



National Audit Office

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Consular Services to British Nationals

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Consular Services to British Nationals

LONDON: The Stationery Office
£12.25

Ordered by the
House of Commons
to be printed on 21 November 2005

This report has been prepared under Section 6 of the National Audit Act 1983 for presentation to the House of Commons in accordance with Section 9 of the Act.

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14 November 2005

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PREFACE



What are consular services?

Consular services is the term used to explain a range of services provided to British nationals overseas, and when necessary, their families in the United Kingdom. The Vienna Convention of 1963 allows for the consular staff of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (the FCO) to assist British nationals in difficulty or distress overseas, although there are limits to what consuls are able to do (**Figure 1 overleaf**). **Figure 2** illustrates some examples of the wide range of consular work, including key statistics, principal partners and typical FCO actions. Consular activity does not include the issuing of visas for foreign nationals to enter or stay in the United Kingdom.

Where are consular services provided?

Consular services are provided at over 200 permanent Posts worldwide where the United Kingdom has diplomatic representation, and through Honorary Consulates. The term “Posts” is used to include:

- Embassies and High Commissions: The principal centre for diplomatic representation in country, normally in the capital city. High Commissions are the term for the principal diplomatic mission in Commonwealth countries.
- Consulates and Deputy High Commissions: Satellite sites within a country in addition to the Embassy or High Commission. A minority are staffed entirely by locally engaged staff. Many consulates are situated in tourist or expatriate areas.

In addition to staffed Posts, there are approximately 290 Honorary Consulates, run by Honorary Consuls and their staff, if any. Honorary Consulates are often housed in the ordinary business premises of the Honorary Consul rather than in a dedicated FCO building.

Who provides consular services?

A range of FCO staff are involved in providing consular services to British nationals overseas, and to their families in the United Kingdom. There are over 1,900 staff working overseas at least part time on consular services, comprising:

- United Kingdom-based diplomatic staff:¹ In many Posts, the Consul and Vice-Consul are United Kingdom-based staff, who are posted overseas for a limited period, normally three years. In addition, the majority of those authorising passports for issue are United Kingdom-based staff, for security reasons. During their careers these officers will normally undertake a range of postings to different countries, carrying out a range of roles;
- Locally engaged staff: These staff are permanently employed at one specified Post and are normally residents or nationals of the host country. Locally engaged staff often play a key role in liaison with local authorities and in translating, particularly with protection work. They are also key in producing passports, often in front counter work, passport production processes or data capture. These can be much cheaper to employ than United Kingdom diplomats, since the latter require housing and allowances;

¹ The term United Kingdom-based staff refers to a member of staff who is employed from the United Kingdom (i.e. not employed locally by a specific Post). In fact, United Kingdom-based staff normally undertake a series of short term placements during their careers, split between roles in the United Kingdom, and roles at Posts overseas.

1 There are limits to what Consuls and their staff can do

Consuls can:

- issue emergency passports, and in some places full passports;
- carry out a range of documentary services, including issuing birth and death certificates;
- contact relatives and friends and ask them to help you with money or tickets or inform them of your situation;
- tell you how to transfer money; and in an emergency, cash you a sterling cheque worth up to £100 in local currency, if supported by a valid banker's card;
- only as a last resort, in exceptional circumstances, and as long as you meet certain strict rules, give you a loan to get you back to the United Kingdom;
- help you get in touch with local lawyers, interpreters and doctors;
- speak to the local authorities on your behalf in certain situations;
- arrange for next of kin to be told of an accident or a death and advise on procedures;
- contact you if you have been arrested or detained, within 24 hours of being notified;
- contact you in hospital;
- help you if you are mentally ill;
- provide help if you've suffered rape or serious assault, and give general advice to victims of other crimes;
- offer support and help in a range of other cases such as child abductions, forced marriages and kidnappings;
- put you in touch with organisations who help trace missing persons; and
- make special arrangements in cases of terrorism, civil disturbances or natural disasters.

Consuls cannot:

- pay your hotel, legal, medical or any other bills or give you money;
- pay your travel costs, except in special circumstances;
- give legal advice or investigate a crime;
- get you out of prison or interfere in court proceedings;
- get you better treatment in hospital or prison than is given to local nationals;
- do work normally done by travel agents, airlines, banks or motoring organisations;
- get you somewhere to live, a job or work permit; and
- except in exceptional circumstances, offer you assistance if you are a dual national in the country of your second nationality.

Source: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

2 The range, links and examples of consular services provided

Type of consular service	Number of cases 2004-05	Key government partners	Examples of FCO activity/ assistance provided
Travel advice and "Know Before You Go"	3.5 million enquiries via website or telephone line	FCO Counter Terrorism Department, Security Services, United Kingdom Passport Service	Publicised information on travel information and country specific advice
Passports and documentary services:			
■ Issuing passports (standard or emergency)	453,000 full passports, plus 11,500 emergency passports	United Kingdom Passport Service (Home Office)	Assess eligibility and issue passports to British nationals after security checks
■ Legalisation, birth and death registration, other notarial and documentary services	7,000 copies of birth and death certificates		Legalisation of documentation for use overseas; registration of births and deaths overseas; certifying documents originating overseas for use in the United Kingdom, witnessing and legalising signatures
Assistance to British nationals. e.g:	84,000 total, of which:		
■ Enquiries on legal, health, housing and employment systems	66,000 enquiries	Host government authorities	General advice and information
■ Inconvenience problems (loss of money, travel documents etc)	520 Undertakings to repay loans	United Kingdom Passport Service	Issuing new travel documents; acting as an intermediary for money transfers; or loaning small sums of money when no alternative
■ Detainees and prisoners	5,800 new cases	Prison Service (Home Office)	Informing next of kin; visiting prisoners, ensuring humane treatment and fair trial; delivering prison comforts provided by others in poor condition prisons
■ Human rights issues: child abduction, forced marriages, death penalty	400 child abductions and 200 forced marriages	Department of Constitutional Affairs (enforces agreements on child abduction); local authority social services; Forced Marriage Unit (Joint FCO/Home Office Unit)	Liaising with host government regarding legal proceedings, providing lists of English speaking lawyers, rescuing potential forced marriage victims, making representations where human rights are contravened
■ Victims of crime: criminal investigations, hostages	Unknown total cases, but includes 200 rape cases	Police Federation, Metropolitan Police; Department for Constitutional Affairs	Supporting victims of crime in making police statements; liaising with United Kingdom police and judicial authorities regarding investigations
■ Illness, injuries and deaths	4200 hospital cases and 3800 deaths requiring consular attention	Health Service; United Kingdom coroners office (repatriation), United Kingdom Police	Hospital visits; liaising with local authorities and United Kingdom police to inform next of kin; providing information on international undertakers, assisting with repatriation
Large scale events/crisis management	Unknown	Cabinet Office (crises), National Criminal Intelligence Service (football)	Devising crisis management strategies; financial support for victims of terrorism; providing information to families, collecting information on possible casualties, liaising with United Kingdom police; repatriation

Source: National Audit Office and FCO management information

- Duty officers: at Posts overseas, there is always a member of staff available to deal with consular emergencies, 24 hours a day. These can be either United Kingdom-based staff or locally engaged staff, and this varies according to the resources available at each Post. Duty officers in many Posts may not normally work in the consular section and may have little or no experience of consular work; and
- Honorary consuls: the FCO has appointed approximately 290 Honorary Consuls to act on behalf of the British Government in consular matters. Some are British expatriates, others are host country nationals with prominent positions in the local community, often in relevant fields such as tourism. The FCO often uses Honorary Consuls to achieve representation in areas where it cannot otherwise justify a presence. Honorary Consuls are paid a small honorarium each year (to an annual maximum of £2300) and most are also in paid employment elsewhere. The time devoted to consular matters varies widely between Posts.

Consular Directorate in London also employs 180 staff. Staff here are responsible for managing and monitoring the global consular operation, allocating resources, setting policy and providing advice to staff overseas. Key sections include:

- Policy, communications and training group
- Passports and documentary services group
- Crisis management group, which includes the travel advice section as well as the crisis management team
- Assistance group, including country casework teams who deal with the United Kingdom angle of all consular cases, and specialist advisers; and
- Resources group

The cost of providing the consular service, and income received, is summarised at [Figure 3](#).

3 Costs of providing consular services 2004-05

Category	Assistance (£ millions)	Passports and documentary services (£ millions)	Total (£ millions)
Expenditure			
United Kingdom-based diplomatic staff costs, including Consular Directorate staff in London	7.7	4.9	12.6
Locally engaged staff costs	5.3	7.2	12.5
Other direct costs incurred at Posts overseas	9.2	11.2	20.4
Post management and support costs	7.3	4.0	11.3
Overheads and central cost charges (depreciation etc)	10.5	11.0	21.5
Total	40.0	38.3	78.3
Income	45.0	29.6	74.6

Source: Foreign and Commonwealth Office Trading Account for 2004/05

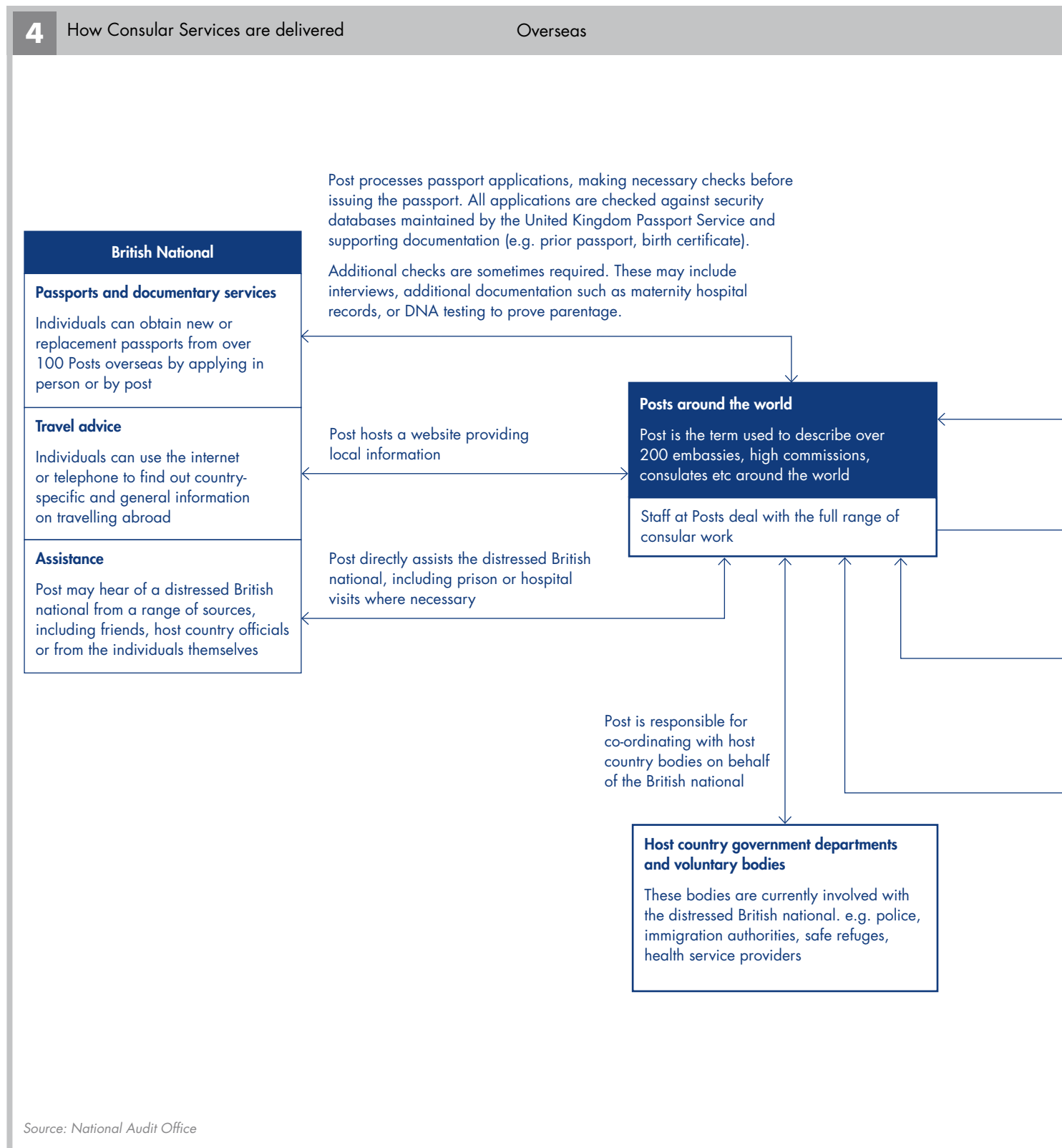
NOTE

Consular funding is covered in greater depth in paragraphs 5.4-5.8 of this Report.

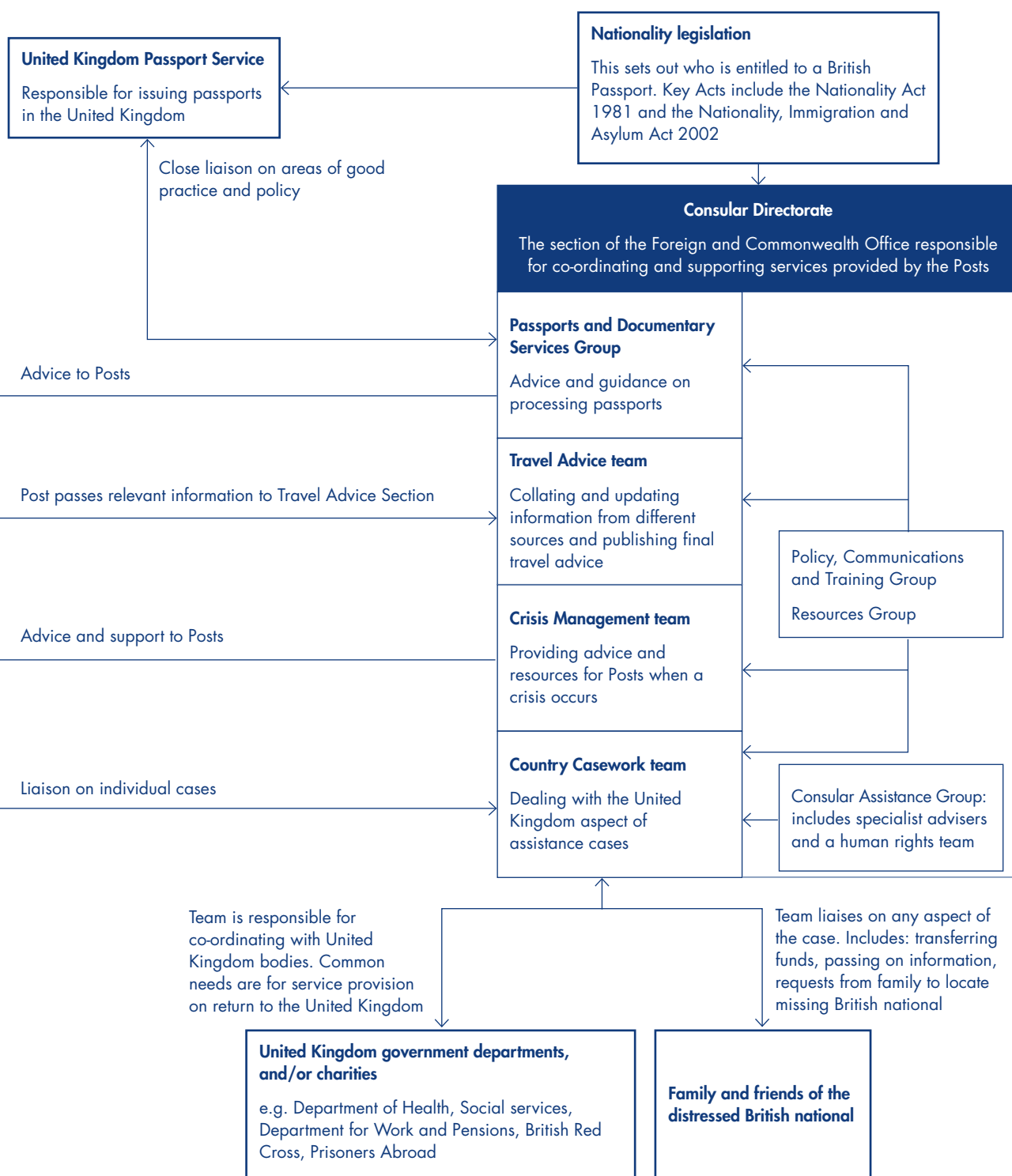


How are consular services provided?

Figure 4 explains the processes and interactions for major types of consular service.



In the United Kingdom



SUMMARY



1 Consular services are provided by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and are a vital source of support to British nationals abroad. Services are provided in four main areas: giving travel advice, issuing passports and other documentary services, assisting travellers who are in difficulty or distress, and dealing with major emergencies such as terrorist attacks or natural disasters. The Preface gives more detail on these areas. The total cost of providing consular services in 2004-05 was nearly £80 million.

2 Consular services are delivered by nearly 1,900 staff, most of whom are based at over 200 Embassies, High Commissions and Consulates (commonly called “Posts”) worldwide. A core of 180 staff based in London provide advice and support to those working overseas, and deal with authorities and family members in the United Kingdom. Although the FCO provides consular services overseas, its work requires good links to other governmental bodies, including the United Kingdom Passport Service, the Police forces, the Home Office, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the National Health Service, and the Department for Constitutional Affairs.

3 The FCO faces changing and increasing demand for consular services. Some 13 million British nationals now live abroad. The rise in low cost air travel has meant that United Kingdom residents are making more frequent and casual trips abroad, and to an increasingly diverse range of destinations (Figure 5). Easier travel has encouraged trips by higher risk groups such as the elderly and children, and by independent travellers not supported by tour operators. The type of consular assistance is also changing. For example, increased terrorist activity such as atrocities in New York, Bali and Egypt, is creating additional demands for intensive and rapid consular assistance. And the diverse and changing nature of British society has also led to new consular services, such as support for Britons undertaking the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, and work to protect victims of forced marriages. The FCO has also faced rising expectations from individuals about the level of support or intervention they can expect, fuelled further by intense media interest. This can in turn lead to pressure on the FCO to provide services which would not normally be within its remit. All of these factors lead to heavier demand for consular assistance, (Figure 6 overleaf),

5 More British nationals are travelling and living abroad

	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
British nationals living overseas (millions)	14.0	14.7	12.9 ¹	12.8	13.2	13.2
British national visits overseas (millions)	54.0	57.0	58.0	62.0	61.0	65.0

Source: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

NOTE

¹ In 2001-02 Consular Directorate improved its estimation of the number of British nationals overseas, through collaboration with host country governments in countries with a high British national population. This led to a decline in the estimated number of British nationals living abroad.

which may prove to be unrealistic or unfeasible when considered against the FCO's duty of care to its own staff and its limited resources for this work. The FCO aims to provide a high quality and efficient consular service within this challenging environment.

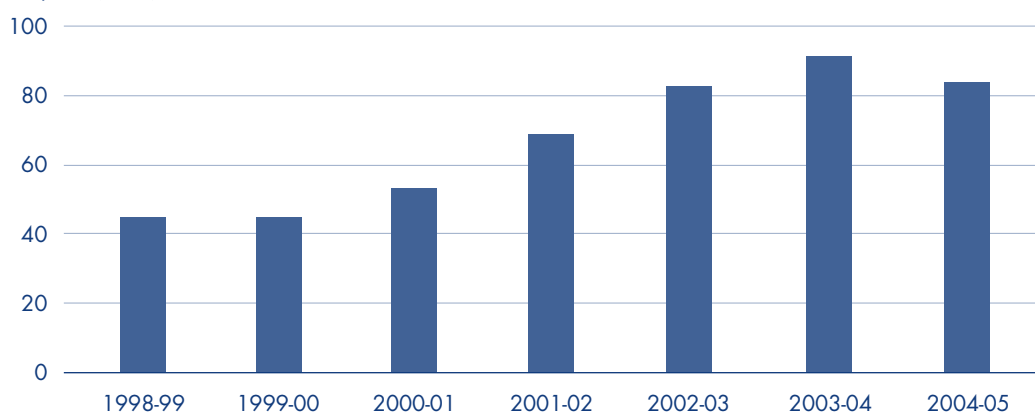
4 Against the background of the complexities of providing assistance, we conclude that the range of services carried out by the FCO is comparable to that of other developed countries, with the United Kingdom being at the forefront of innovative developments in service delivery in some areas. The FCO has taken a number of important steps to respond to the growing challenges facing consular services and to improve the delivery of its consular services. It is working to better define the level of service provided through a highly consultative approach, and has improved its professionalism to deliver a more diverse and more effective service. But there are still areas in which improvements could be made, particularly in influencing and changing the behaviour of travellers, enhancing the

consistency of frontline services, and in equipping the FCO to meet emerging challenges. This includes making clear the limits of the FCO's assistance, and explaining that the appropriate level of assistance varies according to conditions in different countries. **Figure 7** shows how the conclusions are presented in the main body of the report. We set out the key challenges for the FCO, together with high level recommendations that have the potential to build on the FCO's existing actions and to improve further the delivery of its consular services. These are supported by more detailed recommendations and the desired outcomes and benefits arising from these, set out at Appendix 1. Of course, consular work is funded largely from fee income and FCO will need to consider how best to implement the changes we suggest within its funding constraints. We note that cross-subsidisation has meant that Consular Directorate has, until this financial year, not been able to spend the full amount received from its consular premium on assistance work (paragraph 5.8). Our methodology is described in detail at Appendix 2.

6 Demand for consular services has increased

Consular assistance cases 1998-2005

Requests (000s)



Source: FCO management information

NOTE

In 2004-05, Consular Directorate sought to provide clearer guidance for Posts regarding the classification of cases as consular enquiries or as consular assistance cases. Consular Directorate believes that this largely explains the apparent decline in consular assistance cases.

7 The Report's conclusions

Consular Services to British Nationals



Source: National Audit Office



KEY CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Challenge: Influencing and changing behaviours of travellers

The FCO has improved the content and consistency of its messages to travellers in recent years, and now needs to ensure that it reaches and influences more targeted groups of travellers.

1 There is further scope to better understand the root causes of assistance cases, and to target hard hitting messages at traveller groups which do not prepare adequately, or those which have historically required more consular assistance.

2 In developing a consular customer guide for assistance work, the FCO should consider the key criteria it should use to establish levels of assistance which are appropriate for the country and individual circumstance. This will be important in addressing rising public expectations, establishing and publicising the responsibility of individuals and using limited resources to best effect.

Challenge: Moving towards a more consistent frontline service to individuals

Although the overall standard of service appears generally high, at present British nationals can experience a different level and nature of consular service depending on where they are in the world. Some but not all of this can be explained by the variable levels of risk in different environments. There are also improvements which the FCO could make to improve the overall delivery of the service, such as through training.

3 Both increasing the breadth and depth of coverage of the Post review system, and collecting fuller management information would assist the FCO in ensuring that Posts provide a consistent level of service, appropriate for the country circumstance.

4 The FCO should continue to work on ensuring that crisis management and emergency planning at Posts is robust, and should complete its action plan arising from the lessons learned from the Indian Ocean tsunami.

5 The FCO should seek to maximise the benefits from improving existing, and forging new, working partnerships with others to provide a more effective end-to-end service to British nationals, in crisis and non-crisis situations.

6 The FCO has made good progress in enhancing the professionalism of its consular staff but still needs to use training and innovative approaches to further improve the quality of its service.



7 Passport applicants overseas should be given greater choice to obtain their passports from the United Kingdom or from the FCO, subject to meeting basic security requirements.

Challenge: Equipping consular services to meet emerging change

There are a number of challenges to the future delivery of consular services. These include the need to develop increasingly complex and secure passports, and the need to better target existing resources to meet increasing demand.

8 Given the radical changes required for the passport operation, the FCO should change its current business model for issuing passports overseas.

9 The FCO should ensure that existing consular information technology systems are fully utilised and new systems are developed to enable it to allocate its resources where they are most needed.

10 The FCO should, in conjunction with HM Treasury, regularly review the current basis of funding for consular assistance work, and should reconsider the range of consular activities covered by its internal and external targets.

PART ONE

The FCO is delivering high quality information for travellers and has raised public awareness, but changing travellers' behaviours is a challenge



1.1 High quality travel information is vital if the FCO is to help British nationals to make informed decisions about travelling, and to minimise the number of people getting into difficulties overseas. Changing the behaviour of the travelling public is a difficult challenge for the FCO as it cannot force the public to heed its advice. Recognising this, it aims to help travellers by offering accessible and appealing messages, targeted to reach key audiences. This Part examines whether Consular Directorate is providing an appropriate, sufficient and high quality information service to enable the public to prepare themselves adequately before travelling abroad and whether the information is effective in reaching its target audiences.

The FCO provides an extensive, and generally high quality, information service for travellers

1.2 The FCO uses two key mechanisms to provide information for British people travelling overseas:

- **Country specific travel advice** for over 200 countries and territories is available on the FCO's central and in-country websites and through a telephone helpline. There is information on categories such as crime, terrorism, health, entry requirements, local law and customs and travel safety. FCO teams with responsibility for each region collate information from several sources such as intelligence agencies, the travel industry and FCO staff, including Posts

overseas. Proposed amendments are cleared with a central team at the appropriate level, depending on the nature of the change.

- **"Know Before You Go"** is a general safety awareness campaign to encourage British travellers to prepare better before going overseas. Messages are disseminated using a website which gives generic advice, a series of public information leaflets and awareness campaigns at travel trade events and conventions. The FCO also works with the United Kingdom Passport Service to provide a checklist for travellers with every new passport issued in the United Kingdom. Information covers areas including safety and security, insurance, vaccinations, documentation, and keeping in touch.

1.3 **Figure 8 overleaf** provides details of four key areas which the FCO has focused on in recent years to improve the coverage and accuracy of advice provided to travellers. Industry specialists² we consulted agreed that the quality and consistency of travel advice offered by Consular Directorate had improved in recent years, and that it was generally useful and accurate. In particular, they cited improvements in the clarity of the language used and a better approach to assessing and balancing perceived risks to provide an impartial view, although some considered that advice could be more tailored to reflect varying conditions and risks in different geographical regions within a country. We also found that the information offered generally matched or exceeded the information provided by other countries (Appendix 3).

² We heard views of travel industry specialists such as the Association for British Travel Agents (ABTA) and others, which include the large majority of travel agents and tour operators in the United Kingdom.

8 The FCO has taken measures to improve the quality of travel advice

Area of focus	Details
Timeliness of advice	Since 2002, Posts have been required to confirm monthly that no changes are required to travel advice, and to re-issue all advice quarterly, or immediately following a crisis. As a result, in the last three years the number of updates has increased by 70 per cent, with six countries each posting more than 40 updates during 2004-05. More generally, Posts and industry specialists told us that country advice was updated swiftly when required, although some did suggest that there were sometimes delays in removing items which they believed to be no longer relevant. However, the FCO's advice is driven by ongoing risk assessment and the need to reach a prudent, but balanced overall assessment.
Clarity and consistency of advice	There is a standard template for each country which now provides clear summary information on the key concerns (Figure 9). Although the template has some scope for flexibility, applying a consistent format sometimes meant that facts which may affect significant numbers of travellers were not always highlighted in summary information, although they were normally within the detailed text. For example, in Dubai, consular statistics show that alcohol and drugs offences account for over half of the detainee consular cases. But the strict laws pertaining to alcohol were not included in the summary information. Similarly, some Posts felt that insufficient attention was drawn in the summary information to basic but prevalent risks such as muggings and road safety, in view of the priority given to covering risks of terrorism.
Reaching clear conclusions based on risk assessments	The FCO offers graded levels of risk warnings for travellers. At the most extreme, this may involve advice not to travel to the country or area. Feedback from travellers to the FCO indicates that the graded levels of warning were a useful tool in advising about travel. The FCO has attempted to make this clearer through including information on terrorist risks in all country travel advice, but not focusing on this too heavily when setting the overall risk level, unless threats are specific. In identifying risks and possibly advising against travel to a particular country, the FCO faces a difficult balancing act. Whilst the primary consideration is the safety of British nationals, the advice offered can determine whether the public can claim on their insurance in the event of a cancellation and there are also diplomatic considerations given that issuing adverse travel warnings can provoke a strong reaction from a host country. We found no evidence that the FCO has been unduly swayed by these latter considerations. Indeed, in Kenya in May 2003, the FCO had issued adverse travel advice, regardless of protest by the Kenyan government.
Working more closely with other stakeholders	Consular Directorate has set up a Travel Advice Review Group, comprising senior representatives from prominent businesses and organisations in the travel and tourism industry (Appendix 4).

Source: National Audit Office

9 A travel advice summary



Source: The FCO website, www.fco.gov.uk/travel, 12 July 2005

Improvements in traveller information have increased public awareness but have not yet changed behaviours in some key groups

1.4 Changing patterns of travel mean that the FCO needs to target information at different sectors of the population including different age ranges, social and ethnic backgrounds and specialist interests. For example, more than half of holidays overseas are now organised independently of package tours or holiday operators, meaning that the FCO cannot rely mainly on travel agents to disseminate travel information.³ In addition, the rise in independent travellers, the proliferation of specialist tour operators and availability of lower cost airfares encouraging more people to travel overseas all have implications for the dissemination of travel advice. One feature of the changes in travel patterns is that more

3 Research carried out by Mintel International Group in 2003-04 found that inclusive tours accounted for 47 per cent of the holiday travel market.

elderly people, those with limited financial resources and support networks and those who are more vulnerable through illness or disability are travelling regularly.

The FCO has been proactive in improving its pre-travel information to reflect changing travel patterns

1.5 Figure 10 overleaf illustrates the diverse characteristics of some of the different traveller groups. The FCO has responded to this increasingly diverse range of different needs through its “Know Before You Go” initiative including signing up nearly 200 tourist industry stakeholders as partners to provide publicity and sponsorship, using a specialist consultancy firm. An FCO commissioned public survey showed that awareness of “Know Before You Go” and country advice increased from three per cent at the start of the survey in March 2002 to 23 per cent in February 2004.⁴ Posts also told us they believed travellers were becoming more aware of country advice, although the “Know Before You Go” website was still not widely accessed, with fewer visits than to country specific advice, even though the two areas of the website are linked.

Whilst awareness of traveller information is increasing, the FCO has recognised there is further scope to change the behaviour of some groups of travellers and is thinking about the way it targets key risk groups

1.6 There have been some signs of improvement in awareness and public behaviour. The 2004 FCO survey showed public awareness of the availability of traveller information is improving. A decline of eight per cent in the number of assistance cases in 2004-05 may also indicate the growing influence of traveller information, although a decline was already expected due to re-categorisation between enquiries and assistance cases.

But the number of people reading and acting on travel advice is still relatively low. There are several measures for assessing the impact of travel advice, but all show a relatively low level of penetration. For example, in 2004 there were 5 million enquiries in total, (4.9 million via the FCO website⁵ and 100,000 via the call centre), which equates to only eight per cent of the 65 million overseas trips taken by the British public every year. Posts also support the view that many of their consular customers had not read travel advice. 86 per cent of Posts who expressed a view believed that country advice was only seldom or sometimes read by travellers to the country. One effect of the limited public take-up of travel advice is the amount of time and effort which in-country consular staff told us they had to spend assisting travellers in cases where greater awareness and planning before travelling may have prevented problems occurring. Common causes of avoidable assistance cases are:

- Insufficient or no insurance;
- Lack of funds;
- Dangerous activities;
- Pre-existing medical conditions, including psychiatric conditions;
- Failure to recognise particular risks in perceived “safe” countries, such as safety when hiring scooters, local police attitudes to domestic disputes, or unfamiliar road layouts or rules;
- Immigration offences such as overstaying on their visas, without realising that this can result in detention and heavy fines;
- Criminal offences, inappropriate or culturally insensitive behaviour; and
- Low understanding of local laws and customs, such as possession of prescription medicines or public displays of affection in some Middle Eastern countries.

⁴ FCO commissioned Prescient Ltd to carry out a longitudinal study entitled “Project Holiday” to track the impact of its awareness campaign for FCO travel information since 2002, and to understand how this affects the attitudes and behaviour of the British public whilst abroad.

⁵ The figure of 4.9 million reflects the number of times travel advice pages were viewed so therefore probably overstates the number of users, as the same person often views a page more than once. FCO data shows 2.1 million “Visits” to Travel Advice pages. This figure will be lower than the actual number of visitors as some computer users have disabled the function which would allow the information to be logged. The actual number of visitors is therefore somewhere between 2.1 million and 4.9 million people but is impossible to validate.

10 The characteristics of key traveller groups vary widely



Package holiday-makers

- Historically the most common travel group.
- Generally travel to low risk countries (Europe and North America).
- Tour operators often require adequate insurance.
- Basic advice needs – ‘common sense’ – and risks are similar to those faced at home.
- Individuals assume tour operators will take responsibility for their safety.
- Many do not inform themselves adequately of local laws and conditions.

Business travellers

- Majority of trips within Europe and North America.
- Rising risk due to growth of investment and business travel in less familiar/higher-risk countries.
- Individuals assume employers will take responsibility for their safety.
- Capacity to cope varies between companies – from large multinational companies to small and medium sized enterprises.



Travellers taking short breaks

- Majority of trips within Europe or North America.
- Trips often arranged independently.
- Travellers often uninsured for short breaks.
- Travellers going on short breaks rarely inform themselves adequately, particularly if travelling to “safe” countries.

Independent travellers

- Potentially high exposure to risk (depending on destination).
- High proportion of young travellers, including those taking a gap year.
- Many visit families or friends.
- With the absence of tour operators or employers, independent travellers are more aware of their own responsibilities for their safety – although not necessarily when things go wrong.
- Sometimes limited financial resources.



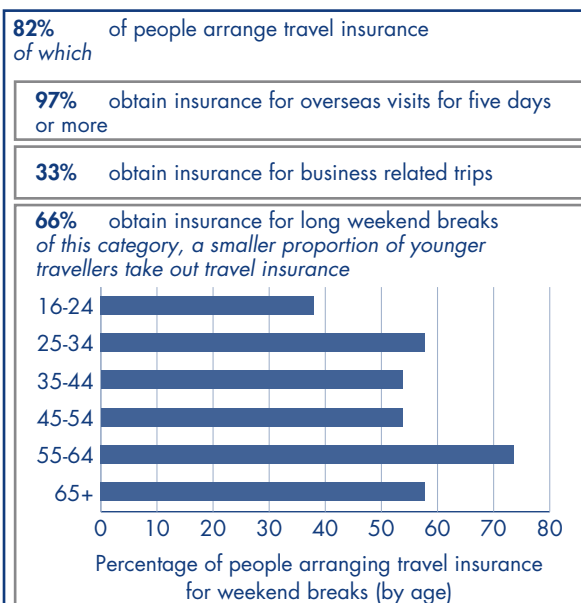
Adventure holiday makers

- High incidence of travel to risky destinations.
- Participate in risky activities, sometimes without adequate travel insurance.
- Many are aware of appropriate steps to protect themselves, but some disregard advice to seek thrills.

Source: National Audit Office

1.7 The 2004 FCO survey highlighted that there are particular groups of travellers who most need to be influenced. For example, younger people and those going on short visits or business trips are less likely to take out appropriate travel insurance (**Figure 11**). It also appears that travel advice is proportionally less frequently read for trips to European or western countries, which are largely perceived to be safe. Other key target groups include those who have poor reading skills or a short attention span, have disabilities or illness, or are independent travellers.

11 Certain key groups are less likely to obtain appropriate travel insurance



Source: The FCO "Project Holiday" research

1.8 Ultimately, taking appropriate precautions before travelling is a personal decision. The FCO cannot force people to access travel advice, or to heed the advice. Consular Directorate has run campaigns with hard hitting messages, putting case examples and costs on the website to highlight the potential consequences of not being properly prepared and insured prior to travel. Further, in April 2005, the FCO revamped its approach to travel advice with a view to improving further its impact on travellers and has employed specialist advisers to develop innovative campaigns to reach different target audiences. There have been a number of cluster campaigns aimed at core target groups such as students, sports fans, the gay community, families with children, and holiday makers (**Figure 12** shows some examples of such campaigns). The FCO plans to continue to evolve this work to address the constant need to attract the public's attention.

12 The FCO has been attempting to reach different target audiences in different ways

GoGap year website, www.gogapyear.com. This website was developed by the FCO and aims to provide comprehensive information for young adults who are planning to travel on completion of, or prior to continuing their studies. Gap year plans can often include a number of high risk or exotic destinations and extreme activities, so they are an important group to target in promoting safe travelling.

The GoGap year website receives on average 1,759 hits per day. Over 40 per cent of visitors typed in the address directly which suggests considerable success in publicising the site.

British Lions tour initiative. The FCO teamed up with BritishLions.com to develop an online Lions news service, for match reports, gossip and events, which also carried consular tips for those travelling to New Zealand for the 2005 Rugby tour. The messages were sent periodically to the computers of those who signed up for the service. The service ran from May until the end of July and was aimed at reaching specialist sports fans.

The total number of subscribers was 3019, and the advert attracted a higher than average viewing rate.

Rough Guide to safer travel. 550,000 copies of this guide have so far been printed under the Rough Guide name, funded by the FCO. It contains key advice on a number of areas regarding making adequate preparations for travel, and safety whilst travelling. The guide is free and can be obtained from a variety of sources, including from the post office. The guide is focused at young and independent travellers, who are the principal market for the existing range of Rough Guides.

Copies have been distributed with travel magazines and have been offered free through travel agents. Consular Directorate is evaluating its cost effectiveness and considering a continuation of this kind of publication.

Source: National Audit Office

PART TWO

The FCO delivers a very responsive passport service against challenging targets, but its sustainability is in question



2.1 Most British passport holders receive their passports from a Home Office agency, the United Kingdom Passport Service. As a matter of policy the United Kingdom Passport Service does not accept applications from overseas addresses due to security issues in sending passports overseas by post and the importance given to understanding local documents in preventing fraud. The FCO therefore provides an equivalent service for the estimated 13 million people with an entitlement to British nationality living overseas, and in 2004/05 issued some 453,000 passports (almost 10 per cent of the total number of United Kingdom passports issued) and

11,000 emergency passports, (**Figure 13**). The passports were issued from 104 of the 233 FCO Posts overseas and represented about a third (244 man years) of the total staff time employed on consular services overseas. This Part of the report examines whether the passport operation has achieved a high quality service to applicants, and considers the challenges facing the FCO in sustaining its service in response to new challenges of security and new technology, leading to increased costs. It also looks at the major decision faced by the FCO regarding the future of its passport operation.

13 The main types of passport issued by the FCO

Passport Type	Cost from July 2005 (Cost prior to July 2005)	Number issued by the FCO (2004-05)	Commentary
Full Passport	£69 adult and £45 child (Previously £56.50 and £36.50)	453,000	Valid for ten years. Includes a "consular premium" of £9.65 Adult and £2.26 Child to cover the cost of the FCO's assistance services. Separate passports for each child have been required since 1998.
Biometric Passport	£91 adult and £59 child	None	Will be phased in from January 2006, replacing the standard passport and providing higher standards of security against fraudulent use and forgery.
Emergency Passport	£43.50 (previously £35.50)	11,000	Usually valid for a single unbroken journey back to the United Kingdom. Normally issued when the traveller's previous passport has been lost or stolen and when the applicant can claim an urgent need to travel.
Temporary Passport	£55.00 (previously £45.60)	De min (New Service from 2004)	Issued in similar circumstances to an emergency passport, but provides flexibility to travel more widely than a single journey back to the United Kingdom. Valid for up to a year.

Source: National Audit Office

The overseas passport-issuing operation provides a very responsive service

2.2 The FCO has for several years worked to particularly exacting Public Service Agreement underlying targets on the time taken to issue passports, arising from negotiations with HM Treasury over increases in passport fees. The five day turnaround target was much more challenging than the equivalent ten days standard service given by the United Kingdom Passport Service to applicants in the United Kingdom, though the latter does provide a one day premium service at higher cost. International comparisons show that most other comparable nations offer much less rapid services for applications made overseas than the United Kingdom, with many other countries offering a three or four week turnaround period (Appendix 3). Appendix 5 lists all the specific underlying targets to the overall Public Service Agreement relevant to consular services and shows, in 2004-05, that the FCO only achieved its five day turnaround targets in 73 per cent of cases, against a target of 95 per cent. The FCO's management information does not identify how long individual applications have been delayed beyond this target. The FCO has now agreed with HM Treasury that from April 2005, its service standard should change to be consistent with United Kingdom Passport Service's target of 90 per cent of applications processed within ten working days.

2.3 From our analysis at the ten Posts we visited, we identified three main causes of delay. First, the introduction of a process whereby passport applications are received at smaller "spoke" Posts and then transferred to a larger "hub" Post in a neighbouring country or region for processing and issuing. Whilst this approach has improved cost efficiency, cases routed through most "spoke" Posts do not meet the five day service target, and normally take between two and five weeks to process. Another key factor in delays is the difficulties faced by passport operations in some parts of the world and the need to spend more time checking applications. The case example in **Figure 14** highlights the challenges faced in Islamabad. The third main problem, with information technology systems, is explored in more detail below.

14 Key factors slowing the turnaround of passport applications at Islamabad

This Post, which operates in a difficult environment for passport issuing, currently normally achieves turnaround within ten days, compared to a five-day FCO target.

A. General pressures impacting indirectly on the five day turnaround of passport applications

Rising demand: Some 3,800 cases handled in 2004-05 compared to 3,500 in previous year.

A historic backlog of incomplete applications: awaiting additional requested evidence such as missing documents. The Post has reduced this backlog considerably since October 2004 by refusing to accept incomplete applications, which has almost eliminated the presentation of new incomplete applications. We noted that the FCO's Washington Post has adopted a similar practice, which is clearly a valid technique as long as it is made clear to applicants why their application has been returned. NB, the Post only starts recording its performance against time targets once a fully completed application and fee has been received.

B. Specific delays impacting directly on the five day turnaround of passport applications

Increased scrutiny of suspect documentation presented by applicants: This sometimes requires cross-checks to local registers of births, marriages or deaths. Sometimes fieldtrips are required. The passport refusal rate at this Post has increased in the last year, partly due to increased vigilance for forged documentation. Forged certificates are freely available locally.

Decision to ask for additional evidence of entitlement: Where the officer decides that in this case an interview or DNA test is required and must be arranged.

Complicated decisions: Where entitlement to nationality remains unclear and has to be referred to a senior officer, or for advice to authorities in the United Kingdom.

Passport production systems unavailable (paragraphs 2.6 to 2.9)

Source: National Audit Office interviews at Posts

Sustaining the existing passport service is already a challenge

Posts are struggling with existing systems because of a combination of problems with supporting information technology infrastructure, software, hardware, and training

2.4 The passport issuing process depends on two main information technology systems:

- **the Generic Issuance Environment (GenIE)**, was introduced from 2000 mainly to produce more fraud-resistant, machine-readable passports;
- **Omnibase** is a global database of all passports issued, and was developed and rolled out with support from the United Kingdom Passport Service. It enables Posts to carry out online security checks and includes a database of lost, stolen and recovered passports.

2.5 The ten Posts we visited recognised that GenIE had improved control over passport processing and that Om nibase had improved their ability to check security details in “real time”. But Posts considered that GenIE had only limited functionality in terms of managing the passport operation. Potential improvements identified included automated stock control of blank passport books, (which the FCO intends to introduce shortly), and automated management information on each Posts’ performance in processing passports within targets. The FCO plans to incorporate this additional functionality in the next biometric passport issuing system from 2006.

2.6 The ten Posts we visited reported that sustained and repeated problems with GenIE, Om nibase or the underlying infrastructure had resulted in delays in issuing passports, and wasted staff time, to varying extents. This ranged from a complete loss of service for several days, through shorter spells of unavailability, to system slowness. The Om nibase problems have also affected the service provided by the United Kingdom Passport Service.

2.7 More generally, some 25 per cent of Posts which responded to our questionnaire believed that the information technology infrastructure underpinning GenIE was not sufficient. The problems arose from a combination of deficiencies in the main consular software systems, the underlying Foreign Office infrastructure (problems

at the server computers), or from interfaces between the two. The effects of any part of the system “falling over” are worsened because users subsequently have to receive permission from desks in the United Kingdom before they can be reinstated on the system. Furthermore, those Posts in similar time zones to the United Kingdom reported that the system ran very slowly during periods of peak demand when London was on the network. There is a helpdesk for specific enquiries, which Posts generally considered responsive, but until 2005 there was limited capability for central analysis and proactive investigation in response to common problems reported at Posts. The Consular Directorate has recently responded to these difficulties by creating an operations team to train users and monitor the effectiveness of information technology systems. The team has been assisted since August 2005 by a service agreement with the providers of the information technology infrastructure and helpdesk.

2.8 Recognising its underlying information technology infrastructure problems, in February 2005 the FCO agreed a seven year deal with Hewlett Packard with a value of £180 million to deliver “Future Firecrest” – a new enhanced information technology infrastructure for the FCO. This system should provide much greater capacity and unlike its predecessor, is being designed to host web-based systems such as GenIE. The total cost of introducing Future Firecrest is budgeted to be £320 million, including internal departmental costs.

2.9 A further problem relates to the introduction of machine readable passports. Technical issues affecting the performance of the specialised printers which print the passports led to a high rate of “spoiled” passports, repeat printing and delay. The FCO had recognised the potential problems but decided to accept them because of the external deadlines they faced for conversion to machine readable passports. No compensation was received for this from the supplier. Rates of spoilt passports have fallen as staff have got more used to the machinery. But only 54 per cent of Posts that responded to our invitation to comment reported that equipment is generally adequate. Reasons we identified for the poor performance included limited initial training and delays in repairing or replacing broken equipment because service and parts have to be requested via the United Kingdom, which poses a risk to continuity of service delivery. The establishment of a new operations team (paragraph 2.7), should help in addressing these problems.

The complex nature of the FCO's overseas passport operation means customer charges are relatively high and rising

2.10 In line with longstanding government requirements, the FCO is required to recover the full cost of issuing passports. To comply with this requirement the FCO raised fees by 22 per cent in mid-2005 (Figure 13), in part because it realised that costs are higher than previously estimated (paragraph 5.8) and partly to finance the cost of transition to more secure, biometric, passports. The FCO's fees are 64 per cent higher than the United Kingdom Passport Service's charge for a standard adult passport though lower than the United Kingdom Passport Service's £89 premium service for same-day collection (both these latter fees are due to increase in December 2005). The key reason for this disparity is that the United Kingdom Passport Service reaps the benefits of much greater economies of scale, producing ten times as many passports from seven (as opposed to 104) locations. In comparison FCO Posts are dependent on less capable, low volume scanners and printers, making their operations more labour intensive. Appendix 3 shows that the FCO's passport fees are higher than those levied by most comparable countries, and are double the cost in some countries, though the FCO considers it likely that many other countries are not recovering the full costs of their passport services, and the inclusion of a consular premium of £9.65 to fund assistance work is also a distorting factor. Nor do other countries maintain as large and accessible a passport issuing network as does the United Kingdom, with most having largely repatriated passport production (Appendix 3). However, the large number of Britons living outside the United Kingdom, and the British tendency to travel increasingly widely, are also factors.

The FCO, supported by the United Kingdom Passport Service, is raising its game on passport issuing security, but more remains to be done

Fraudulent applications for passports pose a real threat, but little is known about how many passports are issued incorrectly overseas

2.11 The FCO does not collect robust management information against which to assess the extent to which passports are issued incorrectly overseas and does not set targets for this aspect of its service. There is evidence, however, that individuals do sometimes attempt to obtain passports fraudulently from overseas Posts. For example, some Posts routinely experience fraudulent passport applications by those using forged documentation or claiming bogus family relationships. In addition, there have been examples of individuals trying to obtain multiple travel documents for criminal purposes, through applications to different British Consulates. Whilst the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the United Kingdom Passport Service were already working on enhanced security, for example by developing databases which show applicants' previous history of passport applications, some Posts, particularly on the Indian sub-continent or in West Africa, continue to face a high incidence of fraudulent applications for passports.

2.12 The United Kingdom Passport Service is developing quality targets to cover incorrect issue of United Kingdom-issued passports, building on a random quality and security check system they have operated since 1998. At present, the FCO does not have an analogous quality assurance regime. Putting such a system in place in such a highly dispersed operation would incur substantial additional cost.

The FCO is doing more to tackle control issues and fraud in passport issuing, although more remains to be done

2.13 The FCO, like the United Kingdom Passport Service, has made a number of improvements in its security arrangements in recent years, including introducing the GenIE system and Omnibase database (paragraph 2.4) and additional checks on selected applicants (such as DNA testing). However, there is a question as to how far the FCO will be able to continue to raise its game with respect to an increasingly demanding and high technology passport security agenda in the future. For example, the United Kingdom Passport Service, which has until now rarely called applicants to interview, is now putting in place arrangements whereby they will interview applicants for first time United Kingdom-issued passports from 2006 and others from 2008. In contrast, the FCO currently relies on Posts to make decisions on a risk-assessed basis, interviewing more often in what are perceived to be higher risk countries. Whilst the FCO intends to interview more applicants in future, particularly when almost all applicants are expected to be required to attend for biometric data enrolment (see phase two

in **Figure 15**), the fact that its approach differs from United Kingdom Passport Service means that the United Kingdom passport issuing operation as a whole operates to inconsistent security standards.

2.14 The risk based method adopted by the FCO is sensible in principle, but poses a significant challenge for the FCO to monitor and manage the way in which the 104 passport issuing Posts apply the approach. Notably, the FCO does not hold data on current interview rates. We found some variation in practices at the Posts we visited. As a perceived high risk Post, Islamabad did most to validate new applications, undertaking field trips, DNA tests and interviews. The other Posts we visited, where the risks appeared lower but still at least as significant as in the United Kingdom, tended to take such steps very rarely if at all. In part the variations reflect the fact that Posts are inevitably most directly aware of local circumstances and risks, but some observed that specific training to enhance their ability to spot forgeries would help to confirm whether any additional checks were required. Basic fraud sessions are now being included on consular training courses to alert staff to these risks.

15 There are two different stages of using biometrics on passport applications

Phase 1 biometric passports

Key features

Digital photographs on chip 2005-2006

United Kingdom passports will contain the holder's personal details and a digital photograph stored on a secure electronic chip. This provides added security against forgery.

Timetable

Key dates:

February 2004: Contract signed with 3M for delivery of systems to FCO Posts.

September to December 2005: Pilot schemes for issue of biometric passports at its embassies in Paris and Washington.

January to April 2006: Roll-out of biometric system to 104 FCO Posts overseas.

July 2006: United Kingdom Passport Service to complete conversion to biometric passports.

Source: National Audit Office

Phase 2 biometric passports

Iris scanning and fingerprinting, from 2008

United Kingdom passports would contain the holder's personal details and more advanced biometric data such as iris scans and fingerprint data, all stored on a secure electronic chip.

This would be a more robust safeguard against identity or passport theft and misuse.

To be confirmed, but if in line with European Union passport regulations this would be by January 2009.

The move to high-security biometric passports raises major doubts about long term sustainability

2.15 The use of biometrics provides a greater measure of security of personal identification data, and is being introduced by the Government on passport applications. Biometric information is used to identify people through biological traits, with information being digitalised and held electronically. Figure 15 provides more detail about the plans for using biometric data in passports.

The FCO has had to make quick progress with basic biometrics, in partnership with the United Kingdom Passport Service

2.16 The pace of change of global passport development has been determined largely by more arduous United States requirements. The United Kingdom is one of 27 countries that qualify for the United States visa waiver programme, under which some four million British passport holders who travel to the United States each year do not have to obtain a \$100 visa in order to enter. Legislation enacted by the United States Congress in the wake of the September 11th 2001 tragedy initially required that all passports eligible under the waiver programme must be biometric by October 2004, although the deadline has since been extended to October 2006. The FCO and United Kingdom Passport Service are jointly committed to doing everything possible to ensure that the United Kingdom remains within the programme, and to deliver enhanced passports that are more secure and less vulnerable to fraudulent use.

2.17 The United Kingdom project is broadly keeping pace with other comparable countries. Italy, Spain and Germany are all aiming to introduce a new system by the end of 2005. The United States plan has been to begin pilot production of biometric passports in late autumn 2005 by issuing official biometric passports to its government employees. Although not all contracts have been finalised, it intends to complete the rollout of biometric passports and to install biometric-compatible readers at immigration desks at United States ports by its own deadline of October 2006. But the United Kingdom, as others, must still overcome a number of significant risks which are summarised in **Figure 16**.

Moving to the next stage of biometric passports will require a step change in technology, be more challenging and costly and could result in fundamental changes to the FCO's passport business

2.18 There is a firm presumption from statements by the United States authorities and by International Civil Aviation Organisation that the development of biometrics will not stop with the use of digital photographs, but would be enhanced by the European Union passport regulation to incorporate fingerprint and possibly iris data on the microchip within passports. Questions of how to collect fingerprint data overseas and transmitting them have not yet been considered in detail. But as Figure 15 above highlights, responding to these developments will be more technically demanding, risky and expensive than the programme to meet the 2006 deadline. The FCO is considering its options for the next generation of biometric passports.

2.19 As Appendix 3 shows, most other comparable countries have already repatriated their passport service to their home countries, in part to improve security, but also recognising that this is a more cost effective, albeit slower service for applicants. Two of the options which the FCO has considered in response to the challenges of delivering next generation biometric passports include repatriation to the United Kingdom of either:

- passport application examination and decision-making for all straightforward passport renewals, particularly those that do not require inspection of local documentation; and /or
- passport production, either to the United Kingdom Passport Service or to FCO-run facilities in either United Kingdom or at a reduced number of global "hubs".

16 Key risks and uncertainties over the delivery of biometric passports

Risks to Phase 1 biometric passports

Standards

Detailed technical standards for data and media in the area, promulgated by the International Civil Aviation Organisation, are still fluid and could still contribute to a situation where biometric passports and passport readers at points of entry do not work well together.

Infrastructure

The limitations of the FCO's existing passport system and information technology infrastructure. For example work is still required to minimise the strain that the transmission of secure data between Posts and the United Kingdom will place on the information technology network.

Suppliers

The availability of sufficient printed passport books and silicon chips that meet the required technical standard at a time when many nations are scouring for supplies. The FCO previously encountered difficulties with the supply of passport books when implementing machine readable passports. Service level agreements for ongoing support are being negotiated with suppliers who maintain the information technology infrastructure, and with the biometric system supplier 3M.

Enrolment

Applicants can still submit their applications by post, without attending in person

Costs

The FCO has sought to reduce the risks and costs of implementing an initial biometrics capability by upgrading its existing system. Whilst the conversion cost is relatively modest, some £3.7million in capital spend, with additional running costs of about £1million a year, as Figure 13 shows, the biometric passports will cost £22 more than the existing passport.

Source: National Audit Office

Risks to Phase 2 biometric passports

The technology is still evolving rapidly and the associated technical standards in iris scanning and fingerprint digitisation are as yet uncertain. The FCO and United Kingdom Passport Service have not yet committed to a particular technical solution to gather the necessary biometric data.

The, as yet undetermined, volumes of electronic data to be handled could have implications for the FCO's existing information technology infrastructure.

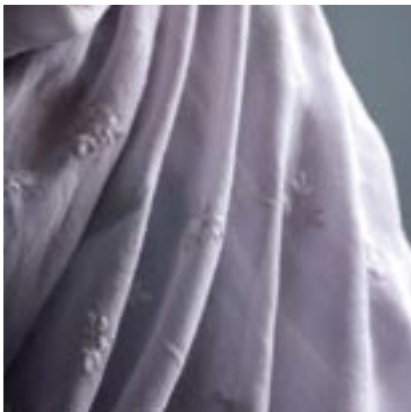
The eventual supply strategy will depend on the chosen technical solution.

Applicants would have to lodge their prints or iris scans personally through face to face "enrolment". The FCO may have to provide for in the region of a million personal calls a year by United Kingdom nationals for biometric enrolment at locations around the world. Viable options include direct co-operation with other countries or through the private sector. Another alternative would be for applicants to travel back to the United Kingdom, although this is not likely to be a realistic option for many applicants. Most passport-issuing Posts could not cope with this level of activity without a major enhancement of visitor facilities.

The costs of producing second phase biometric passports are not yet well understood. The best available proxy is that the UKvisas' project to produce two million biometric visas for foreign nationals entering the United Kingdom is expected to cost £89 million to set-up and £27 million a year to operate.

PART THREE

Consular staff provide generally good assistance to British nationals overseas, but more can be done to make most effective use of limited resources



3.1 Consular staff provide help to United Kingdom nationals who run into trouble overseas, with the FCO facilitating the provision of assistance by family and friends, or in some cases, aiding directly where family and friends are not able to assist. This can be a highly stressful and demanding role. In 2004-05, the FCO dealt with 84,000 new assistance cases as well as over three and a half million consular enquiries. The range of assistance offered is wide and includes looking after the welfare of prisoners, dealing with those affected by child custody disputes or forced marriages and helping victims of crimes or assaults overseas (a more detailed breakdown is at Figure 2). This Part assesses, within the context of ever increasing expectations and demands placed on them, the quality and consistency of the assistance provided by consular staff to distressed British nationals worldwide. It also examines how the FCO is trying to prioritise its assistance work according to need, and to manage public expectations.

There is incomplete information on the quality of service on assistance cases, though standards appear to be generally good

3.2 The FCO has two targets underlying the Public Service Agreement target which specifically concern the promptness of assistance work, relating to contacting detainees and hospitalised British nationals. As Appendix 5 shows, although it failed to meet some of these targets, the FCO achieved demanding service standards in a high proportion of cases (97 per cent of detainees in 2004-05, and 99 per cent of hospitalised cases). But a minority of

Posts failed to meet the targets, often due to in-country difficulties. For example, in 2004-05, Atlanta in the United States did not meet the target for contacting detainees within 24 hours of notification of the arrest in any of its 36 cases because of staff shortages.

3.3 Until a new target was introduced in April 2005 (Appendix 5), Consular Directorate did not routinely gather information relating to customer satisfaction on assistance cases. However, observation during our Post visits and consultation with stakeholder welfare organisations and pressure groups suggests a generally good level of service in the majority of cases, although the service offered did not meet expectations in some cases. This was due to over high expectations regarding the role of consular staff, or to the impact of limited resources leading to prioritising competing demands. The commitment and dedication of staff to achieving a good level of service was apparent, often under difficult and stressful circumstances and outside of office hours.

Consular Directorate is taking steps to improve the delivery of its assistance work, with some success

3.4 As described in the Summary, demands from British nationals overseas are constantly changing. In response, the FCO has flexed the location and staffing of consular assistance overseas, improved staff professional skills, and increasingly worked with other agencies to achieve better results.

The FCO is evolving its approach to ensure that it has appropriate consular representation across the globe to provide assistance to British nationals

3.5 To provide a responsive assistance service, the FCO needs adequate representation in reasonably accessible locations across the globe. The Preface shows how the FCO uses differing forms of representation to achieve this objective. Compared to similar countries, the United Kingdom has a strong consular network, with a presence in approximately 99 per cent of countries worldwide (Appendix 3). Our review of assistance cases highlighted the importance of having someone on the spot to provide a proactive service. The use of Honorary Consuls helps in this regard by allowing the FCO to be represented in both key tourist locations and difficult areas. For example, the island of Bali in Indonesia is a primary tourist destination for British and other western nationals and is approximately two hours' flight journey from the embassy at Jakarta. The Honorary Consul in Bali and his assistant dealt with over 120 assistance cases in 2004-05, including seven deaths, 22 prison visits and 18 hospital visits, as well as other highly sensitive cases such as sexual assaults. Similarly, Honorary Consuls in Cali and Medellin in Columbia, although dealing with a smaller number of cases, were valuable in reaching remote locations when travelling is dangerous. Our visits identified some countries (such as Cyprus, Columbia and Cambodia), where the appointment of more Honorary Consuls would help further to provide a more accessible and responsive service, although finding suitable candidates can be problematic.

3.6 Accommodation is also an important factor in ensuring appropriate and adequate representation. Our survey of Posts revealed that 90 per cent were content with the suitability of their accommodation for their working practices. The FCO does not routinely collect detailed customer satisfaction information but the data we saw at the ten Posts we visited indicated that customers were generally content with the facilities; however, some Posts were not situated in the area where most British nationals are located, necessitating extra travelling time. We also noted variation between Posts between public opening hours, which ranged from 3.5 to 5.5 hours each day. Each Post has discretion to set its own public opening hours and the variation reflects resourcing levels and competing needs, with a recommended minimum of 25 hours per week. However, we found that of the Posts

we visited, half were open for less than the recommended 25 hours. Further, in some Posts the opening hours, together with its location, made it more difficult for British nationals to attend the consular section in person. For example, in Cyprus, the consular section in the capital Nicosia is up to two hours from most tourist resorts and opening hours were 08:00am to noon.

3.7 The FCO is seeking to improve efficiency in its network whilst maintaining the quality of its service delivery by moving towards a greater number of localised Posts and Honorary Consuls.⁶ This allows the FCO to seek cost efficiencies, given that using United Kingdom based staff incurs significant additional costs including housing, allowances, child care as well as preparation time, language training, and moving costs. The total of these costs varies widely across different country circumstances. In addition, experienced local staff and Honorary Consuls often have better language skills and local knowledge and contacts than a United Kingdom-based diplomat on a short posting, although the latter can create opportunities to periodically review the operation and to spread best practice. **Figure 17** describes a number of alternative forms of co-operation which other countries are using to improve the efficiency of running their consular networks.

3.8 International co-operation is likely to become increasingly important as United Kingdom nationals visit increasingly diverse and more remote parts of the world. The FCO already acts on behalf of unrepresented European Union or Commonwealth nationals in many countries, and in 2004-05 provided assistance for over 3,000 unrepresented foreign nationals. But there are few locations in which other nationalities act on behalf of the United Kingdom, and we saw limited use of burden sharing within a country. We found that the quality of links between countries varied greatly, with little evidence of sharing of consular assistance in matters such as enquiries, local information on host country systems, or on individual consular cases. Whilst there are sensitivities to be managed, including possible language difficulties and the reaction of the public, who often expect to deal directly with British officials, tasks such as prison visiting in remote areas could potentially be shared between diplomatic officials of different nations. In addition, joint consular operations with other English speaking and European Union nations could provide a cost effective way to increase the global coverage of the consular network.

⁶ In a ministerial statement on 15 December 2004, the FCO announced its plans for localising its representation in 11 Posts by 2006, and appointing 7 more Honorary Consuls to provide support in areas where Posts are to be closed.

17 The United Kingdom and other countries have alternative ways of organising their network

Informal or one-off sharing arrangements: Countries make unilateral or multilateral agreements with others to provide consular assistance. For example, Australia arranged with Germany and Sweden to provide consular services in Libya and North Korea. The United Kingdom has reciprocal agreements with Commonwealth and European Union countries. Most recently, it has reached agreement with Australia and New Zealand to cover cuts to coverage in the Pacific region.

Shared diplomatic staff and premises: Some countries, such as France and Germany, are also starting to co-operate internationally to achieve greater representation and coverage for routine assistance work. For example, shared French/German consulates in Newcastle, Bosnia and Montenegro optimise efficiency by sharing counter staff and overheads. The United Kingdom also shares its premises with other missions in some countries.

Joint ambassadors: One mechanism to achieve coverage is to make one ambassador or consular officer responsible for multiple countries. Sweden and the United Kingdom both use this method of concurrently accredited ambassadors, with the United Kingdom currently having over 30 such ambassadors.

Non-resident ambassadors: This mechanism is used to cover countries where full representation is not feasible or economic. Sweden handles its international relations of thirty countries through ambassadors based in Stockholm.

Source: National Audit Office

Staff are dedicated to providing a good service, and improved training has led to improvements in professionalism

3.9 Consular work requires good interpersonal skills and an ability to act with sensitivity and discretion. The FCO has recognised the importance of these skills and has produced a new staff training strategy to improve professionalism. None-the-less, diplomats involved in consular work are usually not specialists in this area, but take on a variety of roles during their careers. Historically, many FCO staff have often chosen to specialise in political or representational roles as these were seen as having a more assured route to career advancement, and there are limited senior roles in consular work. This continuous transfer between streams means that a large ongoing training programme is necessary. The four-strong training team has developed significantly and is now training more people (a total of 595 in 2004-05), and reaching a larger proportion of locally engaged staff through regional courses, as well as providing systematic training for Honorary Consuls for the first time. In addition, a consular newsletter, released every two months, aims to spread

experiences, ideas and good practice. Consular staff and external stakeholders we spoke to suggested that further improvements to training could include:

- **Enhancing the capabilities of country casework staff based in the United Kingdom**, who are often only in post for two years, and have little or no experience overseas. This was often raised by external stakeholder groups and Posts overseas as an area of weakness. These officers would benefit from earlier familiarisation visits overseas and short overseas placements to cover absences at Post, equipping them to better understand consular work and local circumstances, and to develop good relationships with key staff. Other countries such as the United States and Canada staff their country casework desks with a broader mix of experienced and less experienced staff;
- **Ensuring that all remaining locally engaged staff attend a training course.** Despite improvements, including training approximately 300 locally engaged staff in 2004-05, FCO statistics indicate that 35 per cent of locally engaged staff have not undertaken formal training in consular work within the last four years, with most common reasons given for this being lack of funding (indicating a possible lack of awareness of funding available from London) or difficulties in releasing staff from front line work;
- **Providing ongoing refresher or update training for more experienced staff, including spreading good practice.** Nearly 50 per cent of Posts who responded to our survey stressed this, and in particular, the need for more regional training events to focus on discussing country circumstances, working practices and policy and management issues;
- **Better language training for United Kingdom-based staff.** Consular work often requires liaison with provincial officials and staff believed that reliance on locally engaged staff to translate can be inappropriate in pressured or sensitive situations; and
- **Further developing the duty officer system** which is designed to ensure that an FCO official is available at each Post to distressed British nationals at all times. Some 75 per cent of duty officers reported that they did not undertake formal training in consular work prior to taking up their position, resulting in a lack of confidence and effectiveness in dealing with consular cases. The FCO is addressing this issue by improving the rate and content of duty officer training but, as **Figure 18 overleaf** details, there may also be scope to learn from the way Canada has tackled the problem.

18 Innovation in service delivery: The Canadian “After Hours” system

The FCO’s system

When a request for consular assistance occurs overseas outside normal working hours the FCO’s normal arrangement is that the call is relayed to a duty officer who is “on call” at his or her home. Duty Officers deal with both consular and other urgent work outside office hours, and are equipped with packs of relevant guidance and documentation to help them assist distressed nationals. They are required to be quickly accessible, and are paid an allowance for being on duty. The total cost of these particular allowances is not known, but is estimated to cost the FCO between £500,000 and £1 million a year. Most Posts operate a rota for this duty, which is not a popular responsibility and can create significant strain for smaller Posts with fewer consular staff included in the rota. Many duty officers are not consular specialists.

The Canadian system

Foreign Affairs Canada operated a similar system to the United Kingdom until 1993, when it instituted new arrangements, to relieve overseas missions of the financial and human costs of duty officers, and to ensure that distressed Canadians can make immediate contact with an experienced consular officer able to give rapid assistance.

After-hours calls made overseas to over 160 missions are now automatically routed to Canada, where experience has shown that 97 per cent of cases can be satisfactorily handled. For the

remaining three per cent the Canadian centre works down a list of staff at the Post to find one able to provide urgent local help, such as a hospital visit or to issue a passport. Savings are not easy to quantify given the gradual implementation process over a period of years, but the Canadians believe that during the first five years alone, the changes led to staff on-call cost savings of \$825,000. Costs were minimal apart from the acquisition of telephone call-handling software, since they began the process by converting Posts which already had relatively advanced telephone equipment.

Foreign Affairs Canada reports high satisfaction with the system from missions and from customers. However, effective implementation of such a system requires:

- Suitable call handling equipment to transfer calls to the home country;
- Support from overseas missions to provide the home country desk with an up-to-date database of the information most frequently requested by callers;
- A phased approach, starting with those missions most enthusiastic to make the change.

Since the United Kingdom FCO has its own system of allowances to staff on-call out of hours, and its own inventory of telephone equipment, outturn savings from implementing such a system in the United Kingdom may be different. The effects on service quality though, would be similar.

Sources: National Audit Office and Foreign Affairs Canada

The FCO has been developing its approach and increasing its expertise in dealing with a wide range of cases

3.10 In addition to improving the quality of staff through training, the FCO has improved the quality of its consular guidance and increased the number of specialists in London to advise consular staff. The number of London-based staff has risen by 28 per cent within the last three years. Consular Directorate now employs specialist advisers in law, policing and social work, and has specialist units in key fields such as forced marriages, human rights and child abductions. A good example of the progress made is the Joint Forced Marriage Unit which, as described in **Figure 19**, has recently been relaunched as a joint initiative with the Home Office.

3.11 The FCO’s attempt to professionalise its service has led it to tailor its approach towards different types of cases and to new areas for consular assistance. In addition to individual assistance cases, Consular Directorate is increasingly focussing on planning for and responding to a number of planned events each year which may result in a surge in consular assistance. This principally involves

major sporting competitions, but also events such as the Hajj, the Muslim annual pilgrimage to Mecca. Measures to deal with such events include placing consular staff at venues and airports to assist British travellers. The Euro 2004 football championship, held in Portugal, provides a good example of how the FCO’s approach has evolved and the innovative and proactive approach which the Consular Directorate took, particularly in areas of travel information and early liaison with other key bodies (**Figure 20 on page 34**). The FCO is working towards a more co-ordinated approach to ensure that lessons learned from one event are disseminated to other Posts.

3.12 Despite this progress, some areas of assistance are still problematic with variations in the consistency of service provided by the FCO, and some public expectations are not currently met. A number of welfare and support organisations have criticised the FCO’s handling of deaths overseas, particularly the lack of adequate information and proactive support to bereaved families and ongoing involvement from the FCO. Groups such as Support After Murder and Manslaughter Abroad (SAMM Abroad) have also highlighted the disparity between the level of assistance available to the families of

19 The Joint Forced Marriage Unit provides specialist assistance for an emerging field of work



The problem: Forced marriage is when a person is coerced into a marriage against their will and under duress. As such, it is very different from arranged marriages, where both parties consent. Forced marriage is an abuse of human rights. The FCO deals with approximately 250 cases per year; the majority of which are from Pakistan, and Bangladesh, but with cases occurring in other countries too. The majority are female, and 30 per cent are minors, with the youngest helped to date being only 13.

The response: The new Joint Forced Marriage Unit was revamped from the FCO's Community Liaison Unit, which was a specialised unit to support Posts in dealing with these cases. Work includes:

- Responses to forced marriage cases as they arise. Staff at Posts, supported by the dedicated team in the United Kingdom, encourage the victim to come to the Post, or in some cases, travel to the location at which the victim is staying to "rescue" them. The FCO may then arrange temporary accommodation and repatriation to the United Kingdom if desired;
- Outreach and publicity campaigns. The FCO is increasingly committed to prevention rather than cure and organises outreach events in target communities; and
- Liaison with others. Guidance has been provided for those in social services, police and education sectors. The unit is also encouraging better contacts with non-governmental organisations such as community groups, counselling organisations, lawyers and refugees. The joint unit is currently undertaking a consultation exercise regarding the possible criminalisation of forced marriage as a specific offence.

Source: National Audit Office

murder victims and that offered in mass casualty terrorist attacks or natural disasters, with key differences relating to financial assistance, travel and accommodation (Figure 29 in Part 4 shows the assistance plan offered to victims of terrorism). The FCO believes that providing such an intensive level of support in all cases is not sustainable, given resource constraints, but has acknowledged that an expectations gap has arisen and, as **Figure 21 overleaf** explains, is working with some key lobby groups to explain its position and to reduce the expectation gap in some areas. Lobby groups recognise the FCO position, but consider that families' expectations are reasonable given the unusual vulnerabilities and extreme circumstances that can apply in an overseas context.

Consular assistance work has benefited from useful partnerships with external stakeholders and would improve further with more joined up government

3.13 The FCO has established a number of partnerships and funding agreements with voluntary bodies to provide services such as counselling and practical assistance with accommodation and financial support. These partnerships work well, and can be crucial in providing assistance where services either fall outside the consular services remit or the skills base of many of its staff. Partnerships include:

- **Formal central agreements and partnerships:** The FCO's Consular Directorate part funds key bodies such as Prisoners Abroad, a charity which receives a grant (£150,000 in 2004-05, reducing to £100,000 by 2006-07) to help it provide funds, advice and support to prisoners, both whilst in prison and after release. (www.prisonersabroad.org.uk);
- **Local agreements:** Some Posts have identified key voluntary bodies to assist them by providing a range of services. For example, Struggle for Change (SACH), a charity in Islamabad, provides legal assistance, safe housing, medical attention and counselling for victims of forced marriage; and
- **Informal links and liaison:** Posts develop links with agencies in country who can help them with individual cases. For example in Lisbon, staff have developed links with the local victim support unit and an international social services agency.

20 Consular planning for Euro 2004 was a success

The Euro 2004 Football Tournament was held in Portugal during June and July 2004. 90,000 England fans attended. Planning for the consular operation commenced well before the start of the tournament, with two main aims:

- 1 To ensure that as many fans as possible arrived in Portugal armed with sufficient information to minimise the likelihood of consular assistance being required.
- 2 To ensure that sufficient resources were in place, without disrupting the provision of non-tournament related services.

The consular team used a wide range of innovative techniques to pursue these aims:

United Kingdom: November 2003 - July 2004

Public Information

A carefully orchestrated media campaign – ‘On The Ball in Portugal’ – to disseminate travel advice, supported by celebrity endorsements and themed promotional literature.

‘Road Shows’ were held at important United Kingdom football matches.

Staffing

Re-deployment of suitably qualified FCO staff from London and other overseas Posts. Procurement of extra office accommodation.

Liaison with Key Partners

Detailed collaboration with fan clubs and football supporters associations, to promote good communication and to disseminate information.



Liaison with Key Partners

Appointment of a dedicated ‘football attaché’ from November 2003, who acted as a co-ordinator for all aspects of the football-related consular operation.

Portugal: Middle 2003 - June 2004

Inter-Agency Liaison

Hosting conferences and seminars including United Kingdom and Portuguese officials, to promote liaison on areas such as policing, ticketing, accommodation and travel, emergency responses and travel advice.

Early cultivation of relationships with key senior officials throughout Portugal.



Preparing for Consular Cases

Setting up a dedicated telephone line for football fans, made memorable by including the digits ‘1966’, the year of England’s World Cup victory.

Running a full-scale simulation of a major consular incident.

Public Information (on arrival)

Publication of 40,000 copies of Lonely Planet guide to Euro 2004 for fans.

Production of wallet size ‘Z Cards’ containing useful information, distributed in the United Kingdom and Portugal, at airports, hotels and bars.

Service Delivery

Teams of consular staff attended matches and provided on-call assistance at the Embassy.

- ☐ United Kingdom
- ☐ United Kingdom and Portugal
- ☐ Portugal

Source: National Audit Office

21 There is a gap between expectations and assistance regarding deaths overseas

Expectations of bereaved families

Staff should be trained to communicate sensitively with families after receiving news of the death

Assistance should be given to families of the bereaved whilst in country, including:

- Family to be met on arrival in country and accommodation booked
- Accompany family to hospital morgue or other arrangements
- Assisting family with paperwork in host country

Financial support granted where required for direct expenses such as for travel abroad to attend trials, for translation and for legal fees.

Regular communication and updates with the bereaved family whilst in the United Kingdom

The FCO to assist families through any investigative or legal process, including:

- The FCO to provide information to bereaved families regarding what to expect from the local court system
- FCO staff to accompany families to murder trials
- The FCO to provide interpreter and document translation

Where necessary, the FCO should lobby foreign governments for effective investigations.

The FCO's position and responses

FCO staff are trained in customer handling skills but are not qualified counsellors, and rightly rely on other agencies to provide this role where required. Where appointed, Police Family Liaison Officers can provide a key source of support, though their core role is to help the overseas investigation team. The FCO is liaising with police over the extent and consistency of their involvement in cases.

Posts actions can be constrained by the resources available to them in country. FCO staff often have to restrict the assistance that they can provide in the interest of having sufficient time to deal with the needs of all British nationals. A recently improved initial condolence letter from the FCO aims to set out more clearly what assistance the family can expect at different stages.

The FCO does not currently provide financial assistance for bereaved families outside of the assistance plan approved for victims of terrorism or natural disaster, due to resource constraints.

Weight of work may sometimes influence staff's ability to be proactive in communicating with the family. The FCO is working to provide clearer staff guidance on the regularity of contact between consular officers and bereaved families. The FCO has also recently developed a generic information pack for the bereaved, based on the Home Office bereavement pack, which sets out practical advice and key contacts.

FCO staff are not legally trained and rightly cannot provide legal advice. For this reason they do not routinely attend court hearings but do provide lists of English-speaking lawyers. There are significant resource implications in training staff in the legal arrangements of other countries. However, the FCO is trialling guides prepared by Posts on the host country legal system in some countries. Interpreting and translating skills are privately available in most countries, and there would be a significant additional cost to public funds if the FCO were to provide these.

The FCO cannot interfere in other countries' judicial processes, and the UK police can only become involved in investigations in a third country at the invitation of that country's police. The FCO can, however, raise concerns with foreign governments about the conduct of an investigation where the country's system appears not to have operated as it is supposed to.

Source: Correspondence with key stakeholders and interviews with consular staff

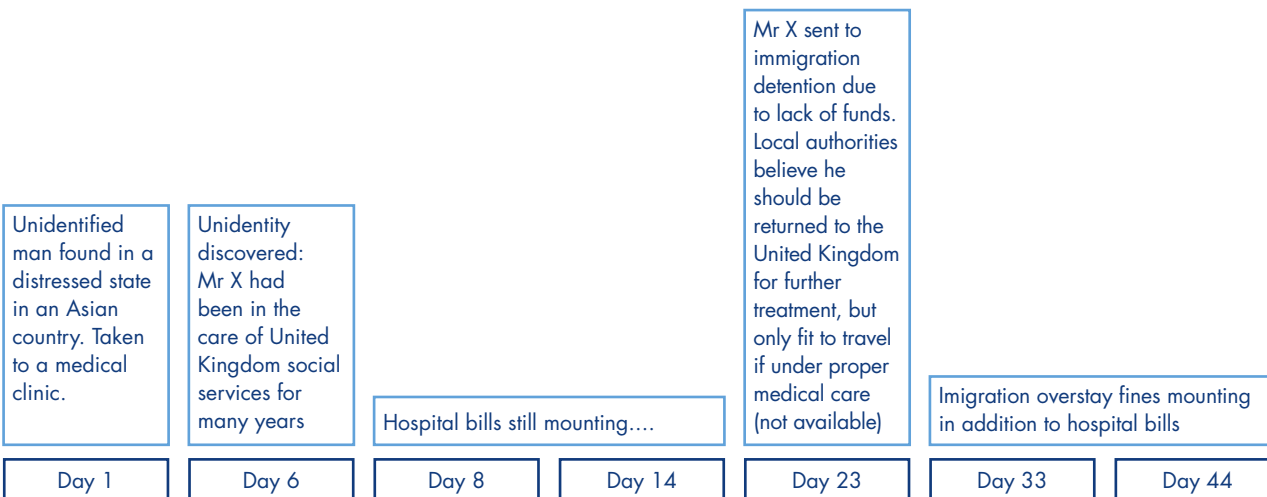
3.14 The FCO has also developed links with other government departments in the United Kingdom which may be involved in service provision, including social services and the police (Figure 2 in the Preface gives further examples). The FCO has made some progress in promoting a more joined-up government approach through initiatives such as the joint Forced Marriage Unit (Figure 19) and using qualified social work and police advisers. But it has been difficult to establish frameworks for co-ordination on other cases and there has been a lack of clarity regarding which department should take lead responsibility on issues such as medical evacuations and dealing with psychiatric cases. It may be especially difficult to persuade a Health Authority to take responsibility for a case if there is no recent United Kingdom address. Posts find dealing with psychiatric cases particularly awkward. Challenges include having sufficient counselling skills to interact with the ill person, obtaining informed consent for treatment, negotiation with host country and United Kingdom health authorities to admit the patient, and arranging transport back to the United Kingdom. Consular Directorate is currently establishing a work programme to help address this area. **Figure 22** illustrates the problems that can arise in medical or psychiatric repatriations.

The FCO seeks to balance the pressure to give financial loans to destitute British nationals, against the calls on public funds

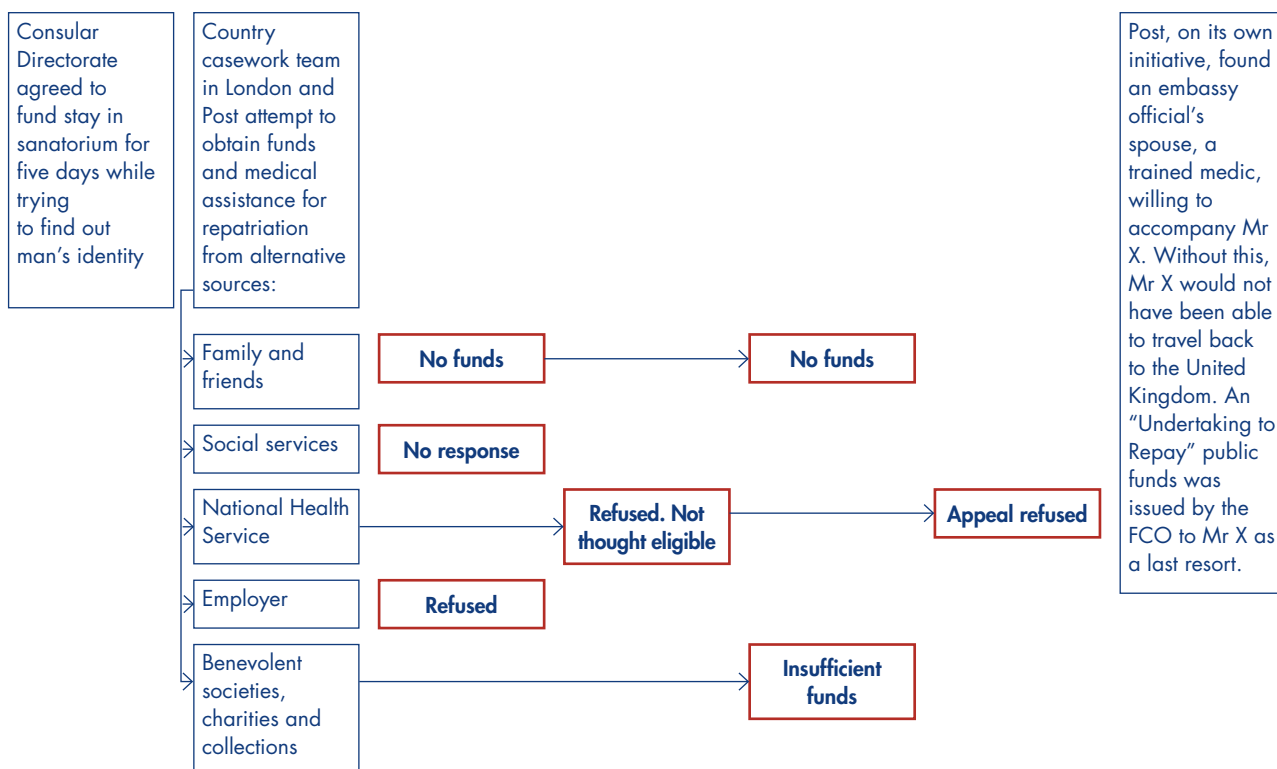
3.15 The FCO does not routinely provide financial assistance to British nationals; rather it advises that individuals should take out adequate insurance whilst overseas. However, consular staff do help individuals in transferring money from other sources when necessary, and can, in exceptional circumstances, offer a loan of up to £100 in cash directly from the Post against an Undertaking to Repay. Larger sums of money are loaned only as a last resort, where the consequences of not doing so may result in death or serious harm. In 2004-05, 430 Undertakings to Repay were issued worldwide, with a total value of £57,000, of which a quarter were for under £100, and only six were for over £1,000. Larger loans had to be authorised by Consular Directorate, which has correctly taken a robust line in limiting the number of such loans. Applying this policy has not been easy given the difficult circumstances surrounding some cases and increasing expectations by those seeking assistance. There is obviously a balance to be struck between providing assistance in cases of need and ensuring that public money is spent wisely. We found no examples where questionable loans had been agreed but, as **Figure 23 on page 38** illustrates, we did identify some cases where strict adherence to the policy had exacerbated the situation of the distressed British national, taken up more FCO staff time, or presented the United Kingdom in a poor light with local groups or authorities. This implies that a greater level of discretion for Posts in issuing loans once all other sources of funding have been exhausted would lead to savings in staff time and costs, although entitlement would need to be assessed against criteria regarding the vulnerability of the individual. Of course, the FCO seeks to recover the cost of all loans made in this way.

22 Problems with liaising with other government departments lead to complications in assistance cases: a case example from 2004

Situation

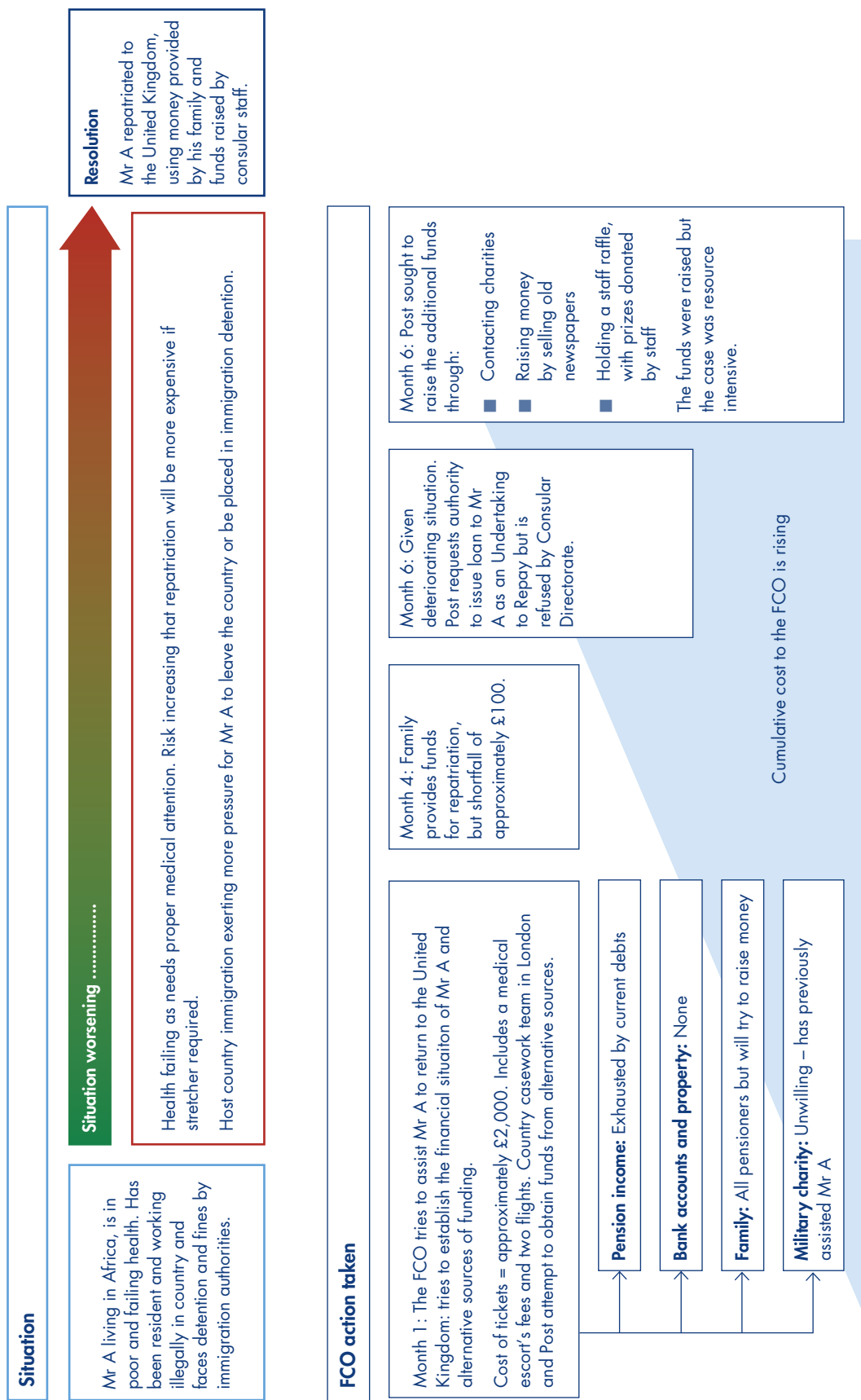


FCO action taken



Source: Case files and discussion with FCO staff

23 The FCO's strict adherence to its policy of seeking payment from other sources can be resource intensive: a case example from 2004



Source: Case files and discussions with consular staff

Since 2001 the FCO has been implementing a new casework management system but the project has so far had a mixed response

3.16 Our 1992 report on Consular Services⁷ highlighted the need for a more systematic and automated approach to analysing the outputs of consular work, to enable the FCO to better manage the use of resources and monitor quality of service. Whilst most data has subsequently still been collected manually, in 2001 the FCO acquired a computerised casework management system, called Compass, based on a system used by the Canadian Foreign Ministry since 1993 (**Figure 24**).

3.17 The Posts we visited considered that Compass was basically a good system with strong potential to assist them in their work. However, the full potential of Compass has yet to be realised. The system began to be rolled out in 2001 but progress has been slow, mainly due to a lack of

resources for training and installation. By September 2005 the system had been rolled out to some 70 per cent (160 Posts) of the expected total number of users. But many of these Posts were not yet making full use of the system for a combination of reasons:

- There is not yet a consistent understanding between Posts of the purpose, potential benefits and use of the system. Posts that have been “early adopters” have often lost enthusiasm as they find that other Posts not yet using Compass have been unable to exchange case data with them. Posts have been using different elements of the system to suit their needs;
- To save costs, training on the system has usually been given by telephone rather than on site, and is widely regarded by users to have been difficult to follow and the outcomes poor. There are no detailed guidance manuals to assist users, though there is a helpdesk in the United Kingdom; and

24 The Compass case management system could be a strong management tool

Main Facility

A shared record of consular assistance cases, consistent between Posts and casework officers in the United Kingdom, enabling each to have a consistent and up to date picture of developments on cases. Also provides background on customers with a previous history of calling on FCO services.

Messaging between the FCO in London and Posts overseas

Registration of British nationals overseas. This helps Posts to identify the location of nationals, and to reach them if necessary particularly during a crisis. In practice only a minority of nationals tend to register.

Record of lost and stolen passports

Resource and time management module

Crisis management (being procured)

Source: National Audit Office

Status as at June 2005

The core system function, available to all 160 Posts on Compass. Some of these Posts use it extensively, others only exceptionally. There is less incentive for Posts to use it to record cases when neighbouring Posts do not or cannot.

In practice, because users must be logged onto Compass to receive messages, most users tend to use normal e-mail instead, particularly for urgent messages

Used by a few Posts since 2003. Registration forms completed online on FCO websites by customers subsequently have to be re-entered directly into Compass by staff at Posts. Some Posts are also re-entering manual registration cards into Compass, but slow and intermittent system response can make this a lengthy and labour intensive process. An improved module for seamless online registration is being procured.

Lost and stolen passports often result in an assistance case, because the victim may also be out of funds. Lists, once filed, are automatically notified to the United Kingdom Passport Service.

Not activated. Developed and used extensively by the originators of the system in Canada to monitor use of Canadian consular resources, but time recording is not standard practice in the FCO.

A new module for use in recording data of missing persons in crisis situations

⁷ National Audit Office: Service to the Public: Foreign and Commonwealth Office Consular Services, HC 75, Parliamentary Session 1992-93.

- Some Posts do not find the system to be user-friendly. Key problems include an inability to freely cut and paste in text from laptops or other sources, and to gather full management information from it. We found “Compass enabled” Posts that were still using clerical processes to compile consular management information on their level of activity, for example the number of assistance cases. System performance and utilisation has been further compromised by periodic unavailability and slowness of the FCO’s underlying information technology infrastructure, for similar reasons to the difficulties experienced by passport processes (Part 2).

3.18 For all the reasons listed above, Compass is not sufficiently embedded into daily operations so many users are still bypassing, rather than using the system fully. A comparison between manual and electronic records usage for a selection of Posts which are on the Compass system indicates that usage rates vary widely between Posts. Taking this information on board, an upgraded version of Compass is planned to be rolled out to all Posts from January 2006. New features include better access and navigation, improved messaging, cutting and pasting of documents and printed birth and death certificates.

There are variations in the delivery of consular services around the world

3.19 The FCO’s approach to the provision of consular services in individual cases allows Posts to use a high degree of discretion, an approach which is valuable in recognising the importance of understanding specific in-country factors (e.g. the quality of local health care, prison standards and other services and the political situation in country, including its human rights record) and personal circumstances (such as the availability of family or friends). But there is basic guidance for staff in setting an appropriate level of assistance. A consular handbook is available to all staff working overseas and covers the fifteen most common types of assistance case, as well as consular confidentiality, customer care, media handling and management issues. There is also a desk guide giving advice on case handling for staff based in London. Staff found this guidance to be well targeted to their needs and accessible.

3.20 The FCO currently does not routinely collect management information such as the frequency of visiting prisoners or hospitalised British nationals. But our survey showed that the FCO’s pragmatic approach was reflected in a more significant level of involvement of consular staff in more difficult regions such as Africa and South America. We also found less readily explicable inconsistencies in the level of assistance provided. For example the FCO policy requires that British prisoners in countries with satisfactory prison conditions (European Economic Area countries, Switzerland, Norway, North America, and Australasia) should only be visited once after sentencing, and thereafter only if required. But **Figure 25** shows that even within Europe there are some significant differences in prison visiting practices, which cannot obviously be explained by local conditions or country circumstances. It also shows an even wider variation in hospital visiting practices, indicating that resources could still be better targeted to the cases with the most need. Staff at the Posts we visited felt still less certain on the best approach to hospitalised cases, which may reflect the fact that guidelines for some categories of assistance work such as hospital visiting are less prescriptive than for prison visiting. Current guidelines for hospital visiting state that “you should try to do as much as you can for the British national, within resource constraints” and “to pay particular attention to cases where individuals are vulnerable” but does not give more specific indications of the extent of assistance expected.

3.21 Discussions with staff at the Posts we visited indicate a number of common possible reasons for these variations in approach. These include staff quality and individual areas of interest, the lack of a tightly defined policy in some areas, different interpretations of consular guidance and competing demands on time. Another common reason was interest by the media or by Members of Parliament in a specific case which could induce staff to provide a higher level of assistance than normal.

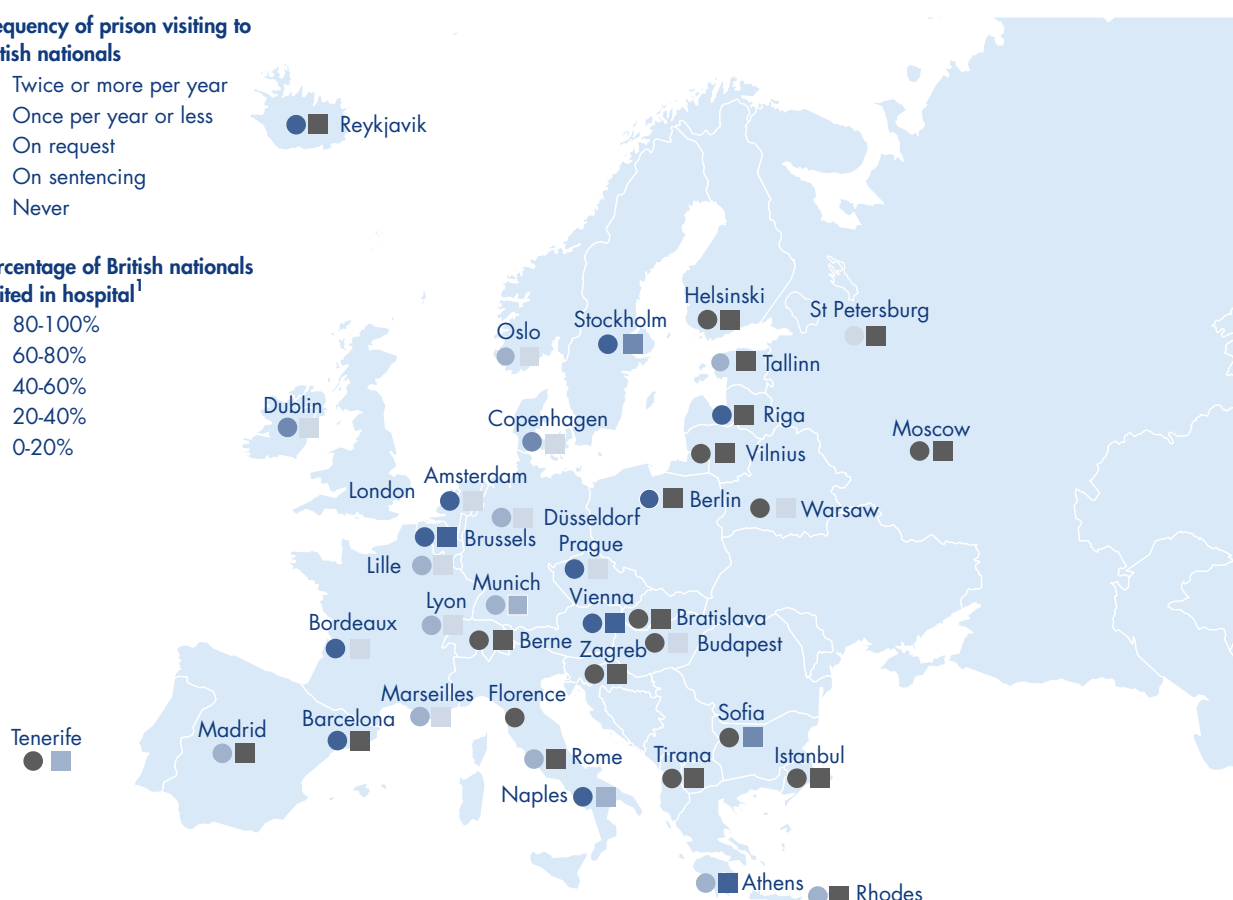
25 There are significant differences in prison and hospital visiting practices within Europe which cannot be easily explained

Frequency of prison visiting to British nationals

- Twice or more per year
- Once per year or less
- On request
- On sentencing
- Never

Percentage of British nationals visited in hospital¹

- 80-100%
- 60-80%
- 40-60%
- 20-40%
- 0-20%



Source: Responses from Posts to National Audit Office invitation to comment

NOTE

¹ Percentage of those notified to Post

Progress has been made in defining standards, but increasing demand for assistance and rising public expectations mean that existing levels of service may need revision to meet greatest priorities

3.22 The range of assistance work carried out by the FCO is similar to that provided by other countries (Appendix 3), although sometimes delivery mechanisms may differ. But changing patterns of travel behaviour, and increasing and

sometimes unrealistic or unreasonable public expectations are placing increasing pressure on consular services resources. There is the risk that actions taken in one case, particularly if it receives media coverage or political prominence, may set precedents for future standards of assistance that FCO would find unsustainable if generally applied. For example, the FCO has resisted pressure to incur translation costs for coroners' and other formal documents, and to attend court hearings, although it has made some exceptions to this.

3.23 The FCO has not yet made an assessment of the implications of increasing demand for the future level of service to be offered. However, it believes that increasing numbers of cases combined with increasing expectations over the level of assistance offered, will lead to a level of demand which the FCO will not be able to meet, given its existing network and resource constraints. It has taken a number of steps to address these pressures and to contain growth in the level of assistance provided (**Figure 26**). This includes greater publicity regarding the role of the FCO and the responsibilities of the individual,

and maintaining a robust but defensible line in setting limits on the services provided, and in tailoring assistance according to transparent criteria based on need. Dealing with the additional pressures is further complicated by the difficulties of reaching British nationals in unsafe areas, and the FCO’s duty of care for its staff many of whom have to deal with highly sensitive and potentially dangerous tasks and who are sometimes placed under great stress. Staff are also increasingly being held to account in legal proceedings for actions taken in the course of their duties.

26

The FCO is responding to rising demand and expectations for consular services in a number of ways

Method	Description
Stakeholder consultation: setting up external stakeholder boards	The FCO has set up a Consular Strategy Board; its membership is shown in Appendix 4. A number of subsidiary working groups have also been established to develop its approach, including on deaths overseas.
Defining standards: producing a Consular Strategy	Published after consultation with a range of stakeholders, it sets out to identify key issues and challenges, and to set out principles for the FCO to address. This provides a clear guide to Consular Directorate’s strategic thinking and vision for consular services.
Targeting resources to the areas of greatest need	For example, with the two-level prison visiting policy introduced in 2003 which distinguishes between those in Europe and those outside it (described in paragraph 3.19).
Publishing public information setting out service standards	The FCO currently has leaflet and website information which sets out what a consul can and cannot do. There is, however, still no definitive statement of the consular services it sets out to provide. The FCO is currently developing a more detailed consular guide, which will set out the services which the public can expect in different assistance cases. It believes this will present an opportunity to attempt to proactively manage expectations through greater clarity on the limits of assistance, as well as clear definition of individual responsibilities.
Championing the idea of a “ European Union Consular Space ”	<p>The principle behind the concept of a European Union consular space is that within the European Union British nationals should feel “less abroad” and more able to access local services directly within the European Union, enabling consular resources to be targeted to geographical areas where they are most needed. To some extent a European Union consular space already exists. Although the percentage of people who are travelling to the European Union is high, the FCO spends less than half the resources per traveller looking after Britons in this area compared with the rest of the world.</p> <p>But some barriers exist to developing a formal European Union consular space, including the differing standards within Europe of healthcare and detention facilities, Ministerial, media and public pressure; language barriers, and difficulties in making the arrangement reciprocal, with differing balances of travel in different countries. The FCO is taking forward this idea during Britain’s presidency of the European Union, and launched the proposal at a meeting of European Union Consular Directors in September 2005.</p>

Source: National Audit Office

PART FOUR

The FCO has improved its response to major emergencies overseas, and now needs to emphasise emergency planning and testing



4.1 In addition to its regular consular activities described in Part 3, the FCO must also prepare for, and respond effectively to, unexpected incidents with high casualty rates involving British nationals. This Part examines how the FCO has been developing its response to mass emergencies and evaluates whether it provides a good service to those affected by a crisis.

Learning from a series of major unplanned crises since 2001, the FCO has progressed towards fuller and more rapid emergency responses

4.2 The FCO has handled several high profile crises since 2001 with numerous British casualties (listed in **Figure 27 overleaf**) as well as other major incidents with fewer British victims, such as bombings in Turkey and Egypt, and coach crashes in Jordan and Austria. Recently, the FCO has responded to Hurricane Katrina in the United States.⁸ Learning from its experiences, the FCO has taken steps to improve its arrangements for crises involving British nationals, particularly after criticisms of its handling of the Bali bombings in 2002. Such criticisms centred on inadequate call handling for relatives in the United Kingdom, the length of time taken for the FCO to mobilise help on the ground, and the adequacy of

travel advice. In late 2002, a Crisis Management team was set up under a new Crisis Group within Consular Directorate. The Crisis Management team of seven has responsibility for planning, training, and co-ordinating emergency responses, working closely with other sections of the FCO.⁹ This new arrangement reflects the increasing prominence given to crisis management issues within the FCO and in government generally.

4.3 The FCO action taken in response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami, which was unprecedented in scale, has triggered further consideration of its approach to crisis management. **Figure 28 overleaf** lists the main lessons which we and the Consular Directorate have identified. These lessons focus mainly on how the FCO responded to the Tsunami. They do not capture the views of those affected by the disaster – the families of the bereaved or survivors. Due to concerns of inflicting further trauma on affected parties, the views of these groups have never been systematically sought by the FCO after a mass emergency response overseas. We have therefore commissioned the Zito Trust to seek the views of those affected. We will publish the results of this work together with recommendations to government arising from it, in a separate report in 2006. The FCO has also recently commissioned work to capture lessons learned from survivors for training purposes.

⁸ The FCO's response to Hurricane Katrina is not covered in this Report, as it occurred when the report was close to completion. However, we intend that a memorandum on the consular response to this and other major crises will be produced in time for any hearing by the Committee of Public Accounts on Consular Services.

⁹ The Counter-Terrorism Policy Department works closely with the crisis management team, co-chairing the FCO-wide steering group which focuses on the FCO's approach to crises.

27 The FCO has dealt with several major crises since 2001, involving many British nationals

Event	Date	Number of Britons believed to have died	Total number believed to have died	Number of countries afflicted
New York attacks	September 2001	67	2992	1
Bali Bombings	October 2002	28	202	1
Indian Ocean Tsunami	December 2004	141	c.300,000	13

Source: National Audit Office

The FCO is considered a world leader in developing its central emergency response

4.4 FCO consular staff at Posts have proved to be willing and dedicated in assisting British nationals in emergency situations, but sometimes they require additional help to mount an adequate response if there are numerous victims. The FCO has made major improvements to provide the required additional emergency response, particularly since 2002, including:

- **Setting up Rapid Deployment Teams**, who are available to travel from the United Kingdom to a country at short notice to assist a Post in dealing with an emergency. The FCO has three teams, each of 12 people, with one team on call at all times. Each team includes a press officer and a technical management officer as well as trained consular staff. The teams were called out ten times between May 2003 and September 2005 to incidents such as the Istanbul terror attack and the coach crash in Jordan. The scale of the deployment varied according to the specific needs of the event, the scale of the crisis, and the ability of the Post to manage the situation from within its own resources;
- **An emergency response centre**, providing immediate call handling for United Kingdom telephone enquiries in the event of an emergency. As back-up for larger scale incidents, the FCO has an agreement with the Metropolitan Police that all calls will be rerouted to police call centres. The FCO now has established set procedures for enquiries, including the use of a standardised police template to record details from worried relatives; and

- **Support from the crisis management team in Consular Directorate**, in co-ordinating each emergency response and providing advice. The team is also responsible for allocating emergency equipment to Posts.

These improvements mean that the FCO now has a reputation amongst other countries' foreign ministries as world leaders in consular crisis management. It has started to speak at international conferences, and in April 2005, it held its first international training exercises in crisis management for European Union member and candidate states. The FCO plans to develop its emergency response further through the improvements mentioned at Figure 28.

The FCO is working towards greater co-operation with others

4.5 One of the key factors which the Tsunami experience re-emphasised is the importance of a coherent government-wide response to emergencies overseas. The FCO takes lead responsibility in smaller scale crises, but there has in the past been a lack of a well defined trigger point for declaring a major crisis. Such a trigger point is essential in establishing lead responsibility for co-ordinating an overall response and must be underpinned by clear criteria to establish, for different situations, the roles and responsibilities of each government department, together with spending authorities, to ensure that funds can be released quickly for emergency responses. The Cabinet Office is currently reviewing the mechanisms for co-ordinating government handling of major events in the United Kingdom and there needs to be consistency between the government's response to emergencies occurring, whether in the United Kingdom or abroad.

28 Lessons have been learned from the Indian Ocean Tsunami

On 26 December 2004 an earthquake measuring 9.3 on the Richter scale triggered a tsunami (a large sea wave) that struck the coasts of 13 countries, causing great devastation and loss of life. Some 300,000 people died, principally in Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand. An estimated 141 Britons are now known or believed to have died; thousands more were evacuated from the area. The FCO had already improved its crisis management capability following recent crises. But further lessons have been learned from the response to the tsunami; far and away the largest consular challenge that the FCO has faced in living memory. The full report is available on the NAO website at <http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/index.htm>.

Lesson learned	Experience	Commentary and response
Emergency response		
Need for improved call handling.	Police call handling lines were not able to cope with the volume of calls. They received up to 11,000 calls per hour at the height of the crisis. Some operators were not sufficiently trained which resulted in poor information collected.	The FCO needs to increase the capacity and quality of responses to telephone enquiries through development of an appropriate Service Level Agreement with the Police. It has made use of new improved Police software systems to improve their capacity to respond to calls, which gives the FCO ability to access up to 650 Police call handlers across the country. This system was successfully used after the bomb attacks in Egypt in July 2005. The FCO could also consider agreements with other providers to provide further reserve capacity. Work on this area was already underway prior to the tsunami.
Strengthening of FCO rapid deployment capability, in numbers and skills.	A Rapid Deployment Team from London arrived in Sri Lanka very quickly, but the scale of this crisis required still greater resources over a sustained period. It would have been helpful if another Rapid Deployment Team had been available to assist in Thailand. Deploying staff to the worst affected areas is difficult with limited information available. Early deployment decisions meant that staff in Thailand were particularly stretched in trying to reach the worst affected areas such as Khao Lak.	<p>The FCO is examining the scope for establishing regional Rapid Deployment Teams and for more teams in London, and arrangements are underway for a trial regional team in Hong Kong, to ensure that expert help can arrive more quickly in distant areas. Initial costs are £35,000 with estimated annual costs of £42,000 for training and on call allowances. Also better communications equipment for teams is required.</p> <p>The FCO will use more specialists in Rapid Deployment Teams including medics, police officers, and non-governmental organisation volunteers. For example, in its response to the Egypt bombings it used International SOS and the British Red Cross. The Dutch deploy trained psychologists in their emergency response, and the Australians have Victim Identification specialists. The Service Level Agreement with the Police service will firm up arrangements for victim identification specialists to deploy in each emergency response.</p> <p>The FCO needs better guidance on the roles and responsibilities of Rapid Deployment Teams, and planning for how these are to integrate with in-country consular teams. This is to counter previous problems experienced in establishing good working arrangements between Post staff and Rapid Deployment Teams.</p>
Co-operation with others		
Major crises require a quick cross-government response, including a clear trigger point for declaring an emergency.	The Cabinet Office was responsible for co-ordinating the liaison between the FCO and other government departments, where a joined-up response was necessary.	The Cabinet Office is currently reviewing the mechanisms in place for coordinating government handling of major civil emergencies in the United Kingdom. It should ensure that emergencies abroad involving large numbers of British nationals are handled as far as possible through the same mechanisms. Natural and other non-terrorist disasters overseas would benefit from a consistent approach with that for terrorist incidents.
Service Level Agreements with key government partners such as the Police, to ensure access to appropriate capacity.	At the time of the crisis, the FCO and the Police were in the process of setting up a Service Level Agreement on call handling. In responding in country, some minor differences arose due to a lack of framework to define the relationship.	The crisis highlighted that clear roles are essential to maximise efficiency cross-government. The crisis highlighted the need for clearer guidelines for the FCO/Police co-operation, including arrangements for the quick appointment of experienced Family Liaison Officers. A Service Level Agreement is currently being drafted. Other issues included the need for improved casualty reporting, including exploration of web-based registration for missing persons. With more clearly defined roles, other departments such as Defence might have been able to play a larger role in assisting the overseas effort. Government departments have recognised the need for aftercare for tsunami victims and their families, and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport took this on in May 2005.

28 Lessons have been learned from the Indian Ocean Tsunami *(continued)*

Lesson learned	Experience	Commentary and response
Co-operation with others (continued)		
		There should also be clear funding agreements in place between departments. Post-tsunami, the current position is that the FCO's Emergency and Disaster Reserve has been exhausted and Treasury will need to consider how it funds emergency work.
Importance of working with a wider range of organisations (British Red Cross, tour operators).	The British Red Cross played an important support role in the crisis, including assisting people on return to the United Kingdom, and in sending doctors and other workers to the scene.	The FCO should involve the British Red Cross (and, possibly, other voluntary organisations) in its future crisis planning, and response and aftercare. This has now included the use of British Red Cross specialists in the makeup of Rapid Deployment Teams.
Volunteers can be vital to achieving an effective early response.	Volunteers manned phone lines, visited nationals in hospitals and assisted travellers at airports.	FCO staff in Thailand and in Sri Lanka told us that without the efforts of the volunteers the British response would have been seriously compromised. There were, however, no networks in place for matching the skills of volunteers with the tasks available. Managing the volunteers was therefore a significant challenge for the FCO.
There have been some good examples of United Kingdom staff achieving results through good international co-operation.	Despite the scale of the crisis, consular co-ordination between European Union member states was effective. It included daily conference calls between European Union missions, and shared chartered aircraft.	The FCO are planning to hold regular European Union-wide meetings to share contingency planning and best practice, including live exercises. The first of these took place in London in April 2005.
Other		
Clear criteria for providing support to victims and families, (e.g. government flights) to ensure clarity from the outset.	The assistance package given to tsunami victims and their families was not announced until 29th December.	The assistance package to British tsunami assistance is similar to that already available to all victims of terrorist incidents. But there were no predefined criteria for such support in non-terrorist incidents and it would improve the speed and clarity of the government's service to establish such criteria in advance of emergencies.
Better quality/more readily useable Emergency plans.	Posts reported making little use of their emergency plans during the crisis.	Attention is focusing on improvements to emergency plans at Posts to ensure better co-operation with Rapid Deployment Teams, European Union partners and local volunteers, and arrangements for rotation of staff.

Source: National Audit Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office

4.6 Co-operation with the host country government is also crucial to providing an efficient emergency response. There are several examples of emergency responses where British officials have been able to support the host country government through provision of medical or victim identification experts. But the FCO's intervention can also be subject to constraints imposed by host country governments. In addition to central government departments and the host country government, many other public agencies and voluntary organisations play a role in responding to crisis situations abroad. For example, social services and health authorities may have to receive victims as they return to the United Kingdom, and the British Red Cross provide specialist counselling. The Police provide a range of support, including supplying family liaison officers where appropriate, and assisting with victim identification overseas. Recognising these links, the FCO is developing a set of more clearly defined frameworks with key partners to provide a reliable end-to-end service to affected British nationals and ensure that the skills of other agencies are fully exploited.

The FCO's definition of the package of support it provides in mass incidents has evolved

4.7 After the Bali bombings in 2002, the FCO for the first time provided direct financial and logistical assistance to families of victims which was similar to that provided to families by the American Red Cross after the New York terrorist attack of 2001. In September 2003, Ministers announced an assistance plan for any further victims of terrorist attacks. **Figure 29** provides the details of the plan, which offers a more generous level of support than the standard consular service provided to individual British nationals. In practice the distinction between the assistance provided for terrorist incidents and for natural disasters was found to be untenable in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami and, on 29 December 2004, the government announced a similar assistance package to assist tsunami victims and their families. The three day gap in establishing the assistance package led to uncertainty over what assistance consular staff could provide and the level of expenses which could be incurred in, for example, chartering planes to evacuate British nationals. This uncertainty led to criticism in the media and drew adverse comparisons with some other foreign governments. The FCO wishes to retain the ability to review which support mechanisms are appropriate after each and every mass incident, rather than automatically applying a standard package of assistance.

29 Current contents of the assistance plan for victims of acts of terrorism and their families

The assistance package provided to victims of terrorism and their families was available to those whose expenses were not covered by travel insurance.

For victims:

- immediate medical expenses for those injured; including if necessary evacuation to the United Kingdom;
- return luggage costs of those killed or injured; and
- a £600 contribution to the cost of counselling for victims in the United Kingdom, if this is not immediately available through the National Health Service.

For the families of victims:

- repatriation of bodies or mortal remains;
- business class travel to the site of the incident for two family members, including local travel and travel insurance;
- up to five nights' four-star accommodation at the site of the incident;
- issuing death certificates; and
- assistance with memorials.

Source: FCO assistance plan

The FCO can do more to increase its preparedness for crises, and it is increasing its focus on this area

4.8 A major responsibility of the consular crisis management team is to prepare FCO staff, at home and overseas, to respond to crises around the world. In addition to co-ordinating the direct emergency response provided from Consular Directorate (paragraph 4.4), the team promotes good practice and aims to equip staff overseas with sufficient training and comprehensive and practical emergency plans.

4.9 In 2004-05, the crisis management team spoke at 35 training courses and seminars which included not just consular officers but other diplomats at Posts, including Honorary Consuls and Heads of Missions who will normally lead crisis responses. Consular Directorate expect these senior staff to be accountable for the crisis management capability of their Posts and for them to encourage all their non-consular staff to obtain basic training, to enable them to support consular staff in crisis situations.

4.10 All Posts have been required to prepare emergency plans for many years, but in 2004 Posts were asked to overhaul these, based on new guidance provided by the FCO crisis team. 98 per cent of Posts who responded to our survey have an emergency plan although the plans we reviewed revealed differences in the detail, content and level of staff involvement in preparing the plan. Two common weaknesses were a lack of detailed planning of individual roles and responsibilities, particularly for non-consular staff, and failure to consider what assistance may be available from other nearby Posts. Emergency planning is being given greater priority and a third of the Posts who responded to our survey said that they had revised their emergency plans within the past three months. But Posts which had recently used their emergency plans reported that some were unwieldy and difficult to use.

4.11 The Crisis Management team has an advisory role in reviewing Post emergency plans and making recommendations for improvement, but progress to date has been limited. Only 30 per cent (66 out of 223) of Posts submitted their plans by the original deadline of July 2004, a figure which rose to 62 per cent (138 Posts) by the revised deadline of April 2005. By April 2005, the crisis management team had given feedback to only 41 of the Posts which had submitted plans, with some Posts waiting eight months for a reply. The delays reflect the resources committed by the team to recent high profile crises, principally the tsunami, and to overstretch within the crisis management team. Resource increases led to replies being given to a total of 114 Posts by September 2005. The FCO did not have a robust system for prioritising the review process to focus limited resources on higher risk Posts, with feedback having first been given to those who have planned to test their plans or where particular concerns were raised. For example, of the 41 responses given by

April, only 15 Posts were categorised by the FCO as being at high risk of civil unrest, and potentially high risk Posts such as Islamabad and Lagos had not yet had received responses. Other considerations such as the number of travellers and expatriates are also important in prioritising. The Crisis Management team has recently been working to develop an elementary system of prioritisation.

4.12 Posts are also encouraged to test their emergency plans at least once a year using both table-top exercises (staff are given a scenario and discuss the most appropriate roles and responsibilities of each person) and “live” exercises (using simulated incident scenes). The FCO does not systematically record information about which Posts have to-date tested their plans, but our survey indicated that so far only one third of the Posts we consulted had tested their plans, although most others intended to do so. Several Posts stated that they were waiting for feedback from the Crisis Management team on their draft plan before expending resources on testing it. The tests which have been carried out have proved valuable with, for example, Stockholm making major changes to its plan in the light of its test. Common problems revealed by tests include faulty communications, absences of key staff and difficulty in gaining access to affected areas. Resource constraints mean that the Crisis Management team involvement in the tests to date has been limited to general guidance, several regional workshops and participation in a small number of individual Post events. The Crisis Management team intends to recruit someone to focus on testing, and Posts commented to us that greater involvement would be welcome in devising test scenarios and observing and feeding back lessons learned, both to the specific Post and more widely. The current trial of creating regional crisis specialists through regional Rapid Deployment Teams, if adopted more widely, may assist with emergency planning and training exercises.

PART FIVE

The FCO needs better tools to help it manage such a dispersed and complex business



5.1 With over 200 Posts of varying sizes around the world, the FCO must ensure that each has adequate resources and facilities. Effective monitoring of a worldwide operation is also challenging. This Part examines how the FCO manages such a dispersed operation and how it seeks to provide Posts with the support and resources they need to operate an efficient and high quality service.

Some aspects of the staffing and funding systems can make it difficult to provide an efficient service

It is difficult to achieve sufficient flexibility in staffing

5.2 Staff undertaking consular work overseas comprises two-thirds locally engaged staff and one third United Kingdom-based career diplomats on postings which last two to three years on average (the Preface provides more detail on staffing arrangements). Most of the Posts we consulted believed that overall staffing levels were adequate, but a quarter considered that they lacked the flexibility to deal with the unpredictable nature of consular work whereby staff need to be highly responsive with major cases such as suspicious deaths or kidnappings, causing a sudden substantial increase in consular workload. The lack of flexibility reflects the fact that most consular sections are small, with only a quarter having staffing equivalent to more than three man years and a third equivalent to less than one man year. Consular staff often must also balance consular work with other responsibilities in entry clearance or management sections.

5.3 Consular Directorate has limited flexibility to provide Posts with additional staff to cover busy periods and prioritises between the demands of different Posts according to the business case presented, and the availability of staff to deploy. In addition, internal efficiency savings have led to a reduction in the number of centrally provided “floaters”, leaving many Posts without cover for planned leave absences. To help address these issues, Posts are being encouraged to make more use of locally engaged staff, and the first secondments from the United Kingdom Passport Service have been organised to start in September 2005.

The funding constraints impact on the quality of service provided

5.4 In line with longstanding government requirements, the FCO is required to recover the full cost of its services. The issue of passports is funded through passport fees (paragraph 2.10), whilst assistance work is funded through a consular premium of £9.65, levied on all passports wherever they are issued. Such funding arrangements are unusual in international terms with most countries funding their assistance services through direct taxation. (see Appendix 3). Like nearly all other nations, the United Kingdom does not currently attempt to recover indirect costs such as staff time from assisted nationals, many of whom have been largely responsible for their own difficulties. Only the Dutch foreign ministry has done this on occasion. The FCO does of course attempt to recover the costs of loans made to assisted nationals for example, for the costs of a repatriation, but this is not always easy to enforce.

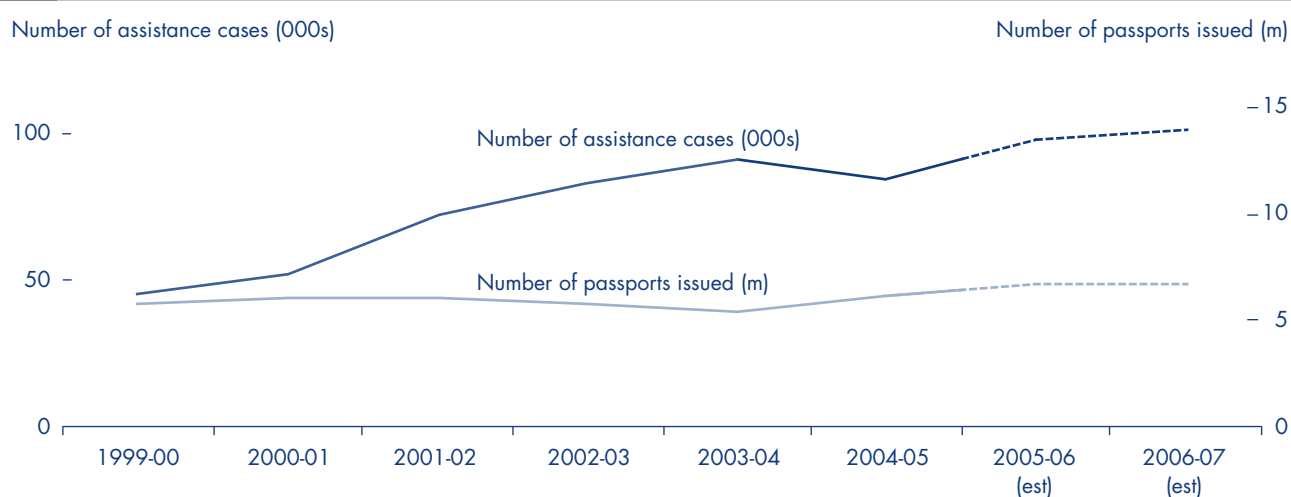
5.5 Dependence on a premium has had some advantages. Over the years it has given the FCO the assurance that its income for assistance work will at least rise in line with the number of Britons obtaining passports. This increase has helped it to broaden the range of services that it offers, and to assist many more customers. Conversely, uncertainty over the number of passports that will be issued each year puts the FCO at risk of shortfalls in annual income. Arrangements are being considered with Treasury to set reasonable expectations of fee income, which would reduce this uncertainty.

5.6 In the longer term, consular services are vulnerable to changes in travel patterns that increase demand for assistance. It is to be expected that more Britons will continue to travel further afield, to more alien environments and increasingly independently, rather than in packages and with tour operators. Increasing numbers, often elderly, are living abroad, rather than just taking short holidays. In contrast the number of passports issued is forecast to remain relatively static (**Figure 30**). Since the amount of the consular premium has also remained fairly static, pressure is predicted to increase on funding.

5.7 For capital expenditure on information technology and accommodation projects, Consular Directorate bids for a share of the FCO's available capital funds. Our visits to Posts indicated that capital had been made available to meet the most urgent accommodation needs. But there is also evidence that lack of capital investment had been one of the factors that has hindered the effective roll-out of new information technology systems like Compass (Part 3).

5.8 Poor central management information on income and costs, including overheads, has affected the ability of Consular Directorate to better manage its budget. The FCO does not operate a time recording system for its staff and time spent on each element of consular work therefore has to be estimated. In early 2005 Consular Directorate identified through time allocation returns that previous assumptions had overestimated the time being spent on assistance work, and underestimated that on passports. In 2004-05 there was an underspend against premium income, currently estimated at £5 million, and a deficit against passports. Ministers and HM Treasury have agreed to significant passport fee increases in the light of both this overspend and the increased costs associated with issuing biometric passports. The underspend of the consular premium on assistance work has, until this financial year, heightened constraints in resources available. During

30 Pressure is predicted to increase on funding as the growth in assistance cases outstrips increases in demand for passports



Source: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

NOTES

1 The value of the consular premium has remained at £9.65 per passport issued since 2003-04, including 69 pence to maintain an emergency disaster reserve. Prior to the introduction of the premium in 2002-03 the level of funding for assistance work was broadly equivalent to £9 per passport in 1999-2000, so funding per passport issued has been broadly unchanged for several years.

2 In 2004-05 Consular Directorate sought to provide clearer guidance for Posts regarding the classification of cases as consular enquiries or as consular assistance cases. This explains the apparent decline in assistance cases in 2004-05.

our work we noted resource constraints in areas such as information technology support, training, and a general concern to try to “manage down” public expectations. In 2005-06 the FCO has budgeted to increase spending on consular assistance work to £52 million, only £1 million less than the estimated value of the consular premium. This increase has been used mainly to boost the number of staff in the network providing the assistance service.

There is scope to strengthen central monitoring and the collection of business information

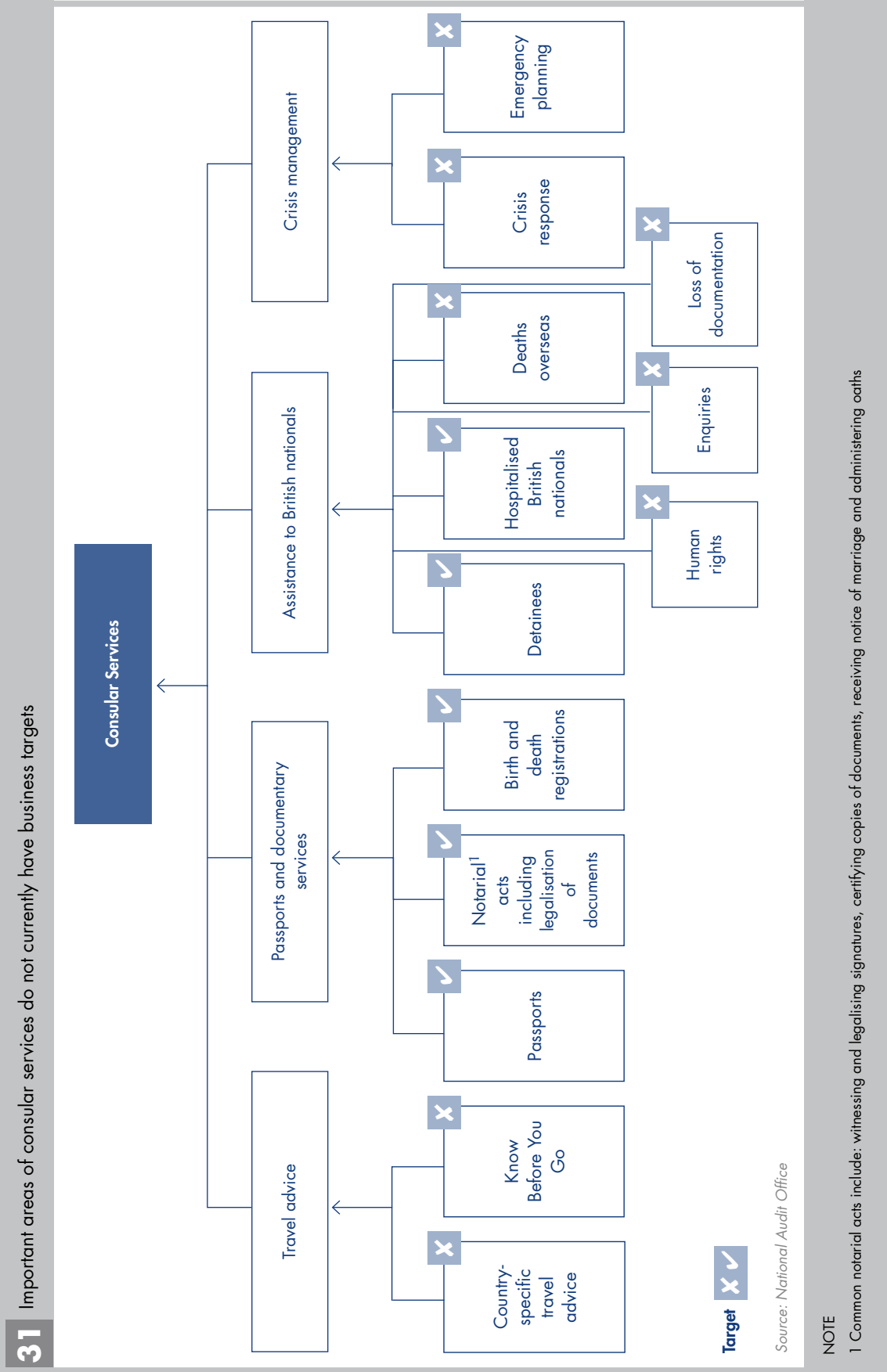
5.9 The FCO’s performance information has historically centred on the six key performance indicators (listed in Appendix 5), which underpin the overall Public Service Agreement target to provide an effective and efficient service. All of these underlying targets focus on timeliness rather than the standards or the quality of the service provided. To address this weakness a seventh target on customer satisfaction is being introduced in 2005-06. However, the underlying targets still do not reflect all aspects of the business, with key aspects of consular work currently having no targets (**Figure 31 overleaf**). Consular Directorate is continuing to consider improvements in the measurement of these services.

5.10 Many Posts do not have robust systems in place to collect reliable performance information against existing targets. For example, the GenIE system is not currently configured to report the time taken to process passports and, whilst some Posts kept manual logs, at others we visited, this information was not recorded at all. The FCO intends that the new biometric system will measure the time taken to issue passports. There are similar problems with reporting against assistance targets. Despite guidance from the FCO, we observed disparities between Posts in what specific actions (e.g. telephone call, letter written, face-to-face contact) counted towards the target. The FCO recognises the problems and reviews the information received from Posts, but this can only identify obvious mistakes and omissions.

5.11 The lack of robust management information also impacts on the ability of the Consular Directorate to plan and allocate resources. For example, there is no recording of the time spent on different activities or types of consular cases, as the FCO does not consider that any resulting benefits to resource planning would justify the additional costs. The Compass casework system has the potential to be a stronger monitoring and resource management tool for assistance work, but its capability has been hamstrung by the lack of a management information reporting facility within the software and the incomplete information recorded on it. The FCO has commissioned its information technology section to carry out a study of available management information reporting tools to improve this.

Having reviewed its United Kingdom operation, Consular Directorate has the opportunity to focus on service delivery overseas

5.12 The FCO has recently reviewed the major sections of Consular Directorate, and introduced a number of changes to its structure and staffing to streamline and improve the management of consular operations. Between September 2003 and September 2005, it also conducted reviews of consular operations at 46 overseas Posts, primarily in response to staffing concerns or increased workloads, and identified a number of useful lessons to improve Post practices and to provide information on the adequacy of staffing levels. The establishment of a larger consular review team of 2-3 full-time equivalent staff from April 2005 creates opportunities for the Consular Directorate to further expand the scope of reviews and increase the breadth and depth of coverage to provide better monitoring information on a range of topics, including the appropriateness and consistency of assistance, and the extent of use made of Compass, where applicable, to improve management of the business.



Customer satisfaction measures need extensive improvement

5.13 The FCO deals with three and a half million approaches from the public each year through its consular work at Posts overseas, including assistance cases, passport applications and enquiries. But Consular Directorate has until now had limited information on customer satisfaction. Posts are in theory required to carry out annual customer satisfaction surveys requesting feedback on factors, such as the quality of information provided, waiting times, staff courtesy, and the adequacy of the waiting area. In 2004-05, only 35 per cent of Posts issued questionnaires and these were only given to those calling at the Posts in person and hence tended to be biased towards the routine and less sensitive documentary services such as legalisation, passport issuing and birth registrations. The detailed data gathered is not centrally collated but, overall, the surveys suggested that 96 per cent of customers were satisfied with the level of service received. At the Posts we visited, the use made of the results of the surveys varied but included examples of good practice such as in Islamabad where full use was made of the responses to improve the service provided.

5.14 From 2005-06, the FCO has agreed with HM Treasury a new underlying Public Service Agreement target for customer satisfaction. The target will be measured using a sample of the year's casework, including more complex and sensitive assistance cases. This survey should constitute a significant source of feedback to the FCO on the quality of its consular service.

5.15 Correspondence and complaints could provide another, albeit subjective, way to monitor the quality of service provided at Posts and in London. But the FCO does not currently have a robust system for collating, analysing or sharing the feedback received in this way, either at Consular Directorate or at Posts.

APPENDIX 1

Detailed recommendations and desired outcomes

Taken as a whole the recommendations in this report are currently expected to be broadly cost neutral, within one per cent of existing expenditure on consular work. However the FCO continues its work to define the resources that will be required to reshape its passport operation as biometrics are implemented.

Recommendation	Detailed actions	Outcomes
Influencing and changing behaviours of travellers		
1. There is scope to better understand the root causes of assistance cases, and to target hard hitting messages at traveller groups which do not prepare adequately, or those which have historically required more consular assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a Undertake structured analyses of previous assistance cases, building on other on-going research, to better identify key risk traveller groups which are less likely to access and digest the full text of existing, extensive travel advice; b Increase the use of trend analysis, international passenger surveys and future modelling techniques to forecast the likely future demand for assistance; c Ensure that all country travel advice pages include in their summaries advice on the most common causes of assistance cases in that country; and d Increase the range of media sources used to disseminate messages, targeting identified high risk sectors – for example using features on television travel programmes, student magazines and tabloid newspaper travel sections – and make wider use of illustrative personal case histories to convey consequences of being under-prepared. 	<p>Increasing public awareness: Use of hard hitting messages, using wider media and targeting the messages towards key risk areas should lead to a greater awareness of risks and better behaviour by Britons when overseas. Ultimately aimed at achieving reductions in the number of assistance cases (proportional to the number of trips abroad).</p>
2. In developing a consular customer guide for assistance work, the FCO should consider the key criteria it should use to establish levels of assistance which are appropriate for the country and individual circumstance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a The consular guide should make clear: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the boundaries of consular activity and the services FCO will never offer; ■ the minimum service FCO will try to provide in all countries; ■ the minimum level of support which the public can expect to receive in all cases, whether for terrorist atrocities, or other murders overseas or other circumstances. This may result in the need for flexible resourcing to provide short term assistance to Posts during more exacting cases; ■ the principles, such as the vulnerability of individuals, which will be considered when assessing whether to provide an enhanced level of assistance for particular cases. b The guide should be underpinned by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ a central set of criteria on risks and appropriate assistance levels, to assist Posts in setting – and justifying if challenged – an appropriate level of assistance; ■ increased emphasis on sharing the burden of consular services by working closely with other nations, services, including pooling of staff resources and accommodation, and driving forward ideas such as the European Union consular space. 	<p>Increasing public awareness: A clear consular guide should increase public awareness regarding their own responsibilities, and will be a tool for managing the expectations of others.</p> <p>More consistent quality of service/Targeting of resources to need: A clearer framework for providing assistance should also assist Posts in providing a level of service which is targeted to local circumstances, but which is defensible and consistent.</p> <p>More efficient delivery: Increased international co-operation could reduce time spent by the FCO on consular cases, or make finite resources go further.</p>

Recommendation	Detailed actions	Outcomes
Moving towards a more consistent frontline service to individuals		
3. Both increasing the breadth and depth of coverage of the Post review system, and collecting fuller management information, would assist the FCO in ensuring that Posts provide a consistent level of service, appropriate for the country circumstance.	<p>a Post reviews should be extended to cover the following areas in more depth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the appropriateness and consistency of the level of assistance provided; ■ the accuracy of performance and management information and performance against targets; ■ customer care, including enquiry handling, complaints, and facilities; ■ the use made of the Compass assistance software tool; ■ opportunities to work with other embassies to routinely provide joint information or consular assistance in remote locations, as well as co-operation in crisis situations; and ■ the quality of decisions being taken on the handling of applications for passports. <p>b Following reviews, the team should maximise impact by encouraging Posts to agree action plans linked to specific and measurable achievements, and by developing more formal mechanisms to disseminate lessons learned.</p> <p>c Post reviews and subsequent management action could be better informed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ more rigorous collection and analysis of customer satisfaction measures, including more comprehensive analysis of complaints and other correspondence ■ better methods of reviewing and comparing workload, including the reassessment of the potential for using a basic method of time recording, particularly for assistance cases, using the capabilities of Compass. 	<p>Better, more consistent quality of service: A strengthened review function and better management information would help the FCO to identify instances where variations in service between Posts may need further investigation or resolution.</p>

Recommendation	Detailed actions	Outcomes
Moving towards a more consistent frontline service to individuals continued		
4. The FCO should continue to work on ensuring that crisis management and emergency planning at Posts is robust, and should complete its action plan arising from the lessons learned from the Indian Ocean tsunami.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a Continue to refine a risk-based assessment to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ prioritise feedback to Posts on the quality of their crisis management plans according to key factors such as the number of British visitors and expatriates, the likelihood of civil unrest, natural disasters and terrorist activity. ■ agree with Posts the frequency with which they should test crisis plans. b Experience shows that understandably, the need to respond to successive crises has detracted from progress in reviewing emergency plans. The FCO should review the level of its staffing commitment to these areas to ensure that crisis planning is given sufficient attention, and maintains the momentum towards completion by the date the FCO has set itself of October 2005 c United Kingdom based and overseas senior management should regularly review achievement against agreed dates for submitting and testing emergency plans and respond to any failures to comply. d The FCO should ensure that the crisis planning and training is included in the objectives of senior officials at Post, against which their performance is assessed e The FCO should establish a system for ongoing review and enhancement of emergency planning and testing, including establishing baselines from which to monitor improvements in quality. f Expanding and extending the role of Rapid Deployment Teams to promote faster responses. Giving regional rapid deployment teams such as that being developed in Hong Kong for South East Asia the responsibility for providing a regional source of crisis management expertise to assist Posts in testing their plans. 	<p>Better, more consistent quality of service: Developed, robust emergency plans across the world should allow quicker and more organised consular responses by Posts to major emergencies, drawing on a wide range of skills. Extending the role of Rapid Deployment teams should lead to quicker responses on the ground following a crisis.</p>
5. The FCO should seek to maximise the benefits from improving existing, and forging new, working partnerships with others to provide a more effective end-to-end service to British nationals, in crisis and non-crisis situations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a Establish formal liaison points, guidance and practical arrangements with other United Kingdom government departments to provide a co-ordinated government service to United Kingdom citizens seeking initial assistance from consular staff. This should include ensuring that responsibility for British citizens returning to the United Kingdom passes smoothly to relevant Home departments b Implement more flexible arrangements for allowing Posts to use some discretion in issuing loans to individuals as Undertakings to Repay once all other sources of funding have been explored, to reduce costs and to avoid unnecessary deterioration in the individual's circumstances. c Develop arrangements with United Kingdom based non-governmental partners who can provide additional services and support to those seeking routine consular assistance and in times of major crisis. d For significant emergency situations, a clear trigger point should be established to ensure a co-ordinated cross-government response, including clear understanding of respective managerial and budgetary responsibilities by all stakeholders. e Ensure that Post crisis plans include consideration of the scope for and benefits of co-operation with others such as local staff and volunteers in emergency situations. 	<p>Better, more consistent quality of service: Enhanced working with others should improve the end to end service provided to British nationals, and reduce the risk that cases might "fall between the cracks".</p> <p>More efficient delivery of services: Better joint working would save FCO time spent on promoting action by other bodies on individual cases and would allow the FCO to pass more specialised roles to other bodies.</p>

Recommendation	Detailed actions	Outcomes
Moving towards a more consistent frontline service to individuals continued		
6. The FCO has made good progress in enhancing the professionalism of its consular staff but still needs to use training and innovative approaches to further improve the quality of its service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a Consider scope for extending the range of career opportunities in consular work to encourage high quality staff to embed consular skills into their portfolios, and to engage in consular work at different points throughout their careers; b Developing a better mix of experience of consular staff, including widening opportunities for less experienced London-based casework officers to do consular work overseas in addition to familiarisation visits; c Pilot a scheme to evaluate the costs and benefits of introducing a United Kingdom based system for “out of normal hours” assistance, similar to that used by the Canadian foreign ministry; d Make attendance at core consular training courses mandatory for all locally engaged consular staff (including Honorary Consuls), and duty officers; e Increase the number of regional training events and make specific provision in these to share lessons between Posts. 	Better, more consistent quality of service: Improved training and opportunities would allow continued improvement in the professionalism and expertise of consular staff, contributing to a more consistent quality of service to customers.
7. Passport applicants overseas should be given greater choice to obtain their passports from the United Kingdom or from the FCO, subject to meeting basic security requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a Agree with the United Kingdom Passport Service that overseas citizens should be able to obtain their passports directly from the United Kingdom Passport Service if they desire, with immediate effect; where they have travelled back to the United Kingdom, can attend any necessary interviews there and can provide a verifiable address. The United Kingdom Passport Service believes that this can be made to work, particularly for renewals, given adequate arrangements to ensure applicants’ eligibility and identity. b Align Consular and United Kingdom Passport Service security checking and quality assurance processes for the issue of passports. c Regularly review the impact of the new arrangements on speed and security of passport issuing, and particularly on the level of demand for passports to be issued overseas. The impact of such changes will provide valuable input into a more fundamental decisions regarding the future of issuing passports overseas (see recommendation 8). 	<p>Better quality of service: Latitude for Britons overseas to obtain a lower cost though slower service from the United Kingdom, if that is what they require. This should result in greater choice between incurring additional time or additional cost.</p> <p>More efficient delivery of services: Possible releasing of staff time which can be spent on assistance cases, which have previously been overstretched.</p>
Equipping consular services meet emerging change		
8. Given the radical changes required for the passport operation, the FCO should change its current business model for issuing passports overseas.¹⁰	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a In response to our findings the FCO has already commenced the process of fundamental review through a report from consultants CapGemini. We consider that the future direction of the Passport operation should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Production of passports should be based in far fewer locations than at present. Specifically, a passport network based on production capability mainly in the United Kingdom, but with the option to maintain several regional “hubs” where there are major concentrations of British passport holders (such as Spain and North America). 	Addressing future challenges: Responding to tighter security requirements. Also Identification of opportunities for greater efficiency in delivery of the service, with closer association with the United Kingdom Passport Service.

¹⁰ The FCO has commissioned a review on the future of the overseas passport operation, which is due to report in September 2005.

Recommendation	Detailed actions	Outcomes
Equipping consular services meet emerging change continued		
8. Continued	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A clear definition and service standard for those residual functions that need to be retained in the country of residence of the applicant. This should focus on maintaining the capability at Posts to issue non-biometric emergency travel documents or temporary passports to assist emergency travel, and to undertake local checks on passport entitlement, such as interviews, biometric enrolment and the inspection of local records. Since a relatively small number of emergency passports will be issued, unit costs will increase but fees should still be set to recover full cost. ■ To build up capability in passport production hubs to take on tasks such as the authorisation of passport decisions made by Posts, and to advise Posts on their decisions on nationality. Once the nature of the next stage of biometric passports is clear the FCO should reconsider whether further work should be consolidated to “hubs”, to obtain lower costs and more consistent standards. 	To secure greater economies of scale to pass onto applicants through lower fees, to enhance standards of security and to enable systematic quality review of award decisions.
9. The FCO should ensure that existing consular information technology systems are fully utilised and new systems are developed to enable it to allocate its resources where they are most needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a Re-invigorating Compass, the consular assistance software programme, with more detailed training and a staged rollout of its functions; including its planned improved functionality b Monitoring whether Posts are using the Compass system, including enforcing compliance through linking any staffing bids to case workloads shown on the systems; c Regular and proactive investigations of common infrastructure problems and frustrations with the system reported by Posts to the centre; and d Better generation of management and performance information from the key information technology systems. 	<p>Targeting resources to need: Better utilisation of the Compass case management system will enable the FCO to manage its allocation of staff resources to best effect and identify shortfalls.</p> <p>More efficient delivery: Resolving underlying infrastructure problems would result in significant savings in staff time.</p>
10. The FCO should, in conjunction with HM Treasury, regularly review the basis of funding for consular assistance work and should reconsider the range of consular activities covered by its internal and external targets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a Regular reviews to assess the adequacy of funding levels should consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ changing patterns of travel and the observed level of demand; ■ projected trends in the issue of passports; and ■ the case for linking the consular premium to the number and type of overseas visits as well as the number of passports issued. b A hierarchy of targets could be established under the existing Public Service Agreement and underlying targets, to develop more detailed working level targets in areas where none currently exist. For example, targets for travel information and crisis management could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the level of public awareness of, or number of visits to, traveller information; ■ the number of Posts who have current, reviewed and tested emergency plans; ■ the speed of deployment in response to crises, and level of continuing support during crises. 	<p>Addressing future challenges: Linking the amount of the consular premium to the number and type of overseas visits should better enable the FCO to respond to changes in demand.</p> <p>Better, more consistent quality of service: Ensuring that targets provide feedback on the full range of consular services will enable the FCO to monitor and improve the delivery of its service.</p>

APPENDIX 2

Study methodology

Evaluation of performance measurement information

We analysed performance information collected by the FCO's Consular Directorate to establish its performance against the underlying targets of the Public Service Agreement, on both a global basis and for individual Posts. We also considered the reliability of the data collected and the use made of it by the FCO. We sought to establish whether best use had been made of the available information in managing the business, and whether there were any gaps in management information collected.

Questionnaire seeking views from Posts

We sent a questionnaire to consular sections worldwide, inviting them to comment on a range of issues concerning the resources available including staffing, accommodation, equipment and information technology. We also sought their views on the support offered to Posts from London including training, guidance and communication. Finally, we requested information from Posts on their service standards and practices when assisting distressed British nationals. We received 100 replies, which covered a wide geographical spread and different sizes of Post. The results are summarised on our website at: <http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/index.htm>

Fieldwork visits to Posts overseas

Another key component of our fieldwork was visits to Posts overseas. The purpose was to develop a better understanding of circumstances in each country, and the approach of the Post to delivering an efficient and high quality consular service, often in difficult circumstances. We visited ten Posts during our fieldwork: Bogotá, Dubai, Islamabad, Jakarta, Lisbon, Malaga, Nairobi, Nicosia, Phnom Penh, and Washington. These Posts were chosen, in agreement with the FCO, because they comprised a broad range of sizes, circumstances and approaches to managing a consular section. During each visit we:

- conducted structured interviews with key staff including Heads of Posts, Consuls, Vice Consuls and Pro-Consuls, Honorary Consuls, locally engaged staff and wardens;
- reviewed performance information collected by Posts;
- reviewed a selection of case files to compare service standards between Posts, and to identify common themes and issues arising from assistance cases;
- observed a prison visit, to compare the conditions and the consular assistance provided to British prisoners overseas. We also observed the FCO's response to a number of other consular assistance cases;
- reviewed the correspondence and complaints received at Post including the subject matter and the time taken to respond;
- reviewed customer satisfaction surveys giving views on the facilities provided at the Post, the quality of the service and the courtesy of staff;
- reviewed Post progress in writing and testing crisis plans; and
- where possible, we also met with consular staff of other countries (including the United States, Germany, Canada, France, Poland and Australia) to compare their approach to that of the United Kingdom. In Islamabad we also met with non-governmental organisations who work with Post in providing assistance to forced marriage victims.

Semi-structured interviews with the FCO and other government departments

In the course of the study we conducted a number of interviews with Consular Directorate staff in London and others within the FCO. Interviews included those with responsibility for assistance policy, travel advice, passports and nationality specialists, specialist advisors, country casework, crisis management, communication, operational reviews, performance measurement, and correspondence. We sought to establish how Consular Directorate is seeking to improve, how it monitors its activities and deals with constraints.

We also met staff from other relevant government departments. At the United Kingdom Passport Service, we compared their approach to that of the FCO in a number of areas, including systems for issuing passports, risk assessment, quality control, service standards and work on biometric passports. We also spoke with representatives from the Police, Health trusts, and the National Criminal Intelligence Service.

Documentation review

We reviewed a large body of departmental guidance and other available documentation on the entry clearance process. This included:

- key documents, including the consular strategy, newsletters, and annual reports;
- nationality laws and Diplomatic Service Procedures, which provide the framework within which consular staff must operate;
- staff manuals and guidance which provide service standards for assistance cases and customer care;
- annual consular statistics;
- research relating to consular activities obtained from internet and library searches, including the FCO and other government department websites;
- minutes from internal management and information technology strategy board meetings;

- management and internal audit reviews previously carried out in Consular Directorate and at Posts overseas; and
- research commissioned by the FCO on the dissemination of travel advice.

Consultation exercise with stakeholders

We consulted a variety of stakeholders with different specialist interests in consular matters by inviting one-to-one interviews and correspondence, and through observing wider stakeholder group meetings and interviews. Interviews with other bodies active in the sector included the British Red Cross, Prisoners Abroad, Support after Murder and Manslaughter Abroad, Heathrow Travelcare, the Association of British Travel Agents and the Association of British Insurers. We also observed meetings of the Consular Strategy Board, Travel Advice Review Group and the working group on deaths overseas, where a wider group of stakeholders expressed their views. These review groups meet regularly and comprise many of the key stakeholders in consular affairs.

International comparisons

We commissioned research by Rand Corporation to conduct an international review of consular services delivered to nationals overseas. The international comparators were Australia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United States. The research was conducted through a combination of desk and website review, and telephone interviews. Information was collected on a range of areas, including the consular network, funding arrangements, levels and standards for the delivery of consular services (including travel advice, assistance and passports), and the organisation of crisis management. The full report is published on our website at <http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/index.htm>

We also met with representatives from the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Evaluation of the FCO's response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami

A joint National Audit Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office team reviewed the FCO's response to the tsunami in December 2004. A detailed report is published in our website at <http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/index.htm>. The review included the following:

- Visits to Thailand, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. These visits included semi-structured interviews with FCO staff and British police officers, field visits to sites affected by the tsunami and to the Thai Tsunami Victim Identification Information Management Centre in Phuket, and meetings with representatives from a range of other foreign embassies in each country, including the Netherlands, Germany and Australia;
- Interviews with FCO staff in Consular Directorate working in response to the crisis;
- Interviews with other relevant stakeholders: the Metropolitan Police Service, the British Red Cross, the Federation of Tour operators and the Association of British insurers;
- Written consultation exercises with the French, German and Swedish Ministries of Foreign Affairs, to learn about their responses to the tsunami; and
- Interviews with staff at the Cabinet Office, which is responsible for cross-government co-ordination, and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which has lead responsibility for the aftercare of British tsunami victims and their families.

We are also currently undertaking a review of the experience of individuals and their view of the services provided to the survivors and families affected by the tsunami. The Zito Trust, a highly respected organisation with great experience in dealing with victims of sudden or violent death, is working with us to undertake the review. We intend to publish this review separately in 2006.

APPENDIX 3

International comparisons

This Appendix provides comparisons of the United Kingdom's approach with that of chosen other countries, showing selected aspects of the different consular services provided. We commissioned the Rand Corporation to carry out these international comparisons with Australia, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United States. The tables below show that the FCO generally provides a level of service which matches or exceeds that of other countries.

Travel Advice

The content and coverage of United Kingdom travel advice is comprehensive

	United Kingdom	Australia	Germany	France	Netherlands	Sweden	United States
Number of countries and territories covered	217	218	All	182	112	17	170
Safety and security				Yes		Yes	Yes
■ terrorism	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes (all)		Yes
■ crime	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes (all)		Yes
■ transportation safety	Yes	Yes	Yes		Some		Yes
■ natural disasters	Yes	Yes	Yes		None		Yes
Health				Yes		Some	Yes
■ vaccinations, etc.	Yes	Yes	Yes		Some		
■ medical facilities	Yes	Yes	Yes		Some		
■ medical insurance	Yes	Yes	Yes		None		
Country profiles	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	None	No	Yes
Local laws and customs	Yes	Yes	Some	Yes	None	No	Yes
Dual nationality	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	None	No	Yes
Entry requirements	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Some	No	Yes
Custom regulations	Yes	Yes	Some	Yes	None	No	Yes
Criminal penalties	Yes	Yes	Some (drugs)	Yes	None	No	Yes
Consular access	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	None	Yes	Yes
Telecommunications	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	None	No	No
Other issues	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	None	No	No

Passport Service

The United Kingdom provides an unusually localised and rapid passport service by international standards.

Outline of arrangements	Turnaround time targets	Actual average turnaround time	Standard adult passport cost (Euros)
United Kingdom Passports are issued at 159 Posts overseas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Standalone Posts: 83 ■ Hubs: 21 ■ Spokes: 38 ■ Emergency passports only: 18 ■ Temporary passports: 44 	5 days	Varies from same day issue to 5 days; though passports processed at a "spoke" Post and printed elsewhere would normally take more than five days.	100
Australia All overseas diplomatic and consular missions used to issue passports. With the introduction of a new series of passports in 2003, production was centralised (at Canberra, Washington and London).	10 days	Achieved in 2003-2004: 9.4 days	90
France Passports are produced in France or one of five regional offices (New York, Montreal, London, Geneva and Brussels).	3 weeks	The introduction of new machine-readable passports may result in turnaround times of 4 weeks or more.	60
Germany Embassies and consular Posts process passport applications, but all passports are printed centrally in Germany.	Not specified	Several weeks can elapse. Turnaround time given on the website is 6 – 8 weeks.	39
Netherlands Since the introduction of a passport with new safety characteristics in October 2001, the passport has been produced at a central location in the Netherlands.	Maximum of 4 weeks	2 weeks	38-50

Passport Service (continued)

The United Kingdom provides an unusually localised and rapid passport service by international standards.

Outline of arrangements	Turnaround time targets	Actual average turnaround time	Standard adult passport cost (Euros)
Sweden Passports are produced in Sweden. Applications are handled by embassies, general consulates and some Honorary Consulates. After introduction of biometric passports, only embassies and general consulates will take applications.	4 – 6 weeks	The Swedish authorities do not collect data on actual turnaround times, but passport are usually issued in less than 4 weeks of receipt.	40
United States Applications are received at Posts overseas, but sent to the United States for production at two centres.	2005: 90 per cent to be issued within 19 business days of receipt	Result 2004: 90 per cent of passports are issued within 21 days of receipt.	43

Assistance work

The FCO's global network is comprehensive, although some countries have higher numbers of Honorary Consuls

	United Kingdom	Australia	Germany	France	Netherlands	Sweden	United States
Embassies	153	71	142	184	112	85	160
Consulates	130	67	57	100	335	12	80
Honorary consulates or consular agencies	290	49	345	486	360	Ca. 400	46

Note: Figures for Embassies also include High Commissions, and figures for Consulates also include Consulates-General and Deputy High Commissions

The FCO provides a similar range of services to that of other countries

	United Kingdom	Australia	Germany	France	Netherlands	Sweden	United States
Assistance in criminal cases	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Assistance to victims of crime	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Financial assistance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Death of a citizen abroad	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Major accidents and disasters	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Abducted children	Yes	Yes	Limited	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

APPENDIX FOUR

Key stakeholder groups

The FCO has set up key consultation groups with the following members:

The Consular Strategy Board:

- Association of British Travel Agents
- Association of Independent Travel Operators
- Federation of Tour Operators
- Confederation of British Industry
- Association of British Insurers
- British Airways
- Virgin Atlantic Airways
- Travelcare Heathrow
- Travelcare Gatwick
- Commission for Racial Equality
- Muslim Council of Great Britain
- British Red Cross
- Support After Murder and Manslaughter (Abroad)
- Prisoners Abroad
- Mr Justice Peter Singer
- National Criminal Intelligence Service/INTERPOL

The Travel Advice Review Group:

- Association of British Travel Agents
- Association of Independent Tour Operators
- Federation of Tour Operators
- African Travel and Tourism Association
- Pacific Asia Travel Association
- Chartered Institute of Marketing Travel Industry Group
- Confederation of British Industries
- Tourism Concern
- Travel Foundation
- Dunira Strategy
- Association of National Tourist Office Representatives
- British Airways
- Year Out Group
- Association of British Insurers
- The Lonely Planet
- Rough Guides
- Department Of Health
- Department for Transport
- Incentive Travel & Meetings Assoc Ltd
- Charter Airline Group

APPENDIX FIVE

Performance against the Public Service Agreement target

The Consular Public Service Agreement target, a shared target with UKvisas, is “Effective and efficient consular and entry clearance services, as measured by specific underlying targets”.

Existing underlying targets:

Underlying public service agreement targets	Target	Outcome 2002-03		Outcome 2003-04		Outcome 2004-05	
	%	%	vs. Target	%	vs. Target	%	vs. Target
Overseas passports issued within five working days from receiving the fee and completed application	95	97.3	✓	88.1	✗	73.3	✗
Hospitalised consular cases contacted within 24 hours of being notified	99	98.3	✗	99.5	✓	99.3	✓
Detainees contacted within 24 of being notified of their arrest, and then visiting them as soon as possible if they want us to.	98	98.2	✓	96.3	✗	96.6	✗
Notarial acts carried out within one working day from receiving the correct fee and correctly completed application	98	99.9	✓	99.9	✓	99.6	✓
Birth registrations carried out within five working days from receiving the correct fee and correctly completed application	98	99.2	✓	96.5	✗	95.8	✗
Death registrations carried out within 3 working days from receiving the correct fee and correctly completed application	98	98.8	✓	95.3	✗	96.2	✗

New underlying target for 2005-06:

Underlying public service agreement target	Target	Outcome 2002-03	Outcome 2003-04	Outcome 2004-05
Percentage of customers stating that they are satisfied with the quality of service received	75	N/A	N/A	N/A