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## Editorial

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### Pathways Through the Whitehall Jungle

On November 10 the Royal Institute of Public Administration, working in association with the Commerce and Industry Group of the Law Society, held a one-day seminar entitled "Whitehall and Commerce and Industry — the Lawyer's Involvement", chaired by Sir John Donaldson, Master of the Rolls. The purpose of the seminar was to bridge the communications gap between business and industrial lawyers on the one hand, and central government lawyers on the other. About forty people attended. The proceedings featured informative presentations by senior civil service lawyers in the Treasury Solicitor's Department, the DTI and the Department of Energy, and a lively and very topical session on the Data Protection Act (evidently a subject close to the hearts of many delegates), led by the Data Protection Registrar.

There seemed to be a general feeling among those present that this kind of exercise serves a most valuable purpose. Government needs informed contributions from those likely to be affected by its decisions; commercial lawyers want an opportunity to influence

those decisions before they are set hard in legislative concrete. In his introductory speech, the Master of the Rolls said that he could not think of any public policy decisions that did not involve a contribution by government lawyers, with the possible exception of a decision to raise or lower interest rates. Lawyers, he said, refresh the parts that others do not reach!

Yet there remains a real and serious communications problem. To the non-government lawyer the work of lawyers in Whitehall seems often to be shrouded in a veil of quite unnecessary secrecy. Many of those present were evidently, and rather worryingly, grateful for quite basic information about Departmental arrangements and civil service grading nomenclature, and for suggestions (some of them seemingly rather elementary) about how best to find pathways through the Whitehall jungle. That jungle has, as several contributors pointed out, become much thicker over the years, as a result both of growing levels of government activity and of the increasingly international character of commercial life.

Government lawyers themselves may be partly to blame for the veil of mystery that has so long surrounded them: it was

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