

From: [REDACTED]  
To: [Bevan, James](#)  
Cc: [Chief Executive Office](#); [REDACTED]; [DL-DEFRA-NewsSMT](#); [REDACTED]; [Burns, Anna](#); [Rawlinson, Lee](#); [Marks, Kate](#); [Sutton, Rob](#); [Hunt, Lucy](#); [REDACTED]; [Douglass, Caroline](#); [DL-DEFRA-Newsdesk](#); [DL-DEFRA-Comms SLT](#); [Chair Office](#); [REDACTED]; [Lovell, Alan](#); [REDACTED]  
Subject: RE: JAMES TO CLEAR - STAFF NETWORK, MEDIA HANDLING  
Date: 14 November 2022 10:34:58  
Attachments: [image001.jpg](#)

---

Morning all,

For awareness, over the weekend the [Telegraph](#) ran an article on the cross-government Sex Equality and Equity Network – full copy below. There is no Environment Agency or Defra group mention. The article focusses on comments from the network and reports the network is open across government. The Cabinet Office led on the government response which is reflected within the piece (highlighted).

We will continue to monitor media coverage and have EA reactive lines prepared in case needed. We will flag if approached by media or if the Environment Agency is mentioned in coverage.

Many thanks,

[REDACTED]

#### [Civil servants 'fight back' to defend binary biological sex](#)

The defence of gender-critical beliefs follows a series of controversies around Whitehall diversity training

Civil servants have launched a new employee forum to “fight back” against groupthink and defend binary biological sex, The Telegraph can disclose.

The cross-government Sex Equality and Equity Network (SEEN) is open to all public sector staff in the UK.

It was launched by civil servants last week to “re-focus attention” among officials on furthering sex-based rights by reaffirming sex as immutable.

It is the first time mandarins have formally organised a defence of gender-critical beliefs, following a series of controversies around Whitehall diversity training.

Last year, staff in some Government departments [were shown a “Genderbread Person” diagram](#) that claimed sex and gender sit on spectrums of zero to 100.

And earlier this year, other officials were schooled in unlimited gender identities using a “diversity iceberg” model and told to imagine a “Japanese gay grandfather” in a workshop.

SEEN said it was needed because “we all need to be able to talk openly and clearly about sex-based rights using clear language” to [improve equity between men and women](#).

“In recent years, confusion has arisen between sex and the concept of gender identity. Some people have a personal sense of identity as male, female or neither, which they call gender identity,” SEEN said.

“We think it’s important not to confuse sex with gender identity because confusion undermines our ability to protect everyone’s rights.”

The move was welcomed last night by Government insiders. A Whitehall source told The Telegraph: “Whether it is introducing pronouns, building ‘universal’ toilets or referring to ‘chestfeeding’, the assault on women in the civil service is now facing pushback.

“This network is a sign to mandarins that [if they try to erase women, women will fight back](#).”

[The Cabinet Office confirmed that SEEN has been authorised as an official employee network, joining around 20 other forums on issues such as LGBT+, disability, flexible working and race.](#)

One mandarin broke ranks earlier this year to tell The Telegraph that Civil Service HR chiefs recognise more than 100 self-identified genders for official personnel records.

Meanwhile, a:gender, another employee network that exists across the entirety of Whitehall, is open to members who self-identify as transgender, transsexual, non-binary, gender fluid, genderqueer, gender variant, cross-dresser, genderless, third gender or bigender, and intersex.

It has run inclusion workshops for hundreds of Civil Service staff and says it wants officials to go beyond current equality legislation and use "[appropriate language/names/pronouns](#)" and "challenge inappropriate language or behaviours". SEEN says it "believes in fairness, tolerance and pluralism" with other staff networks, backed by the Civil Service diversity and inclusion strategy, and "wants to avoid and challenge groupthink".

The Telegraph understands that SEEN has already amassed multiple members.

One member, who has joined from HMRC, said they were "sick of the gender and trans twaddle", while another said the group was months in the making and "here to stay".

Concerns about civil servants spending hours sitting through diversity courses prompted Jacob Rees-Mogg to [axe more than 250 "woke" courses in September](#), when he was Cabinet Office minister.

Mr Rees-Mogg claimed some sessions were "indoctrinating" civil servants with "divisive ideological agendas".

Maya Forstater, a tax expert whose own landmark legal victory to protect gender-critical beliefs under the 2010 Equality Act sparked JK Rowling's first trans intervention, also welcomed the move.

"I hear from many people that they are afraid of being harassed and discriminated against at work if they speak up about sex-based rights," she said.

"A network like this can give people support and make clear that the ordinary belief that sex matters is worthy of respect."

**A Government spokesman said: "All staff networks are voluntary. Civil Service Employee Networks [provide support and practical guidance to staff.](#)"**

---

**From:** Bevan, James <James.Bevan@environment-agency.gov.uk>

**Sent:** 08 November 2022 11:30

**To:** [REDACTED]@defra.gov.uk>

**Cc:** Chief Executive Office <Chief.Executive@environment-agency.gov.uk>; [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk>; DL-DEFRA-NewsSMT <DL-NewsSMT@defra.gov.uk>; [REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk>; [REDACTED]@defra.gov.uk>; [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]@defra.gov.uk>; [REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Burns, Anna <anna.burns@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Rawlinson, Lee <lee.rawlinson@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Marks, Kate <Kate.Marks@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Sutton, Rob <rob.sutton@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Hunt, Lucy <lucy.hunt@environment-agency.gov.uk>; [REDACTED]@defra.gov.uk>; Douglass, Caroline <caroline.douglass@environment-agency.gov.uk>; DL-DEFRA-Newsdesk <DL-Newsdesk@defra.gov.uk>; DL-DEFRA-Comms SLT <DL-CommsSLT@defra.gov.uk>; Chair Office <ChairOfficeEA@environment-agency.gov.uk>; [REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Lovell, Alan <Alan.Lovell@environment-agency.gov.uk>; [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]@defra.gov.uk>

**Subject:** Re: JAMES TO CLEAR - STAFF NETWORK, MEDIA HANDLING

[REDACTED] thanks. Fine. Let me know if we get any interest.

[REDACTED]: and you let me know please if there is any internal rumbling from others.

James

Sent from my iPad

On 8 Nov 2022, at 10:12, [REDACTED] <[\[REDACTED\]@defra.gov.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@defra.gov.uk)> wrote:

Hi James,

Please see media handling on the new Sex Equality and Equity Network below.

Grateful for your view when you can.

To note, we haven't been approached on this or seen any media coverage yet.

Many thanks,

[REDACTED]

**To:** James Bevan

**Already cleared by:** [REDACTED], Anna Burns, Caroline Douglass

**Issue:** A new civil service wide staff network called [Sex Equality and Equity Network \(SEEN\)](#) has been established. The network aims to promote and support sex equality and equity between men and women in the workplace. The network say their focus is "on challenging sex discrimination and upholding rights and protections that relate to sex".

The network holds the protected belief (covered by the protected characteristic of religion and belief in the Equality Act 2010) that biological sex is binary and immutable.

Some members of Environment Agency staff are founding members of the network and plan to publish an item on the Defra Yammer channel to publicise the network during w/c 7 November.

**Media handling:** The staff network has already been launched and we have not seen any media pick up. Although it is possible this could enter the public domain and attract some media interest, particularly in outlets such as the Daily Mail or trade press like Civil Service World. Overall, this would be a Cabinet Office lead as the network is civil service wide and they would handle queries reactively. If we receive any approaches on the network which are not specific about the EA we will direct to the Cabinet Office in the first instance.

It is unlikely the EA would feature in media coverage as potential coverage would like discuss the network as a whole and potentially link it to ministerial and government positions on related issues. However, if any coverage does pick up on EA involvement we have prepared the below reactive lines. These lines make clear that the EA is committed to creating an inclusive workplace. The lines also explain factually that the staff network has been recognised by the Cabinet Office and is civil service wide, rather than just in the EA.

Separately, Defra group and EA internal comms are aware and are working on internal comms handling.

**Are you content with this media handling approach?**

**Background information:**

- The wellbeing of all staff is a top priority for the Environment Agency.
- The EA is a public service, place based organisation so it is crucial we are an inclusive organisation and representative of the communities we serve.
- We are working to promote inclusion for all staff and to tackle discrimination through a range of actions – including mandatory Respect at Work training for all employees, refreshed grievance, dispute and resolution policies, and ongoing collaboration with our

diversity networks.

- The cross-government Sex Equality and Equity Network (SEEN) is recognised by the Cabinet Office and is open to staff across government, including staff at the Environment Agency.

**If needed:**

- As part of our commitment to being an inclusive employer, we will seek to ensure all staff feel supported and respected in the workplace. Our staff have the right to free speech and expression of belief and where there is disagreement we will support staff to talk to each other and be respectful of each other, of difference and of differing views.

[REDACTED] | [REDACTED]  
 Planning & Corporate | Defra Group Press Office  
 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
 Direct line: [REDACTED] | Out of Hours: [REDACTED]  
 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Seacole Block, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF  
 Email: [REDACTED] [\[REDACTED\]@defra.gov.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@defra.gov.uk)  
[Read our media blog here.](#)

