



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Report on stakeholder consultation

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15 October 2002

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Introduction

- This is a summary presentation of the stakeholder consultation, which consisted of a wide-ranging and in-depth programme of individual discussions with a broad range of people and organisations who deal with the FCO. It has yielded rich material, ranging from strategic issues about the role of the FCO to nitty-gritty comments about particular services.
- We have evaluated and weighted data from the six sectors in which interviews were conducted according to frequency of occurrence of messages. Outlying views have been communicated verbally, and attributed where the interviewee has requested this. However, to preserve consistency and the integrity of the data, we have not included these in the report
- This report is divided into three sections, building from the data towards analysis and ideas for action:
 - Section 1: feedback by sector. A synthesis of the raw data.
 - Section 2: themes. Interprets the data into six two-part themes which emerge from the interviews across all six sectors.
 - Section 3: messages. Draws out the messages from these themes. These messages include ideas for action from stakeholders themselves. (Note: these stakeholders' ideas for action do not constitute the consultants' recommendations.)
- Participants were, almost without exception, thoughtful, engaged and constructive in their approach. Inevitably, there are contradictions and inconsistencies among individual views. Our aim has been to give a faithful reflection of what people actually said about the FCO. Whether or not these views are justified, their inherent validity lies in the fact that this is what people perceive.

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What we did

- We interviewed 65 individuals (34 face to face and 31 by telephone)
- In addition, we held 4 discussion groups in Whitehall departments:
 - the Cabinet Office
 - the Home Office
 - the Treasury
 - the Ministry of Defence
- Interviews took the form of in-depth discussions of between 30 minutes and an hour's duration.
- Views were sought in the following areas:
 - The nature of their interaction with the FCO on foreign affairs
 - The extent to which they are satisfied with the service they receive
 - How they anticipate their needs changing and what they want to see from the FCO in the future
- Interviews were conducted over the period July – September 2002

1 Data from the six sectors

1. Whitehall and government: how do they interact with the FCO on foreign affairs?

- Broad set of linkages across Whitehall Departments on international/EU issues – through FCO London, through posts and with UKREP. Dealings range from major policy issues, to joint operations (e.g. visas, trade support), to briefings and visits.
- The FCO has a key role in supporting No 10 and the Cabinet Office in relation to the Prime Minister's international activities. It fulfils a similar role in relation to the Royal Household.
- Most Whitehall Departments manage dealings with EU institutions direct, with support from UKREP. There are increasingly close links between Departments and their opposite numbers in major European capitals.
- A number of other key departments handle their major international dealings direct with other capitals or through multilateral organisations (e.g. HMT's relationship with G7, World Bank etc and with major finance ministries). But the international reach of Departments is limited, and they rely on the FCO for reporting from countries outside their immediate sphere of relationships.
- Often ministry-to-ministry relationships will be confined to their immediate subject matter. A key area in which the FCO adds value to Departments is broader knowledge of the inner workings of other governments.
- The FCO supports other Departments in their international negotiations, e.g. in UN institutions. There is increasing flexibility in such relationships between Whitehall and the FCO, e.g. over who takes the lead in key international negotiations. The 'who does what' will often depend on capacity and capability.

"It is a great credit to the FCO that they run UKREP for government as a whole ... Because of the mix of staffing it is quite different in character from other posts."

"In many of our dealings on international issues the FCO is all but irrelevant... we do the business ourselves."

"The Paris embassy has added real value to us by knowing what's going on at the heart of the French government."

"We do need the network of posts to keep us informed of what is happening..."

1. Whitehall and government: how do they interact with the FCO on foreign affairs? (cont/d)

- DfID and FCO come into close contact in a number of policy and geographic areas, notably Africa. A number of DfID personnel have been made heads of post in countries where development issues are to the fore.
- A number of specific joint relationships have been established to pursue joint interests e.g. TPUK, UK Visas.
- The Parliamentary Relations and Devolution Department keeps a brief for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland over international, especially European, issues which bear on their interests, particularly trade and European regional relationships.

"In Africa I'm not sure we'd reinvent the FCO if it wasn't there, though some individual High Commissioners carry great weight."

Whitehall and government: how well are they served?

- Generally seen as enormously able people, fast in response, professional, good operators. FCO still able to attract the best. Up at the top of the Whitehall league table in terms of capability.
- Senior people widely respected and seen as responsive and prepared to go that extra mile. General perception that 'old guard' ambassadors are a thing of the past. High praise for specific missions and Heads of Post, e.g. New Delhi, in responding to needs of government departments. Criticisms of middle ranking people, where quality is seen to be more variable.
- Briefing generally good: some regarded as excellent, although some criticism, especially of briefing at junior levels. Some important stakeholders such as No 10 and the Cabinet Office criticise the FCO e.g. for submitting 'waffly, long draft papers to the Prime Minister' which then have to be rewritten
- Quality of reporting varies. Not clear that Whitehall is universally good at 'tasking' the FCO. Some reporting criticised as being rather random and too generic. Targeted reporting critical in parts of the world which are out of the reach of domestic departments, e.g. briefing HMT on Argentinian debt crisis. Some posts singled out for excellent reporting, e.g. Seoul on economic issues, Washington on trade issues
- High quality delivery in areas of specific expertise, e.g. UKMIS New York frequently singled out for praise.
- FCO seen to be losing place in the value it adds on European issues with centre of gravity moving to the Cabinet Office/No 10 as well as to domestic departments. EUD generally seen as a professional outfit with good people, but some departments more sceptical about EUD's role and contribution.

"It really does stand out in comparison to other Departments, partly simply because their people are very clever."

"The work of the consulate in New York after 9/11 was quite phenomenal."

"A lot depends on the ambassador... most are now very good.. The old style ones used to find our issues a bit too grubby for their taste."

"Tendency to think that drafting a communiqué is delivering."

Whitehall and government: how well are they served? (cont/d)

- Some departments critical of FCO for failing to understand practical implications of policy – e.g. deployment of peacekeeping forces, and failing to recognise that delivery often means more than an announcement or a communiqué .
- Perceptions that FCO not strong on Africa, that its best people are not there - short of Africa specialists, policy sometimes at odds with DfID.
- Planning of visits and logistical support from most posts very good indeed; high praise from all quarters. UKREP visits team described as stunningly good.

"I get all the possible help I ask for. My view of their service is full of superlatives."

"[reporting] often doesn't give us more than we can read in the Economist."

"They're sometimes a bit slow to grasp the implications of a domestic issue .. But when they get into gear, they are excellent."

"Occasionally they go into default mode of putting the preservation of bilateral relations as the top priority ..."

Whitehall and government: their issues

- Economic understanding: economics not in the bloodstream, Trying hard and recruiting some good new people but fundamentally don't understand international economics or the impact it has on international relations. Not good at underpinning economics or micro-institutional analysis.
- Europe: need much more expertise and focus across the board here. Welcome developments such as use of non-FCO expert staff, access to wider range of expertise. Expertise in European affairs seen as the preserve of the few and not in the bloodstream.
- Focus: some stakeholders advocate greater focus: 'do fewer things, in fewer places, better.'
- Domestic agenda: increasing intertwining of foreign and domestic agendas, yet not clear that the FCO is always as fast as it should be to understand the domestic agenda. Issues around understanding requirements of other Departments; whether relationships could be managed more systematically; whether other departments could be induced to become more 'intelligent customers'.
- FCO agenda: sometimes seen as working on their own agenda, developing its own positions, rather than government-wide positions. Not clear that the FCO is acting as a force to join up government in relation to foreign countries or foreign policy issues.

"They don't think naturally in economic terms. The reporting from [country x] was political about an issue that was basically one of economics."

"Not sure they understand explicitly what we want – that's partly our fault."

Whitehall and government: their issues (cont/d)

- Strategic view: top people seen as good at seeing the whole picture – others often not.
- Releasing talent: younger people seen as not making enough of a contribution around policy; career paths seem to keep brighter younger people back until later in their career.
- Value for money: some see the FCO as 'lavish', though the substance of such criticism is often around ways of working: 'they could do more business in meetings than over dinner ... Are cocktail parties a good way of doing business in the modern world?'. Postings policy and gaps between posts seen as generous and out of kilter with senior life in the rest of Whitehall.
- Breadth of activity: tendency to think in terms of traditional tools of diplomacy; need for more creativity and to think beyond communiqués, scholarships, exchange programmes and the equivalent.
- Culture: not always seen as a Whitehall team player, sometimes seen as hierarchical and superior in tone. "Can come across as rather haughty and inclined to domineer". Though this criticism is tempered by some who find FCO people easy to do business with (whatever their background).

"They do all sorts of things which don't matter in parts of the world which don't matter."

"Solutions tend to be based on ideas they can deal with – a communiqué or a scholarship scheme."

Whitehall and government: what will they want from FCO in the future?

- Major trends seen as follows:
 - Shift of foreign policy agenda to No 10 and Cabinet Office poses challenge to traditional role of FCO.
 - EU Enlargement and CFSP will make a huge difference to how all European business is handled. Need to think hard about role in EU matters for the future. Risk of real loss of FCO role in relation to Europe.
 - Increasingly blurred boundaries between foreign policy and domestic agenda: range of issues will become ever more complex and intertwined with the rest of Whitehall. But FCO should be more than simply a broker of domestic departments' interests overseas.
 - Increasing capital-to-capital diplomacy, as well as trend for departments to run own policy abroad, changes role of ambassadors and FCO generally.
 - Trend in immigration to push controls out from UK borders, growth of asylum as an issue and more UK citizens with links abroad means this agenda will become bigger and more important.

"As Departments increasingly run their own policy abroad, FCO needs to be clear on where it can add value."

"Bring EU thinking more into their mainstream, be a rigorously efficient machine in lobbying, networking, etc."

Whitehall and government: what will they want from FCO in the future? (cont/d)

- Needs for the future seen as:
 - Concentrate on major foreign policy issues, e.g. Middle East, Iraq, conflict resolution in Africa. “Be in fewer places in more depth.”
 - Bring European thinking into the mainstream.
 - Clarify role and ‘value added’. Be clearer about impact of domestic policies abroad and vice versa.
 - Clarify what services the FCO offers so that other departments are clear about what they will get (e.g. reporting or support in international negotiations); rely less on having bright people who will do what needs to be done and more on frameworks which enable the FCO as an organisation to deliver.
 - Be more transparent, about e.g. where resources are going. Be more flexible to emerging situations, shift resources according to need.
 - Join up more across government departments and join up the whole range of UK contacts in particular countries.

“Helpful role is to add context. They get too focussed on their individual countries.”

“‘Abroad’ is going to become more important to our business in the future, and we will need the FCO to help us.”

2. Parliament: how do they interact with the FCO on foreign affairs?

- Constituency cases, mostly around visas, immigration, consular issues.
- Foreign Affairs Committee: giving evidence, responding to reports, planning and supporting visits overseas.
- Other select committees: support to overseas visits.
- General briefing on policy issues.
- Support to Ministers in carrying out their Parliamentary responsibilities.
- Other forms of accountability, e.g. to the PAC.
- Dealings with European Parliament through UKREP.

"Relationship with FAC is on the whole formal – and properly recognises the divide between executive and legislature."

"My dealings [as a backbencher] are exclusively on immigration and visa issues ..."

"Do rely on them for support with briefings and for visits."

Parliament: how well are they served?

- Generally good relationships, good understanding of needs and nature of service required.
- FCO takes Parliament seriously. Has helped to have secondments of clerks to FCO. Increasingly seen to be giving reasoned explanations in response to FAC reports.
- Generally good on constituency enquiries, speedy and helpful.
- Some see service of a higher quality than a few years ago – less arrogance, more understanding; has shown flexibility.
- Some specific criticism of the handling of immigration and visa cases, e.g. FCO treating people from certain countries with suspicion, responding to well-argued cases with standard replies.
- Others see traditional standards of professionalism and efficiency eroding, standard of correspondence now poorer, other Departments (e.g. Treasury) overtaking FCO.
- Recent briefings for parliamentarians considered a good step, enabling informed debate.
- Good planning and support on foreign trips; embassies play valuable role.
- Europe: UKREP considered in European Parliament to offer highest level of support compared to other member states. FCO liaises well with MEPs, reacts swiftly to requests.

"FCO full of people of highest calibre and intellect, and completely dedicated."

"Not modern, although there is a good new generation of ambassadors."

"Very open and helpful, partly because I've known them a long time."

"We are very well served by the FCO ... They're generally reliable on constituency cases."

"Standard of correspondence now much poorer, and not helped by annoying details like failing to include enclosures."

Parliament: their issues

- A number of policy issues raised which are outside the scope of this report.
- Question over how efficient a policy-making machine FCO is, with shift of gravity to Ministers, No. 10, Cabinet Office and other Departments.
- Getting the basics right in handling correspondence.
- Need to monitor for ethnic bias in visa and consular work.
- Need for FCO to be more proactive on certain issues, e.g. on migration issues.
- Level of understanding of devolution and the status of devolved assemblies/parliaments not uniformly high.
- Questions about handling of foreign delegations meeting parliamentarians, and need for better explanation of context and value of such visits.

"Not sure that FCO has completed the adjustment from imperial power, or realises its role in a new world including Europe."

"Needs to have lots of contact with outside influences and ensure that the system is well ventilated."

"Good intentions at the top don't always translate into action further down."

Parliament: what will they want from FCO in the future?

- Move from reactive to pre-emptive thinking; will need to look ahead and spot trouble spots with implications for UK domestic policy.
- Immigration issue will cause increasing passport/visa issues.
- Europe becoming strategic issue, no longer foreign policy. Parliament will need more sophisticated support, especially on Europe.
- More flexible structure of international relations, moving towards where the action is, rather than relying on the old map.
- FCO mustn't become isolated. Case for having overseas cadre of home civil servants?
- Has done well at adapting, but needs to engage more with the outside world. Be open to sharing information and ideas and make sure this permeates FCO.
- Should take the lead on building bridges and relationships abroad which could be helpful to Britain, e.g. in Arab world.
- More informal briefings (e.g. Sir Jeremy Greenstock to FAC on UN issues when in London).
- Could do more public diplomacy; Britain highly regarded abroad, could do more with this asset.

"Decide priorities – what are the UK's primary objectives in the world?"

"They have been striving to move forward for a long time, but change is very slow."

"Key thing is the future of Europe. FCO should lead on this. Action should be targeted and specific."

3. Industry/business: how do they interact with the FCO on foreign affairs?

- Many large businesses have well established export operations and local relationships.
- But their needs differ greatly depending on different markets: from USA through to developing countries, or countries where any major trade issue may have high political content.
- A wide range of services is provided through TPUK.
- Major international companies look for political door-opening and relationship-building with foreign governments. A key issue is 'knowing people' and having the right levels of access, especially where a deal may have a political element. Heads of Mission can play a critical role in opening doors, and using their wider influence to support business interests.
- A number of large businesses declined to see us on the basis that they had no contact with the FCO and little use for their services.

"Have been helped to secure major contracts by FCO support through Trade Partners UK."

"Has made huge strides from its mysterious image of ten years ago. Would like to see this demonstrated more in practice."

"Japanese and American foreign services do far more for their industries than FCO does for ours."

Industry/business: how well are they served?

- FCO has made great strides over the past ten years in terms of focus on the commercial agenda. Generally seen as much more in tune with business and willing to work closely with business people, although there's a need to see this demonstrated more in practice.
- FCO key to providing formal and social access to local business community and politicians – dinners, trade development events, exhibitions. Generally excellent FCO support here.
- Developed markets; need less, get less; do more for themselves. Main need is political support. Consular assistance singled out as helpful in negotiating local political/business landscapes, e.g. in the US.
- Many examples of where FCO intervention has been helpful. Tokyo singled out as particularly responsive.
- Works well when ambassadorial network drives link between business and the local economy.
- Complaints that quality of FCO-organised events in London has declined – e.g. poor planning, late invitations, no interpreters – and over lack of background briefing and guidance on visiting delegations.

"Generally very responsive. Lots of people in lots of ways do their very best to help."

"Degree of responsiveness depends on the individual and the territory."

"Quality of posts varies enormously. Some have no time for commercial visitors, however senior."

Industry/business: their issues

- Many focussed their comments on TPUK:
 - The structure is perceived as too complex; services generally hard to access and poorly signposted
 - Many saw it as an FCO operation and felt the joint service with the DTI did not work effectively; wanted the FCO to take the lead
 - TPUK links can work well or badly – difference is down to individuals
 - Within TPUK, don't see different parts effectively integrated
 - Some information from TPUK seen as too generic to be of value.
- Ministers: most expressed a need for more access to/ involvement by ministers; concern that ministers lack focus on business agenda.
- Overseas network more responsive to business than London. Outreach from embassies to business is valued. The embassy network is valued and considered important.
- In bids for major overseas contracts, FCO seen as too concerned to be even-handed, e.g. if two British companies are competing, FCO will back neither, whereas the US would support both.
- Senior people understand importance of helping UK business better than middle ranks, some of whom have “old public sector ethos”.

“TPUK hangs like a hammock between FCO and DTI. No-one is satisfied with the arrangement.”

“Proactive abroad; invisible at home.”

“Too reactive. Responds to stimuli but doesn't stimulate others.”

Industry/business: their issues (cont/d)

- Considered less approachable than the DTI, more difficult to engage in dialogue, less interested in the views of business people.
- Perception that UK foreign policy not integrated, does not present a clear story abroad, and this can cause difficulties.
- Some had given up on earlier attempts to work with FCO and felt they could do better for themselves, although they found this state of affairs disappointing.

"Change is difficult for them. We see more rhetoric than reality."

"For all the talk of joined-up government, it still seems very hard to make it happen."

Industry/business: what will they want from FCO in the future?

- Europe will be important and influential in some areas where the UK is not. FCO could get Brussels to pick these things up. Should think about how to add value through Brussels.
- Globalisation presents new business challenges; relationship between foreign policy and trade will become a growing issue.
- A key role is to build relationships with foreign governments in support of UK business. More active lobbying for individual companies abroad – the US is seen as doing this more effectively.
- Support for SMEs from embassies seen as a good thing, promoting growth in exports, but should not take resources from where they are needed to oil the wheels for major business players. Trade and export support could be provided at lower levels while senior people focus on helping bigger companies.
- Joining up doesn't work yet. Need for proper processes in place to ensure that one government department does not get in the way of another. Work more closely with other government departments. Join up abroad, so that FCO knows what other government departments are doing and can present a coherent picture.
- More regular, planned contact. A need for more dialogue, to be more visible and more proactive in relationships with business. Support should be based on clear priorities.
- Make better use of what business can offer, e.g. in policy development where business people have knowledge of a particular area, and to brief ministers in advance of overseas visits.

"Instead of sending papers round, they should invite people into working groups to frame and develop policy."

"Should bat for UK business and needs to be much more visible to do that."

"Must continue to enhance its understanding of business and improve the way it works with other government departments."

"Business is in a position to contribute knowledge that is an essential part of the policy jigsaw."

4. SMEs: how do they interact with the FCO on foreign affairs?

- A number of SMEs we spoke to were 'new exporters' and therefore needed basic support services in areas such as:
 - Sourcing export markets
 - Finding overseas joint venture partners for production
 - Sourcing overseas contract opportunities
 - Finding import trade partners
 - Sourcing market intelligence on overseas markets
 - Identifying trade mission opportunities and supporting attendance
- Some have close links with BTI, involved in e.g. regional export clubs and chamber of commerce networks. Point of access usually local.
- Contacts with posts usually through commercial sections.
- Interact via a range of TPUK services – some charged for – e.g. training, market familiarisation, market research, advice on joint ventures.
- Some have fallen through the net and don't know how to access services or how the FCO could help them.

"We work with three different agencies; I think of them all as Foreign Office agencies."

"I don't really care about all the different bits. Superb local person has guided me through."

"I can't comment because I have no contact with them. I would like to know what they offer and what they can do for my business."

SMEs: how well are they served?

- Overall perceived as excellent service, well tailored to their needs, helpful and delivering on promises.
- BTI central structure viewed as sound, but needs to reach out more to users, tell them how to get involved, what's on offer and the benefits of the network.
- Embassy network very effective on the ground and helpful to business users.
- Information generally adds value, most is relevant, specific information provided on request is valued.
- Greatest strength seen as good connections and access to contacts and information.
- Help in preparing for competitive pitches valued; provides useful lists of possible opportunities overseas.

"Five years ago, the FCO seemed distant and unapproachable, added no value. Now genuinely making an effort."

"We have had invitations to events and have been fed fairly relevant and useful information."

"You get a lot more attention if you know people well – if you are new, you are on the periphery."

"UK staff in posts much more interested in helping than they were 10 years ago."

SMEs: their issues

- Considerable confusion surrounds BTI and TPUK. Structure seen as too complex and points of access and connection confusing. Need to clarify roles and explain connection between all parts of the system. Centre needs to act as the glue to hold services together.
- 90% of posts staff are good and helpful, but ways of making contact, quality of staff and capability varies from embassy to embassy, e.g. some will take calls, some won't; some direct you back to UK; some will only provide costly market intelligence reports.
- BTI trying hard, has done some tremendous things, but some businesses won't touch it because of impression of complexity, muddle and bureaucracy. Some belief that the centre does not look at what customers actually need.
- Experienced people know how to work the system; for less experienced people, inconsistencies can be frustrating.
- UK staff are in post for limited periods which makes it difficult to build relationships.
- Some see a reduction in range and number of services available through BTI and believe resources have been cut back. Some complaints about training organised by BTI for business users – some of it seen as too generic to be useful, and in some cases out of date (e.g. letters of credit no longer used but still in training programme).

"Sort out the clutter in the communication chain in the UK."

"Stop chopping and changing initiatives. Decide who delivers what in the chain and stick to it."

"Warsaw pushes you back to business link; Budapest commercial department is much more open. Inconsistency can be disappointing and confusing to new users."

SMEs: what will they want from FCO in the future?

- Will need more information on foreign market trends, and will need it faster.
- Need for centre to provide policies and ways of making contact to ensure a more consistent service abroad, and so that business users know what to expect and how to make successful links.
- Conduct more business-led trade missions.
- Recognise the importance of inward investment as well as exports.
- Update training programme to provide more practical information.
- Get in touch with the grass roots through chambers of commerce and business links to understand changing needs; constantly review services and user needs; pay more attention to regional users.
- Target successful companies who will really benefit from the help.

"Clear universal ways of access would be helpful."

"Should market services to SMEs in a way they can understand; work through personal contact."

"Need to do much more of what is already happening."

5. Other bodies: how do they interact with the FCO on foreign affairs?

- Huge variety of relationships amongst the bodies we spoke to in this group – from lobbying (e.g. Amnesty International) to close working on shared interests (e.g. British Council).
- In some cases the FCO is the sponsoring government department; some bodies are directly funded with programme money.
- Some are contributors to policy debate as part of the delivery mechanism for foreign policy.
- Regular consular contact, e.g. on visas.
- Wider links into the ambassadorial and consular network (e.g. BTA uses buildings for promotional activities). Links into other government departments and cross-departmental initiatives.
- Some organisations have specific obvious FCO interlocutor (e.g. HRPD in the case of Amnesty).

"Much better since we started bringing their and our people together to get a sense of overall global priorities. That's been helpful and creative."

"Just one of many Whitehall contacts and, for us, one that is quite remote."

"They should use us more as an asset and an instrument."

Other bodies: how well are they served?

- Where there are good personal relationships, FCO generally considered helpful, cooperative, responsive, knowledgeable. Most believe they have a proper constructive dialogue.
- Many believe the overseas network works better than the centre – networks are smaller, closer knit and contact more frequent.
- Seen as more flexible than 5 years ago, but still a sense that inflexible policies are made centrally without regard to local advice.
- Can be guarded and secretive about discussing politically sensitive subjects, which is seen as unhelpful. There have been improvements and FCO considered generally much more open than 10 years ago.

"Relationships driven by how people get on with each other, rather than a clear understanding of respective roles."

"On the whole good, but relationships have to be built on a one-to-one basis over time."

"Still perceived as a bit stuffy, although it isn't really when you get inside."

"Quality of service depends too much on quality of individuals."

Other bodies: their issues

- Although most believe they are treated as serious players, many are uncertain to what extent theirs and others' views are taken on board. Some contact is seen as token; FCO sometimes seen as paying lip service to the idea of engaging with the outside world. Some feel they are not listened to or consulted; that FCO deals only with a chosen few.
- Lack of clarity on role of FCO; need for transparency on what the FCO has to offer, what it can and can't do.
- Visas:
 - Integrated Casework Directorate: joint FCO/HO operation, yet interface seen as ineffective. "A brick wall they can't even look through themselves."
 - Some consular visa sections seen as better than others
 - Some believe there is systemic prejudice towards certain countries irrespective of the particulars of the case
 - UK Visas is considered helpful, but ends up fire-fighting issues which have run into unnecessary difficulties at consular level.
- Some perceive a shift towards trade at the expense of other areas, e.g. environmental politics, humanitarian need.
- Where funded by FCO, concern that the 1-year funding cycle is too short.

"Works better overseas than at the centre."

"(Integrated casework directorate) supposed to be a seamless joint operation – yet in practice no better than 4 years ago."

"There are certain hot spots where you know there'll be a problem."

Other bodies: what will they want from FCO in the future?

- General desire to be treated more as policy partners, with more proactive consultation and engagement, not just “nice chats” that don’t result in action.
- Need for clearer “sign posting” of FCO – who does what, who to talk to, where to find them, contact numbers, etc.
- Visas: need for a more flexible approach (e.g. BTA). “The national border has moved to posts”; more resources needed to develop the positive side of border control, not just policing; EU expansion will alter the picture sharply.
- Some would like to see the FCO become more visible to ethnic and minority communities and develop a more visible presence at home, especially in education.
- Many would like closer engagement and more open dialogue with the FCO about sensitive subjects and territories; there is a feeling that it is impossible to discuss controversial issues.
- Put more resources into consular services and give them more authority to act locally.

“Need to put themselves out there and tell people what they do. Has a lot of information that could be used to educate people.”

“Their role is crucial but at present it’s too diffuse.”

“We would like to see a more coordinated approach to projecting the image of the UK abroad. FCO does this well in some places, e.g. Japan and France.”

6. Media: how do they interact with the FCO on foreign affairs?

- News Department main point of contact with journalists as source of official line on breaking stories as well as background briefings, guidance on policy, advance notice of what ministers are doing.
- Some don't use News Department at all, but go direct to personal contacts in the FCO in London and in posts for background briefings .
- Personal interaction with posts when stationed or reporting from abroad,
- Some contact with desks; some direct to ministers.
- Formal events and collective weekly briefings for the media.

"They should be aware of who their stakeholders are."

"I get good service because I have been around a long time and they know me."

"Their website is good. Good background and frequently updated news."

Media: how well are they served?

- Views on News Department mixed. Some find it helpful, many hold it in low regard. Some believe FCO does not put good people there, and that it can act as a block to effective relationships elsewhere in the FCO.
- Those who rate the News Department highly tend to ring the Head of News directly, “much quicker to go to an individual than through the duty officer.”
- Availability of key people generally very good – with the News Department this can be a problem.
- Has re-instituted the weekly briefing for journalists; this is welcomed.
- Perception of the FCO in general, i.e. beyond the News Department, is that it has improved in many ways – research, better quality of discussion in most posts, ambassadors now more open (but can be hard to get access).

“The quality of service absolutely depends on who you get. Some are very good; some are hopeless.”

“It's clear who thinks journalists are important. I will deal only with these individuals.”

“Hugely above the Whitehall average.”

“The higher up the chain you go, the better the relationship works.”

Media: their issues

- View that the serious media contribute to the explication of policy, “widen public consent for policy”. Foreign affairs journalists should therefore be regarded as partners by the FCO, and the purpose of interaction with them should be to explain policy. However many get the impression that their dealings with the News Department are instead intended to enhance the reputation of the current government and particular politicians, and to avoid bad publicity at all costs.
- Complaints that the News Department doesn’t differentiate between journalists; doesn’t appear to know who is who, or the difference between people with a serious interest in foreign affairs and those seeking sensation.
- Informal, face-to-face contact seen as vital, but some ways of doing this considered out of date (e.g. cocktail parties).

“News Department should facilitate access but instead sees itself as a shield.”

“Sometimes seems to function as an extension of Government PR machine rather than part of the diplomatic service.”

“A sense of hierarchy underlies it all – the idea that you get a nice embassy with a good wine cellar after 35 years.”

Media: what will they want from FCO in the future?

- Commercial pressures on news mean a 24-hour news cycle, so speed of response and accessibility will become more important.
- FCO should make better use of its cultural role – use the media to help make emotional links to the citizens of foreign countries.
- Need to push responsibility down the chain with the intent to widen public consent for policy.
- News will become increasingly Europe-centred and policy decisions will no longer fall within clear departmental boundaries. The relationship between FCO and the media over Europe will become more complex, difficult and important. In the future the FCO will need to speak for and with other government departments on foreign policy, e.g. jointly with the Treasury on the single currency.

"News Department has to facilitate communication rather than prevent it."

"All press officers need to be brought up to the level of the best."

"The title FCO does not reflect the importance of the EU in the work of the department."

2 Themes:
What emerges from the data taken as a whole

Themes: what emerges from the data taken as a whole

- The general picture emerging from the data is of a very competent organisation, driven by the high quality of its individuals.
- Yet major issues arise about the FCO's future role, and where it can add value in an increasingly complex world where domestic and foreign policy is intertwined.
- Although the overall picture is one of a high quality organisation, there are trenchant criticisms on specific issues, e.g. the quality of briefing in some areas, the processing of visa cases.
- The following section sets out six overall themes. Often positive and negative perceptions are closely related – almost two sides of the same coin. The fact that the FCO does have so many high calibre individuals, for example, has meant that the quality of service has come to depend too much on the individuals rather than a coherent, consistent and transparent way of doing business. We have set out the themes in a way which demonstrates the connections between positives and negatives.
- After some explication of the themes, we set out a number of key messages and stakeholders' own ideas for action under each of the six themes. These messages and ideas for action from stakeholders are intended to feed a debate on future priorities.

Themes: what emerges from the picture taken as a whole

Positive and negative perceptions demonstrate close connections:

	Positive	Negative
1. Quality	High quality outfit thanks to large numbers of good people	Quality is patchy because it is too reliant on individuals
2. Reform	Has made great strides in many areas	Doesn't keep pace with external change
3. Services	Provides good services on the whole, compared to others	Does not demonstrate value for money or transparency of resourcing
4. Role	Operating in an increasingly complex world of inter-relationships	Has yet to define its role in this new world
5. Joining up	Joined-up operations such as UKREP highly praised; others (TPUK, Visas) seen as steps in the right direction	Joining up not yet effective in joint operations or in UK policy abroad
6. Relationships	Increasingly open to external relationships	Relationships perceived as too ad-hoc, and in some cases token

Themes

1. Quality

High quality outfit thanks to large numbers of good people

- The FCO is full of high-calibre, dedicated individuals, on the whole doing a good job as it is currently defined.
- The best heads of mission are highly praised for proactive, energetic and dedicated professionalism.
- Trend for greater expertise in key areas such as EU and commercial agenda welcomed.

Quality is patchy because it is too reliant on individuals

- Too much depends on the quality of individuals and personal relationships.
- In posts, too much depends on the quality of the head of mission.
- Many stakeholders said service ranged from poor to excellent, depending on who and where you dealt with.
- Europe and Economics frequently singled out as vital areas for the future which don't seem to have entered the FCO bloodstream.

Themes

2. Reform

Has made great strides in many areas

- There has been marked progress over the last ten years, especially around commercial focus, domestic agenda, openness and cultural diversity.
- More openness and engagement with the rest of government.
- Progress on the diversity agenda.
- Old style diplomacy and old school ambassadors seen as a thing of the past.

Doesn't keep pace with external change

- Tends to be reactive and respond only when required to.
- Does not demonstrate proactive and leading commitment to new ways of working.
- Progress is slow and does not keep pace with external change.
- The default option can still be to put priority on the preservation of bilateral relations rather than fighting the UK's case.

Themes

3. Services

Provides good services on the whole, compared to others

- Quality of services – consular, visa, commercial, supporting visits abroad – attracts high praise.
- In some areas, such as the UK's representation at the UN, the FCO is consistently highly praised for outstanding work.
- Some posts are centres of excellence – Paris, Washington, UKREP, Madrid, Berlin were singled out.
- Praise compared to other Whitehall departments and other countries' foreign services.

Does not demonstrate value for money or transparency of resourcing

- Questions over how resources are used, and value for money generally.
- Quality of briefing varies from excellent to poor.
- More minor matters detract from a good overall image, and cause disproportionate frustration – e.g. IT, invoicing on time for services supplied, internal postal system.
- Criticism of old-fashioned ways of doing business.

Themes

4. Role

Operating in an increasingly complex world of inter-relationships

- Wider relations with other UK government departments, multilateral organisations, in Europe and bilaterally are increasingly complex and broadly based.
- Trend towards capital-to-capital diplomacy, shifts in centres of power (e.g. No 10, European Secretariat, Home departments, DfID in Africa).
- Domestic and foreign agendas increasingly intertwined.

Has yet to define its role in this new world

- Has not defined its role, or where it adds value.
- Must clarify and implement that with the rest of government and beyond.
- Slow to understand imperatives of domestic agenda.

Themes

5. Joining up

Joined-up operations such as UKREP highly praised; others (TPUK, Visas) seen as steps in the right direction

- Thinking behind joined-up operations applauded.
- FCO seen as well-placed to drive these forward.
- Seen as having a natural role in joining up UK policy abroad.
- Joining up a strong theme, seen as critical future role by many stakeholders.

Joining up not yet effective in joint operations or in UK policy abroad

- TPUK and joint FCO/Home Office immigration casework operation are criticised as too complex in structure and difficult to penetrate and use effectively.
- These are experienced as very far from seamless and accessible services.
- In many parts of the world it is not clear that there is a joined-up approach to overall UK policy.
- This applies not just to trade issues but to the broad swathe of government relations.

Themes

6. Relationships

Increasingly open to external relationships

- Increasingly open to a wide range of other stakeholders.
- Welcome for greater involvement of NGOs in policy issues.
- Quality of personal relationships strong.

Relationships perceived as too ad-hoc, and in some cases token.

- Many stakeholders seek consultation as policy partners.
- Some feel closely engaged because they know FCO people well; others feel on the margins.
- Perception of a 'magic circle' of key stakeholders 'who know the right people'.
- A general need expressed for more active, planned, systematic and consistent stakeholder management.
- Some see lack of trust in the relationship and a tendency to be secretive.

**3 Messages:
Feeding the debate on future priorities**

Messages: feeding the debate on future priorities

From the themes which emerge from the whole consultation, we have identified messages for discussion around each theme.

Theme 1: Quality

Messages:

- Manage and develop your people so as to get more out of them:
 - Training : increasing delegation means more junior people must be equipped with core skills such as briefing and reporting
 - Stronger career management, greater continuity, a more managed marketplace
 - Greater professionalism, less reliance on the 'cult of the amateur'
 - More interchange with Whitehall/other organisations
- Make services more consistent:
 - Greater definition of services offered
 - Greater definition with customers of services required
 - Greater transparency of costs of services

Messages: feeding the debate on future priorities

Theme 2: Reform

Messages:

- Embed skills across the organisation
 - Particularly around economics and Europe
- Develop new ways of working
 - Challenge some of the traditional ways of doing business
- Make faster progress on diversity issues
 - Bring in and bring on people faster

Messages: feeding the debate on future priorities

Theme 3: Services

Messages:

- Clarify access to services
 - Provide a service on trade and visas which is seamless for customers
- Get the basics right
 - Particularly briefing and correspondence
 - Identify and remedy weak points e.g. IT, invoicing. IT seen as an important enabler to 'joining up'
- Create greater transparency of the FCO's value added
 - demonstrate what results are delivered in return for cost
- Clarify what the FCO does
 - Signpost the FCO better (who's who, what's where); explain more clearly what the FCO does

Messages: feeding the debate on future priorities

Theme 4: Role

Messages:

- Greater focus
 - Do fewer things, in fewer places, better
- Clarify role/value added
 - Clarify where the FCO adds value
 - Clarify some roles/boundaries, e.g. with Cabinet Office, DfID
- Be more proactive at home
 - Understand more broadly the implications of domestic policy
 - Create clearer working relationships with domestic departments
 - More inward/outward secondments in Whitehall

Messages: feeding the debate on future priorities

Theme 5: Joining up

Messages:

- Join up in Whitehall
 - Create explicit contracts with other departments
- Join up policy on a country by country basis
 - Understand how UK interests as a whole impact on other countries
- Provide seamless services
 - Particularly in relation to trade and visas, tracking back from the needs of customers

Messages: feeding the debate on future priorities

Theme 6: Relationships

Messages:

- Engage with stakeholders
 - Help others become 'intelligent customers' and at the same time understand the needs of other stakeholders
 - Do this more systematically and at an earlier stage; use stakeholders as genuine policy partners; invite them into working groups etc
- Ensure that the underpinning technology is in place
 - Ensure greater connectivity between IT systems
- Engage FCO people with Whitehall
 - Make more use of networks (e.g. environment attaches) to provide input from domestic agenda and for them to contribute to the domestic agenda
 - Make greater efforts to understand the practical implications of delivery, e.g. of the logistics involved in deploying peace keeping forces.

Annex: Discussion guide used in interviews

FCO Stakeholder Survey

June 2002

Interview Guide

Note to interviewers:

This is a guide for discussion rather than a checklist of questions. The bold questions indicate areas it is important to cover with all interviewees. The summary questions at the end of each section should be presented as an opportunity to offer an informal evaluation, and not as a form to be filled.

INTRODUCTION:

1. Who are Stanton Marris.
2. Assurance of confidentiality
3. Background to project
4. Check name, spelling, title, role and position in organisation.

There are four main areas for discussion:

- A.** Your current dealings with the FCO
- B.** The extent to which you are satisfied with these
- C.** How you anticipate your needs changing in the future
- D.** The potential role of the FCO in meeting those future needs

Questions in each area are followed by a summary question evaluating each section. Summary questions should be filled in by the interviewer on the separate page provided.

SECTION A:

Your current dealings with the FCO

- 1. What is the nature of your dealings with abroad? Where is the focus of your work – Europe or more global?**
- 2. How much impact does foreign affairs have on your work?**
- 3. How much interaction do you have with the Foreign Office? Do you deal direct with foreign posts, via the Foreign Office, or both?**
- 4. How critical is the role of the Foreign Office to the success of your work?**
- 5. What alternative is there to the role played by the Foreign Office in supporting your work?**

Summary question:

How critical is the Foreign Office to the success of your enterprise? Could you rate this on a scale of 1 to 5? **(see separate sheet)**

SECTION B:

How satisfied you are with the service you receive

1. What are the best and worst aspects of the service you receive from the Foreign Office?
2. If you could change one thing about the service you receive, what would it be?
3. If the Foreign Office were to stop doing one thing, what should it be?
4. When the relationship works well, what makes the positive difference – is it people/ skills/ structures/systems/other?
5. When your expectations are not met, what seems to cause the problem - people/skills/structures/systems/other?

Summary question:

Overall, how good a service do you feel you receive? Could you rate this on a scale of 1 to 5 **(see separate sheet)**

SECTION C

How you anticipate your needs changing in the future

1. What changes do you foresee in the way you will work in the future?
2. What factors are most likely to affect how your needs change? (e.g. domestic economy, foreign policy, foreign affairs, etc)
3. Do you foresee an alternative to the role played by the Foreign Office in pursuing your policies overseas?
4. Do you perceive the Foreign Office changing to keep pace with your changing needs?

Summary question:

Overall, to what extent do you anticipate your requirements from the Foreign Office changing over the next five years? Could you rate this on a scale from 1 to 5 **(see separate sheet)**

SECTION D:

The Foreign Office in the future

- 1. Should the Foreign Office have a role in communicating an image of modern Britain abroad?**
- 2. How well does it do that now? How could it do that better in the future?**
- 3. How could the Foreign Office deliver more and better for you?**
4. What change would you most like to see in the Foreign Office in five years' time?
5. How different does the Foreign Office seem to you today from what it was before? Are the changes for the better, or for the worse?

Summary question:

Overall, how responsive do you think the Foreign Office is to changing demands from UK stakeholders? Could you rate this, on a scale of 1 to 5 **(see separate sheet)**

CLOSE:

1. Thank you for your participation
2. Follow-up: The main findings of the survey will be published. A copy will be supplied to you.

FCO Stakeholder Survey
June 2002
SUMMARY QUESTIONS

Note to interviewers: <i>Please fill these in on this sheet.</i>
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SECTION A:

Rate how critical the Foreign Office is to the success of your enterprise on a scale of 1 to 5.

- 1 Not at all important
- 2 Important but not essential
- 3 Significant
- 4 Very important
- 5 Critical

SECTION B:

Overall, how good a service do you feel you receive? Rate this on a scale of 1 to 5

- 1 Below my expectations
- 2 Acceptable
- 3 Good
- 4 Very good
- 5 Excellent

SECTION C:

How much do you expect your needs will change over the next five years? Rate this on a scale from 1 to 5

- 1 Not at all or very little
- 2 Slightly, or in only a few respects
- 3 Noticeably
- 4 Substantially and significantly
- 5 Critically

SECTION D:

How responsive do you think the Foreign Office is to changing demands from UK stakeholders? Rate this on a scale of 1 to 5

- 1 Inflexible
- 2 Not particularly responsive
- 3 Aware of the need and trying to adapt
- 4 Keeping up with demand
- 5 Forward-thinking and setting the pace