



Senior Whitehall officials from 10 Government departments and agencies attended exclusive "training courses" laid on by Shell over two days at its London headquarters, according to documents released by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) following a freedom of information request (FOI).

The documents show that in June this year and last, "30-40 mid to senior-level civil servants" attended the two-day "Shell energy course for Whitehall", laid on at the energy giant's expense at its UK head office on London's South Bank.

In responding to the FOI request, DECC said the course was designed to give civil servants an "understanding of the energy industry in the UK and internationally". It added: "The production of and markets for energy in a carbon constrained world were the main themes [of the course]. The programme is an opportunity for DECC staff to hear the views of Shell on the oil and gas industry, meet colleagues and counterparts from other Government departments and exchange views on the industry and Shell's activities."

DECC confirmed that 12 of its civil servants attended this year's event and that Shell is the only company or organisation providing such "training" to its officials.

The event on 19 and 20 June included presentations such as 'Government and Industry: Working Together' by Shell's head of UK Government relations, and 'Transparency, Human Rights and Corporate Social Responsibility' by the company's NGO and stakeholder relations manager.

The revelation has angered environmental campaigners who say it exposes the extent of privileged access afforded to Shell across Whitehall, as well as raising questions about the degree of lobbying exercised by the energy industry.

Last month, the Guardian reported that Ministers at the Treasury have held meetings with representatives from energy-intensive sectors seven times more often than with green sector representatives since the Coalition Government was formed. Over the same period, Treasury Ministers met Shell on 12 occasions, including at least three one-on-one lunches and dinners. George Osborne, the Chancellor, has not met a single green sector representative.

Jim Footner, head of Greenpeace's climate and energy campaign, said: "These documents show that one of the world's most environmentally damaging companies has shocking levels of access to some of the Government's top mandarins. Shell has effectively locked themselves in a room for days with powerful civil servants to promote their own agenda. Our Government officials should not be allowed to take part in a two-day schmooze-athon with this company.

"They should instead be upping their game and trying to save the Arctic [where Shell is seeking to drill for oil], not cavorting with a company who could destroy this pristine and beautiful area."

A Decc spokesman said: "DECC staff are encouraged to engage with a broad range of external organisations and stakeholders in order to help the department meet its commitments and objectives. This engagement helps improve their understanding of the industry and markets and for their own professional development. Shell is one of many stakeholders that DECC has regular contact with. The course, hosted by Shell, was an opportunity for staff to meet with counterparts from industry and Whitehall."

The spokesman added that officials from the following departments also attended: the Treasury, the Environment Agency, the Department for International Development, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the Department for Transport, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK Trade and Investment, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Health and Safety Executive.

A Shell spokeswoman said the annual course for mid- to senior-level civil servants was "part of our legitimate dialogue with stakeholders about the energy industry as a whole and Shell's activities".