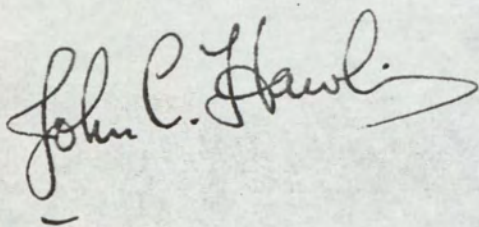


PS/LORD PRESIDENT

cc PS/Minister of State
PS/Permanent Secretary
PS/2nd Permanent Secretary
Mr Wilding
Mr Wollen
Mr Jarman
Miss Rolleston (No 10)

LORD O'HAGAN'S PQ: MINISTERIAL TRAVEL ABROAD

... I attach a draft answer for Lord O'Hagan's Written Question for the approval of the Lord President, together with a background note.



J C HAWKINS
Parliamentary Clerk
24 February 1981

HOUSE OF LORDS

FOR WRITTEN ANSWER

THE LORD O'HAGAN: To ask Her Majesty's Government how many Ministers have travelled abroad in each of the last five years; where each trip has been; the number of people accompanying the Minister on each occasion; the number and cost of interpreters on each occasion; and the cost of each trip. [19th February.]

THE LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL (LORD SOAMES)

Information in this form is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. It is for Departmental Ministers to account [to my Rt hon Friend the Prime Minister and] to Parliament for managing their travel arrangements in the most economical and efficient way possible.

BACKGROUND NOTE

1. Lord O'Hagan is the MEP for Devon. He has asked us three previous PQs during the current administration:

- i. How many civil servants are engaged in agriculture, fisheries and tourism.
- ii. How many members of CPRS have experience in Europe.
- iii. A comparison of MPs' and MEPs' pay.

Copies of these questions are at flag A.

2. It is not clear why Lord O'Hagan has asked this Question about the cost of Ministerial travel but there has been some press comment recently:

- a. about the cost of an MEP delegation to *Bagota (South America)*
- b. about the cost of spouses accompanying Ministers abroad.

3. The only centralised record of Ministerial travel is held by No 10 - and this is only maintained for the current administration.

4. CSD tried to keep a record but this was found to be unworkable. It was abolished in August 1980 following discussion between No 10 and Sir Ian Bancroft's Office (flag B).

5. The FCO approves all Ministerial travel (although Cabinet Ministers must seek the Prime Minister's authority) but they do not keep any record of which Ministers went where or when.* (Information provided by telecon Parliamentary Clerk, FCO to Parliamentary Clerk, CSD 20 February 1981.) **Except, of course, for FCO Ministers.*

6. The Prime Minister has made it clear that individual Ministers are responsible for making the most efficient and cost-effective arrangements for travel, and that they should be relied upon to use their commonsense without having every detail checked (C(P)(79)2).

7. A Question from Sir Donald Kaberry was answered by individual Ministers in charge of departments on 21 July 1980 giving details

of Ministerial travel over a 12 month period. At the same time the then Minister of State, CSD, when asked by Michael English for more, central, details stated that "Information in this form is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost" (copies of PQs, flag C). - Mr English subsequently asked each Department for the information.

8. Departmental Ministers are accountable both to the Prime Minister and to Parliament for managing a visit in the most economical and efficient way possible. No 10 have taken the view (Mike Pattison's letter of 8 August, flag D) that we should discourage Questions which make the assumption that there is central responsibility for the cost of travel, and enquiries should be referred to individual departments.

9. Even if a central response could be justified in this case (and No 10 think it is not), the limited records held do not go back before May 1979 and while some departments may be able to provide an answer covering five years it is doubtful whether figures for the Government as a whole could be given with any confidence. This is the more so, given the changes of Ministerial responsibilities of the last two years. The cost of asking departments to provide the information is likely to far exceed the so-called £50 limit.

10. In giving a "no central records" answer there may be criticism that the Government is unable to account for Ministerial travel adequately. If an answer covering the last five years is ruled out on the grounds of cost and validity of the available data, then the other alternative would be to give information in respect of the current administration only. The question is, however, purely factual, and to refuse the earlier data might suggest that the Government had something to hide. The detailed information would still have to be collected from departments, so that this would probably cost just as much as providing all five years.

Wednesday 25 February 1981 *Ministers*

House of Lords OFFICIAL REPORT: VOLUME 417 COLUMN 1143

MINISTERIAL VISITS ABROAD

Lord O'Hagan asked Her Majesty's Government:

How many Ministers have travelled abroad in each of the last five years; where each trip has been; the number of people accompanying the Minister on each occasion; the number and cost of interpreters on each occasion; and the cost of each trip.

The Lord President of the Council (Lord Soames): Information in this form is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. It is for departmental Ministers to account to Parliament for managing their travel arrangements in the most economical and efficient way possible.



✓
MJD

with compliments

PARLIAMENTARY CLERK

**CIVIL SERVICE DEPARTMENT
Whitehall, London SW1A 2AZ
Tel 273 3376 or 273 3709**