unsung heroes of the Civil Service –The Pride Of Civil Service Awards

The first Pride of the Civil Service North West awards were held to celebrate the unheralded contribution civil servants make to their communities in their own time. The event was staged in the magnificent surroundings of Birkdale's General Register Office, with finalists being recognised for their achievements in eight categories.

The awards ceremony evolved from an original idea at the CS Local North West Academy 2015. The team involved had to create and deliver a project as part of the Academy experience, and they decided to raise the profile of civil servants and celebrate the amazing things that some of them do to help their local communities. The event's tag line, 'ordinary people doing extraordinary things' neatly sums-up that aim.

The team created a communications campaign to tell civil servants about the awards and they were rewarded with a flood of nominations from government workers who wanted to highlight the achievements of their colleagues. In total, 14 winners and runners-up were presented with beautiful, cut-glass trophies to commemorate their achievements.

Ruth Owen, who heads the Operational Delivery Profession for the Civil Service, presented some of the awards. She said the experience was "emotional, humbling and inspiring".

One of the winners was Alison Duggan, who works in child maintenance at the Department for Work and Pensions. She won the Courageous Person category for intervening to save the life of a man who was threatening to end his life.

Alison said: "I was in shock! I really didn't think I would win it". She said of the ceremony: "It was full of interesting stories.....some were so inspiring and others very upsetting. It shows how many good people there are that do so much for the community and their families."



*Pride of Civil Service awards continued*

## Celebrating the unsung heroes of the Civil Service –The Pride of Civil Service Awards

Mel Goodship won the Special Recognition award for her tireless work in highlighting the dangers of open water.

Mel's son, James, died in 2014 after he got into difficulties while swimming in a reservoir with friends. Mel and her family collaborated with Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service to make a video called 'Dying for a dip – James' story', aimed at warning people of the dangers of open water in places such as reservoirs, lakes and quarries.

The film is now used by 17 Fire and Rescue services across the country, alerting countless numbers of people to the risks posed by open-water swimming.

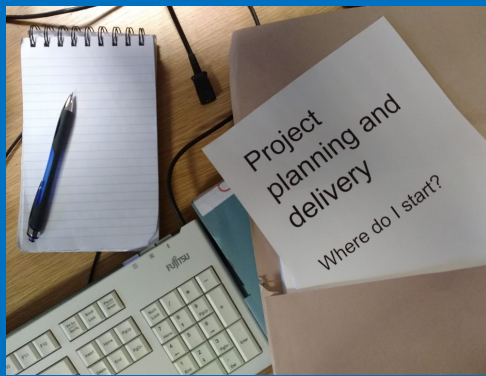
Mel received a standing ovation from everyone in the hall when her nomination was read out and they learned of her campaign.

Jamie Cousins, one of the organisers, was elated by the event. He said he was "bursting with pride and excitement at the success of the awards", adding it was "the highlight of my Civil Service career so far."

Plans are already underway to hold another awards night next year. Desanne Sutherland, who was also part of the team that organised the awards, said: "I think I can speak on behalf of the whole team when I say we'd love to see the event become an annual feature on everyone's calendar. We'd love to see other regions adopt it, and we hope for the Pride of the Civil Service Awards to reach a stage where a national event is possible."



### *Discovering opportunities in project management*



***The first discovery session on project and programme management has been held at Preston's Kirkham prison, with a diverse audience of North West civil servants taking part. Alex Scott, covering his first Civil Service Local event, found that the knowledge the audience took away with them could be a springboard into a new career – sooner rather than later.***

All CS local events whether citizen-focussed projects, cross-government networks or discovery events like this one aim to make civil servants more skilled, so they can be even more effective in their current and future roles. The Land Registry's Steve Field, who is a member of the Civil Service Local steering group, explained to the audience of 70 colleagues how discovery sessions link to policy, saying "discovery sessions make policy real". He wanted the attendees to take the knowledge gained from this session and apply it back in the workplace.

That chance could come sooner than the attendees thought. Sue Harper, a project manager in HM Revenue Customs (HMRC), said that her department have 200 project manager vacancies, which is one of the reasons why these discovery sessions are taking place.

After explaining the basics and aims of project management, Sue began the interactive part of the session, which proved to be very popular with the audience. The attendees were split into groups and given the task of planning a holiday in 20 minutes. A twist was thrown in around halfway through the task; facilitators gave each team new information which meant that they had to rethink their plans and change them, though another 15 minutes were allowed.

At the end of the task, each team explained how they had weighed the risks and benefits of the holidays they had planned, and how they had responded to the new information they had been given. One team had planned a skiing trip to Norway, with risks that included costs and benefits including learning to ski, but had to come up with a new plan when they were told that an ash cloud had grounded all flights to the country. A re-think saw them plan to head off to Austria instead, supplementing the slopes with a trip to a Christmas market.



### *Discovering opportunities in project management continued*

Sue explained that the exercise was to give everyone a taste of being a project manager, before she spoke about how to get a job in the profession, the different roles available and the range of projects that exist. The attendees went away with plenty of food for thought, and the possibility of a new career beckoning.

Mike Cheshire from the Department for Work and Pensions organised the event. He thought it went well, especially the interactive section. He faced a challenge in finding a suitable, available venue, but deploying his project management skills he found HM Prison Kirkham, which he said was ideal.

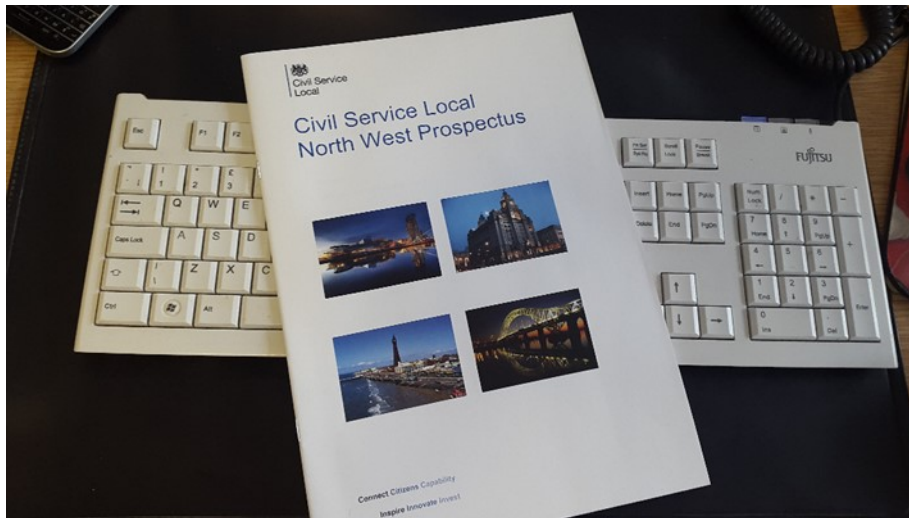


I spoke to some of the attendees to gain their insights into the event. Melanie Shipstone from HM Passport Office said she particularly enjoyed the interactive section, and she thought it was interesting that despite the groups all having the same brief, the results were very different.

HMRC's Viv Shone is currently a project leader, and she was interested to learn about the current vacancies for project managers as that could enable her to progress her career in the profession.

For myself, I really enjoyed attending and reporting on this event. It gave me a greater insight into the world of project management and, by talking to colleagues in different departments, an insight into the wider Civil Service.

*How to find out more*



Please read our prospectus ([link here](#)) for further details about our offerings and how to get involved

We've invested in our people, empowered them to innovate and in return they have inspired others to be the best they can be. We are constantly working to make a brilliant Civil Service that is a great place to work, with skilled people, effective leaders and improved outcomes for all our citizens.

I hope this gives you a flavour of what we've achieved over the last five years - here's to the next five!

*Why don't you come and join us?*

## Taking on Mount Ventoux

### HMRC's John Bentley talks about his Cycling Challenge in the French Alps



Approximately one year ago my younger brother, Paul, or 'Our Paul' as he will be referred to from heron in asked if I fancied cycling up Mount Ventoux for charity. "Yeah whatever" I unwittingly replied. If I am honest I was not 100% confident the trip would come off. And if it didn't it could be filed alongside a number of Our Paul's half-baked ideas. He still hasn't traded in his car for a vintage Vespa for example.

However around Christmas 2015 I found myself being quizzed about training routines and rides that I had or rather more accurately, had not, been on. I then received a link to justgiving.com page. The realisation dawned. He was serious.

There were two chosen charities, Cancer Research and My Life. Cancer Research is a noble cause which needs no introduction and cancer is a disease which impacts upon a number of families, including my own. My Life is a charity established to support a range of disabilities but was close to our party due to the assistance it provides to families with autistic children. In total we raised over £2,500 between the two thanks in no small part to the generosity of colleagues from HMRC.

It was at that point I started to review the statistics. Google and Wikipedia came to my aid:

Height:	1,912 metres
Distance:	22km (all of them pointing up)
Average gradient:	7.5%
Steepest gradient:	12%
Tour de France appearances:	16
Tour de France Summit Finishes:	10



There followed a further realisation. I needed to train. I consider myself a casual or recreational cyclist as a consequence, I am more concerned with the number of pubs a given ride may take in rather than the number of kilometres. I am also a fair weather cyclist and the prospect of getting out on my bike during the depths of winter was not an attractive one. I was further hampered by the fact my 'proper bike' was in indefinite storage following its theft and, thankful retrieval. I had however acquired something rather more leisurely to accompany my girlfriend when we chose to go for rides at the weekend to the pub (naturally). In the coming months, but only once the weather improved, my trusty steel steed would become the ultimate training bike.

For the most part the training went well. I actually overtook the odd person whilst out on my bike (always a good sign) and my Strava segment times were fairly respectable for someone riding a bike built for comfort rather than speed. The biggest hurdle I faced was the fact the terrain near me was not particularly hilly, never mind mountainous. Consequently I had to go out in search of inclines. Manly Road, Frodsham was my chosen nemesis. I trained alone but by the time the trip came around, I was feeling as fit as I have for many a year.

## Taking on Mount Ventoux



We travelled to Bedouin at the base of the mountain in the opulent luxury of a mini-bus full of lads (who were primarily Our Paul's colleagues). For those not familiar, Ventoux is in Provence. It was decided we should camp and our base was in a fantastic location just 500 metres or so from the start point.

We'd arranged the bike hire in advance and for a modest outlay I had chosen essentially the same bike Chris Froome rides when tackling the Tour de France. To say I was pleased with my choice is an understatement. The bike looked fantastic but crucially for the challenge ahead it was light. Very light in fact. Just riding it the 8 kilometres back to the campsite was a joy. I had clearly picked the right tool for the job.

The 'grand depart' was at 0600 and we were away. The opening kilometres of the Bedouin-summit route are very gentle among the vineyards of Provence. After 5 kilometre or so you turn left into what is known as the forest section and that's when things start to get serious.

The forest section of the ride is just switchback after switchback at gradients of 10%+. Dense forest lies behind each corner, this has the benefit of allowing one to psychologically chalk off these individual challenges as did the stone kilometre markers along the entirety of the route. Chalet Reynard signified the end of the forest section.

Thereafter begins the open lunar landscape section that Ventoux is famous for. It really does look other worldly with the weather station at the top of the mountain marking the finish. It's a strange sensation once you reach the top. I can only describe it as an emotional mix of disbelief, relief, fatigue, satisfaction and achievement. There's certainly no emoji for it. And what's more you look around at your fellow companions at the top and it's clear everyone is feeling the same. Then it's a case of enjoying the views and taking numerous photos while supping an isotonic beverage?!

Going down the mountain sounds fun in theory. However regularly reaching speeds of 75kph, can only be described as scary when you are only wearing lycra to protect you?!

As quickly as the trip began, like any good holiday, it was over. There followed an emotional farewell to the bike I had shared the experience with and another 26 hour mini bus ride. The mood on the bus was euphoric and talk quickly turned to where we might go next year.

"Alpe d'huez?" Our Paul suggested.

"Yeah whatever" came the collective reply...

### Getting to know...

*John*

#### **1. What books would be found on your bookshelf?**

Shamefully few books but the most recent I have read are Devil May Care by Sebastian Faulkes as Ian Fleming; The Big Short by Michael Lewis and Flash Boys also by Michael Lewis (as I enjoyed the Big Short)

#### **2. What is your favourite food?**

Italian food generally but you can't beat Roast Beef (and all the trimmings)

#### **3. Who is your favourite sports team?**

Burnley

#### **4. What was the last film you watched and provide a two word review?**

The Hateful Eight; Don't bother

#### **5. Who would be your 5 ideal dinner guests?**

Bradley Wiggins, Sean Dyche, Rory McIlroy, Danny Baker and Our Paul

## PROBLEM PAGE

Dear The Network,

I'm a civil servant based in East Lancashire. I'm ready for a challenge and would love to build my competencies through some volunteering work. Are you aware of anything in the Accrington on Burnley area that I could get involved with?

*Well, as serendipity would have it, we can point you in the direction of just such an opportunity on your doorstep. Civil Service Local are about to launch a new pilot project in BURNLEY, working with job seekers to help build their confidence at job interviews and hone their CVs. It's a chance to polish your skills in leadership, coaching, and communication. [You can find out more details on the blog](#). Or, if you'd rather pick up the phone and discuss the project in more detail - you can call Janine Clitheroe on 07798 695976.*

Dear The Network.

I'm keen to progress and want to build a professional career in the civil service. I'm driven and ambitious with a lot to give. Any ideas on my next big development step?

I don't always feel comfortable talking to my immediate line manager about my career. I think she even gets jealous of me sometimes and isn't very supportive. If I challenge, she turns things so I start questioning myself. I want someone I can confide in and who will inspire and coach me, but we don't have the best relationship - help!

*Look into fast stream, information can be found on their new website [here](#). The closing date for applications is 30th November.*

Contact [Jo Nunnerly](#) and get a mentor they will coach and help you to be able to have more constructive conversations with your boss as well as develop a better working relationship. Find out more [here](#).

Dear The Network,

I enjoy getting involved in communications at work but my spelling and grammar isn't too good. I want to make it better and learn how to do more digital stuff - where can I get me some advice?

*Check out the government communication service website [here](#)—there is lots of information on here including the newly launched style guide which you can find in the blog section of the website.*

If you have a problem and no-one else can help... don't contact the **A-Team**, they haven't been seen for a number of years. Instead contact [The Network](#) team. We will be far more useful than a bunch of former soldiers of fortune who waste their time building armoured tanks out of milk bottle tops and pipe-cleaners.

### Looking for Development Opportunities in the North West?

Take a look at the Civil Service Local blog [here](#). Here you will find advertisements to get involved in various projects they are promoting and job opportunities available. Check it out...

Keep up to date with CS local North West on their [blog](#) for news, opportunities and more...

People Connections enables colleagues to network and collaborate with others outside their department. It's open to civil servants and public sector colleagues across the North West, and we want volunteers to help with exciting new additions to the programme.

If you can spare a few days a month, you can help devise, organise and oversee the four strands of the People Connections programme, which are:

Shadow 'n' Share Days, Business Buddies, Placements, Secondments

Interested? Have a chat with your line manager first to make sure you have their support and agree the level of time you can commit to the project. If you'd like more information or an expression of interest form, please [email Jo](#)



# The Network *Cross-Department Quiz*

*As the festive season approaches get into the Christmas spirit with our Quiz*



1. Yule Log cake is the traditional Christmas cake served in which European country?
2. Who wrote the following words: "It was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge."
3. When did Queen Elizabeth II deliver her first Christmas message to the nation?
4. In which European country do creatures called Kallikantzaroi get up to mischief around Christmas?
5. Who composed the music for the ballet 'The Nutcracker'?
6. Which two figures deliver gifts in Russia during the festive season?
7. What famous Christmas film starred James Stewart as George Bailey?
8. Which country traditionally gives London's Trafalgar Square its Christmas tree?
9. Feliz Navidad is Happy Christmas in which language?
10. How many Lords-a-Leaping are there in 'The 12 Days Of Christmas'?
11. In the rhyme 'Christmas is coming' what is getting fat?
12. Which of Santa's reindeer shares its name with a mythical god of love?
13. At which of her houses does the Queen traditionally spend Christmas?
14. In literature, which fictional character said it is "always Winter, but never Christmas"?
15. In the film 'Jingle All The Way' what toy is Arnold Schwarzenegger hunting?



Just for Fun *YOU*

# Sudoku

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9

	4			8			5	
			3		2			
1		2		4		9		3
4			8	2	7			9
	2						3	
5			4	3	1			7
7		8		6		3		2
			5		3			
	3			9			7	

# WORDSEARCH

Can you find these words: ABSEIL, CHRISTMAS, CSLOCAL, PLEAPAGE, PROLEMPAGE, VENTOUX

B	Z	G	P	L	R	T	U	X	V	I	J	S	V	G
I	K	S	Y	S	N	C	O	G	I	G	U	O	B	W
O	T	S	A	M	T	S	I	R	H	C	D	Z	H	X
Z	V	Z	G	D	O	M	W	K	V	N	J	E	A	B
A	B	U	T	B	H	N	S	D	W	R	G	I	T	R
K	N	L	G	V	Y	O	R	D	E	A	V	X	R	I
O	V	F	A	D	I	E	I	R	P	B	Q	O	A	G
X	T	L	J	C	W	F	G	M	K	B	E	Q	B	H
D	M	T	V	K	O	M	E	C	V	Y	L	J	S	D
T	M	I	L	I	M	L	J	L	W	Z	L	B	E	J
J	M	P	D	H	O	E	S	A	C	F	I	L	I	Q
C	B	A	C	R	T	B	H	C	H	T	G	E	L	J
H	R	C	P	S	M	R	X	W	D	W	W	D	G	N
Z	X	U	O	T	N	E	V	G	V	O	W	E	X	H
E	G	A	P	A	E	L	P	N	Q	P	W	B	R	K

Answers from last editions Sudoku puzzle

1	5	4	8	2	6	9	3	7
3	9	6	4	7	5	1	2	8
8	2	7	3	9	1	4	6	5
9	6	1	2	5	8	3	7	4
5	4	8	6	3	7	2	1	9
2	7	3	1	4	9	5	8	6
7	1	5	9	6	3	8	4	2
6	8	2	5	1	4	7	9	3
4	3	9	7	8	2	6	5	1

Answers from last editions Autumn Quiz

- September
- March
- French
- Melancholy
- 30th October
- Thanksgiving
- Back
- Halloween
- Chlorophyll decreases
- Diwali
- Amy Winehouse
- Pumpkins
- Harvest
- September, October, November
- 1621

## The Network Back Catalogue

Click on a front cover to see a previous edition



Answers for the Cross-Department Quiz and Sudoku will feature in Issue 12 of The Network