

*The Political Officer
in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade*

But attrition of another kind is a problem. Many officers with 5-10 years of experience are leaving after the department has invested in their professional development and sometimes in intensive language training and after their first posting has gained them the experience to become fully effective FSs. On average, 20-30% of recruits resign five years after joining. For instance, the 1991 recruitment year lost 33% of its intake by 1997. Departing officers cite non-competitive salaries, poor promotion prospects, and spousal employment as the main causes⁽⁸⁾. The department believes it is still the attracting "the best and the brightest" to its ranks⁽⁹⁾. But officials in other departments do not share this belief. In the words of one ADM, "We compete with DFAIT for the same talent pool. In general, people are less interested in public service these days than in other pursuits, though that can be overstated. But even within the Public Service, DFAIT is not getting the best and the brightest. Prospects seem better elsewhere."

The political/economic stream and "political" officers

Within the FS group, the largest component is the "political/economic stream" totaling 482 officers in FY2000. Another 95 officers from the stream are in EX-1 or EX-2 positions. FS-1s and FS-2s are usually "desk officers" or deputy directors at headquarters, and serve at the First Secretary or Counsellor level at missions abroad. EX-1s and Ex-2s are directors in Ottawa, ambassadors at small missions, and deputy heads of large missions.

Among officers in the political/economic stream, the ratio of men to women is about 2:1, better than in the FS group as a whole. At the FS-1 level, the numbers of men and women are approximately equal (Table 5). By and large, members of the political/economic stream are a well educated group. Almost half of them have postgraduate degrees, including 23 doctorates (5%).

⁸ *In the mid 1990s the department required recruits to have a master's degree, which tended to raise the age of entrants to 26-28. In some cases, recruits were much older. The effect was to heighten the mismatch between career expectations and what DFAIT could offer. Individuals beginning to hit their stride professionally could not long be expected to settle for an FS-1 level salary when the market was sometimes paying their peers twice as much.*

⁹ *In the last three years, the numbers interviewed have ranged between 5500 and 6500 per year.*