

Debate Pack

19 May 2022

CDP-0093 (2022)

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Funding levels for diplomatic staff in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

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1 Background

A Westminster Hall debate on Funding levels for diplomatic staff in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is scheduled for Tuesday 24 May 2022, from 9.30am to 11.00am. The debate will be led by Valerie Vaz MP.

1.1 Spending data

The FCDO's overall budget, like that of all Government departments, is set at Spending Reviews. This gives an overall spending limit, but it is up to individual departments to determine how they then spend this.

Information on the FCDO's spending on diplomacy can be found in the department's Annual Report and Accounts. The most recent edition, published in September 2021, includes accounts going back to 2016/17.¹ These give figures for the FCDO's level of spending on "operating costs, frontline diplomacy and overseas network", as shown in the table below.

FCDO spending on diplomacy and operating costs			
£ billions, not adjusted for inflation			
	Total spending	Operating Costs, frontline diplomacy and overseas network	
2016/17	12.5	1.2	10%
2017/18	13.1	0.9	7%
2018/19	13.5	1.4	11%
2019/20	13.6	1.6	12%
2020/21	14.1	1.6	11%
2021/22 (plans)	10.2	1.8	17%

Source: [FCDO annual report and accounts 2020 to 2021](#), annex C core tables, 22 September 2021

These figures do not distinguish between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development in the years before they were merged in September 2020, so they will also include the operating costs of the latter department.

The data show that spending on operating costs, frontline diplomacy and the overseas network has made up 7-12% of the FCDO's total budget every year between 2016/17 and 2020/21, and that this proportion was planned to rise to 17% in 2021/22. The amount spent on this area was set to rise to £1.8 billion

¹ FCDO, [Annual Report and Accounts 2020 to 2021](#), 22 September 2021

even as overall spending on the FCDO was decreasing (as part of the overall reduction in aid spending).²

Some spending on diplomacy can be funded from the overseas aid budget. Figures from the FCDO's Statistics on International Development publication show that FCDO aid spending on diplomacy was around £278 million in 2020, up slightly from £276 million the year before.³

² See the Commons Library briefing [Reducing the UK's aid spending in 2021](#) for more on this.

³ FCDO, [Statistics on International Development: final UK aid spend 2020](#), 29 September 2021; totals include all projects funded by the FCO in sector code 91010 (administrative costs) that include the word "diplomacy" in the project title.

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Press and media articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

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[The incredible shrinking Global Britain](#)

Politico
Cristina Gallardo
19 May 2022

[What cutbacks? Foreign Secretary Liz Truss faces a Whitehall row over purchase of £20million New York 'partyhouse' for British diplomats](#)

Mail Online
14 May 2022

[FCDO morale at 'rock bottom' as government denies 10% staff cuts planned](#)

Civil Service News
Tevye Markson
17 December 2021

[How to turn 'Global Britain' from a slogan to reality](#)

Chatham House
Dr Robin Niblett CMG
11 January 2021

[UK falls in diplomatic rankings despite 'Global Britain' vision](#)

Financial Times (Subscription required)
Jamie Smyth
26 November 2019

[Foreign Office overseas staffing cut by 1,000 in 30 years, say diplomats](#)

The Guardian
Patrick Wintour
18 June 2019

[Cuts to diplomatic service will reduce Britain's influence, MPs warn](#)

The Observer
Michael Savage
16 June 2019

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PQs

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Public Expenditure

6 Apr 2022 | 14913

Asked by: David Lammy

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate he has made of the real terms change in the budget of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office over the next three years.

Answered by: Simon Clarke | Treasury

As published at the Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021 (SR21), the average annual real terms growth for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) is 4.4% from 2021-2022 to 2024-25.

It is standard practice for the Government to set budgets in cash terms. The FCDO, like other departments, is expected to manage risks of inflation within its budget.

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Staff

21 Feb 2022 | 121757

Asked by: Stephen Doughty

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many full-time equivalent staff were assigned to her Department's Consular Crisis Centre (a) as of 9 February 2022 and (b) in each month in the last year; and whether she has plans to increase that number.

Answered by: James Cleverly | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The size of the consular team reflects the demands of the Department. The number is regularly reviewed to ensure we have appropriate resource in place to manage demands. This core number of staff is supplemented by volunteer cadres from across the office during periods of immediate crisis response. Numbers therefore fluctuate to meet demand and can vary month to month. Permanent staffing levels are also under regular review.

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Staff

21 Feb 2022 | 121756

Asked by: Stephen Doughty

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether liaison officials from the Ministry of Defence and the Home

Office are currently permanently present in her Department's Consular Crisis Centre.

Answered by: James Cleverly | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) Crisis Management Department maintains constant, close contact with Partners Across Government, including through Liaison Officers, working groups and ongoing contingency planning. We currently have a number of Ministry of Defence personnel and Home Office embed working with FCDO.

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Staff
17 Jan 2022 | 100658

Asked by: Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes to the level of staffing in her Department on the Government's ability to respond to international humanitarian crises.

Answered by: Amanda Milling | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The department's focus on strategic workforce planning will ensure that we have the right capabilities to deliver on our international priorities as set out in the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy and the forthcoming International Development Strategy. We want to ensure we invest in our people, take forward work to align terms and conditions and reward high performers. We will remain agile in the face of emerging opportunities and challenges.

Various workforce models were looked at prior to the current Foreign Secretary joining which we are not proceeding with. At this stage no decisions on changes to staff numbers have been made. The purpose of our planning processes is to take into account exactly the sort of issue you raise - ensuring we have adequate staffing to ensure the UK will continue to be a leading responder to new rapid onset crises, providing lifesaving humanitarian assistance at times of crisis as well as tackling their causes. As the Prime Minister and Minister Cleverly have said in the House on 15 and 16 December, there will not be an across the board 10 per cent reduction in FCDO staff. Indeed, with the addition of new responsibilities on the UK's relationship with the EU, we will need to further expand our capability in some areas to reflect new priorities.

Engagements

15 Dec 2021 | 705 c1057

Asked by: Tom Tugendhat

I very much welcome my right hon. Friend's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin), with its emphasis on global Britain and partnership in standing up to autocracies. Does he therefore share my concern about reports that I have just got from the Foreign Office of a staff cut of 10% across the board? How is that compatible with global Britain?

Answered by: Boris Johnson | Prime Minister

We are investing massively in overseas aid — this country is spending £10 billion a year on overseas aid. I think that if you look at what we are doing on aid, on the Foreign Office and on Defence, we are, at £54 billion, the biggest spender on overseas activities of any country in Europe. My hon. Friend is an expert on foreign affairs, but I am assured by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary that the information that has recently trickled into his ears is fake news.

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Staff

26 Nov 2021 | 80428

Asked by: Preet Kaur Gill

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 19 November 2021 to Question 75966, on Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Staff, when she plans to conclude her Department's strategic workforce plan.

Answered by: Amanda Milling | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Work is ongoing on the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's Strategic Workforce Plan, which will define the longer-term workforce size, skills and expertise that the department will require for the next three years. At this stage no decisions have been made.

Our focus on strategic workforce planning will ensure that we have the right capabilities to deliver on our international priorities as set out in the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy and the forthcoming International Development Strategy. Whilst we expect staff reductions in some locations over the course of the Spending Review, we will continue to retain one of the largest overseas diplomatic networks. Where reductions in staff are required, we would look to meet these through normal departures, the redeployment of our staff into funded posts and offering voluntary exits in line with Civil Service Policy and legal guidance.

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Other Parliamentary material

FCDO Staffing

16 Dec 2021 | House of Commons | 705 cc1155-63

Urgent question on staffing cuts in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

FCDO Staffing

16 Dec 2021 | House of Lords | 817 cc545-7

Lords statement on staffing cuts in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Consular Support for British Citizens

9 Dec 2021 | House of Commons | 705 cc643-64

Motion that this House regrets that the consular services provided by the FCDO to bereaved families of people who have been murdered, have died in suspicious circumstances, or have been imprisoned or tortured overseas have fallen short of the standard reasonably expected; notes that access to justice and basic standards of assistance are dependent upon a person's ability to pay; is concerned that there is no legal right to consular assistance and that support is provided on a discretionary basis which can lead to unpredictable and inconsistent communications from the FCDO; further regrets that consular services in the UK are below the level of support UK citizens should expect; believes that the FCDO's focus is on what it cannot do to help, rather than what it can do, which adds to the trauma experienced by victims; calls on the government to improve and standardise communication processes at the FCDO, to publish consular procedures and policies and to revisit the findings of the Foreign Affairs Committee's fifth report of session 2014-15, "Support for British nationals abroad: the Consular Service" (HC 516); further calls on the government to consult with the families affected and to raise the standard of how British citizens are treated by FCDO procedures; and urges the government to set a world-leading example of how a state treats its citizens in their darkest hour of need.

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Further reading

[The UK Government's Strategy for International Development](#)

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

CP 676

16 May 2022

[Update on FCDO structures](#), letter of 21 March 2022 from Secretary of State Elizabeth Truss to International Development Committee Chair Sarah Champion, International Development Committee, 23 March 2022

[Work of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office](#), Foreign Affairs Committee, HC 518, Oral evidence, 7 March 2022

Witnesses: Sir Philip Barton, Thomas Drew and Elizabeth Truss

[Work of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office](#) [Inquiry]

[Consular support for British citizens](#)

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