



# Foreign Affairs Committee

## Oral evidence: Work of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, HC 253

Tuesday 10 November 2020

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Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Chris Bryant; Neil Coyle; Alicia Kearns; Stewart Malcolm McDonald; Bob Seely; Henry Smith; Royston Smith; Graham Stringer; Claudia Webbe.

Questions 251 - 393

### Witnesses

I: Sir Philip Barton KCMG OBE, Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and Head of the Diplomatic Service; and Juliet Chua, Director General, Finance and Corporate, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.



## Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Sir Philip Barton and Juliet Chua.

Q251 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to this session of the Foreign Affairs Committee. We have two witnesses from the Foreign Office. I will leave them to introduce themselves.

**Sir Philip Barton:** I am Philip Barton, the new Permanent Under-Secretary in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. It is a pleasure to be here this afternoon.

**Juliet Chua:** I am Juliet Chua, Director General of Corporate and Finance at the FCDO.

Q252 **Chair:** This is not only your first appearance before us—congratulations on your appointment—but the first appearance of the PUS of the new Department, so you will understand that we will cover quite a lot of things that would once have been the remit of somebody else in Whitehall but are now yours. The first question has to be: what are your top three priorities in the FCDO?

**Sir Philip Barton:** It is a new Department. My first priority nine weeks in has been, and will continue to be all the way through, to make sure that as we bring DFID and the FCO together the merger of the two Departments is genuinely transformational. It is not just putting development and diplomacy alongside one another; it is putting them together and making sure they are more than the sum of their parts, and we can now seize opportunities around the world and address the world's biggest challenges. Therefore, it is about full integration and making the best of both and more of both.

We have made a good start on that, if you look at the way we have tackled Covid-19, by putting international leadership and diplomacy alongside development and support for research in the field of vaccines, leading up to the Prime Minister's announcement about giving billions of dollars-worth of support. I think that is an illustration of what we are doing.

On day one we announced that Nick Dyer, who was one of my predecessors on the development side, is the Foreign Secretary's envoy on famine prevention and humanitarian affairs. He is now using our diplomatic networks in countries at risk of famine, alongside our development expertise, to make sure we are using both development and diplomacy to help the world's least well off in places like Yemen, across the Sahel and the DRC. The top priority is making the merger genuinely transformational.

My second priority is about the people of the Department. I feel a very keen responsibility for our greatest asset: the people and my colleagues around the world. On behalf of the Foreign Secretary—as you know, he is self-isolating—this morning I laid a wreath at the pillar outside my office



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in King Charles Street in memory of all colleagues who have lost their lives on international service overseas. I am conscious that day in, day out colleagues, both UK staff but also local staff appointed in country, are in difficult and dangerous places doing remarkable things. Their safety, wellbeing and security is a top priority for me.

Beyond that, I want to build our capabilities and make sure that, as we bring together the geographic expertise of the old FCO, together with the really deep expertise from DFID—the cadres of economists, health experts and Government experts—we build that into something more. We need to be better as a Department in how we use data and make sure we are economically literate. It is fantastic that on the board we have two former chief economists from other Government Departments, and that we build on the work already done in the former FCO in building up our language skills and improving our ability to engage in trade to support both the Department for International Trade as it negotiates new agreements and British business around the world. Therefore, there is a big capability part to the people side of it.

Finally, on people, I want us to be diverse, inclusive and able to retain and recruit the best talent from around the UK. Therefore, the second priority is capability, particularly through our people.

The third priority in one word is delivery, and that is what the Foreign Secretary wants us to be focused on. It is about making sure that 24/7, around the world, our consular teams are: supporting British nationals who need our help in the best possible way; maximising impact in improving the lives of the least well off around the world; doing what we can to resolve conflicts; helping to keep the UK secure and make us more prosperous; and leading the overall international effort of the UK both across the UK Government and the world.

There is a relentless focus on delivering the Government's agenda, going into what I think is an exciting year ahead with the G7 presidency, our responsibilities on climate change with COP 26 and carrying on leading our response around the world to Covid-19.

**Q253 Chair:** You have stepped up from the board and being the DNSA, which you held before. You are now the senior permanent diplomat of the United Kingdom. What are the three priorities you are trying to achieve as a diplomat, not as a departmental manager?

**Sir Philip Barton:** Our job as a Department is to deliver the Government's international agenda. First, the Foreign Secretary has set out very clearly his priorities about the UK being a force for good in the world. That has a number of different components. We have introduced a new human rights sanctions regime, championing issues like media freedom alongside partners like Canada.

Secondly, the Foreign Secretary has talked very clearly about the trade side both in support of the Department for International Trade and, more



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broadly, British business and, in some countries where we have a development effort, creating new markets and making sure that, as we help countries with their own economic development, that leads to British business opportunities.

Thirdly, the Foreign Secretary's other priority is work on Europe as we come to the end of our transition period out of the European Union.

Q254 **Chair:** You have spoken about some large and, if I may say so, slightly vague areas. What are you actually trying to achieve? What are your priorities in British diplomacy at this point? In theory, you have an integrated review coming out any day now. We have the world in flux, the like of which we have probably not seen since the end of the cold war. The UK has had a seat at the table of every moment of major flux for 300 years and has normally had a very clear idea of what we are trying to achieve out of the turmoil when the world crystallises again. What are you trying to achieve?

**Sir Philip Barton:** As I said, we are trying to secure the UK's interests in the big international challenges.

Q255 **Chair:** I get that, but what does that mean?

**Sir Philip Barton:** What it means is that, for example, on climate change we have a special responsibility, as next year we are hosting COP 26. That is about the countries of the world coming together and putting us on a different trajectory in terms of climate change across the planet. The FCDO will play a key part in that effort through both our diplomatic network and our development support of things like climate finance through our advocacy and putting that together.

There is also the work we will do to make the event itself a success. At the G7 presidency next year, the Foreign Secretary will lead the Foreign and Development Ministers' track, and I am sure he is looking now at what our priorities should be. I am sure he will want to use that to take forward our vision of the UK as a force for good in the world in the areas I have talked about.

Q256 **Chair:** I am not trying to trap you. It is often quite useful to have an idea of what you are trying to do. Phrases like "force for good" were very adequately used by Robin Cook nearly 30 years ago. They summarise but do not state. We have heard "Global Britain", which is a perfectly valid summation of an ambition, but it does not tell us what you are actually trying to achieve. What are you actually trying to achieve from Glasgow next year? What are you actually trying to achieve from the G7? You will have seven plus three leaders of the world's richest and most influential powers. Why are they there?

**Sir Philip Barton:** The world has been going through a global pandemic. We are very hopeful about a vaccine that is better able to manage the disease. That has clearly had a big impact on the world. That has had



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macroeconomic effects across the entire globe, whether that is the developed or developing world.

If you look over the year ahead, what the UK will want to do is use these international leadership moments, whether that is on climate or the G7, to deliver for the UK its national interests. That is making us more secure, whether that is about climate change or dealing with some of the conflicts in the world that have impacts directly on us, because they provide breeding grounds for terrorism or migration, or whether that is making our way in the world now that we have control of our international commercial policies and can negotiate free trade agreements. Those are the Government's objectives and the Department's objectives.

**Q257 Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** COP 26 is a hugely important event, certainly in Glasgow. We look forward to welcoming the international community to the city. Could you talk a bit more about how the preparations for that are going?

**Sir Philip Barton:** Do you mean the preparations for the event itself?

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** The event and the diplomatic outcomes that you want to see from it.

**Sir Philip Barton:** We are putting in place the relationships we need around the world and making sure that, as we work with Peter Hill and the Cabinet Office team who are leading on the Government's work on COP 26, we are absolutely using all of our diplomatic networks and development assistance as part of a joined-up effort, and that we are using that to influence countries as we look to them to make new national commitments, for example. We are making sure that, as we deploy our own development assistance, that is absolutely tied into the COP 26 agenda.

The FCDO is leading on adaption and resilience programmes. To give you an example of the kinds of things we are doing, as high commissioner in India before returning to take up my current role, I was working in partnership with the Indian Government on resilient infrastructure and how to build resilience in countries prone to climactic events. All of that will come together next year in an international strategy to secure the outcome we want, which is putting the world on to a different climate change trajectory. There will be some stepping stones along the way in the international events we will use—the G7 is one of those—to make sure we have some waypoints between now and November next year.

**Q258 Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** What does a successful COP 26 ultimately look like at the other end?

**Sir Philip Barton:** Success is that we can be much more confident than we can be now that we are not heading for a climate catastrophe on the planet and that we have made a fundamental difference to the trajectory. That is what ultimate success would look like.



Q259 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Is it the Department's assessment or your assessment that that is easier with the new American presidency than with the departing American presidency, which has just left the Paris agreement?

**Sir Philip Barton:** As the Prime Minister said in his remarks over the weekend, one of the exciting things for the UK with President-elect Biden coming on to the scene next year is our ability to partner with the US on the climate change agenda going forward, so yes.

Q260 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** It gets easier?

**Sir Philip Barton:** It does.

Q261 **Alicia Kearns:** You have talked very much about the Government's priorities—media freedoms, human rights and Global Britain—but what are your personal aspirations for the Department under your tenure? Do you want to transform radically our approach to countering hostile states, or transform linguistic skills, or open up more offices? What is your vision for the Department in what you want to deliver as the chief civil servant?

**Sir Philip Barton:** I have two responsibilities apart from my responsibility to Parliament for accounting for the resources we are given. First, it is to make sure that we are delivering and have the capability to deliver the international agenda of the Government of the day, and that they have the best possible advice and capabilities behind that advice to deliver.

Secondly, I am conscious that I am custodian of a big part of our international effort, and when I come to the end of my tenure I want to hand that on in a better state than I found it. I do not imply that it is broken at all, but one always wants to improve things for which one is responsible.

I go back to what I said in answer to the Chair at the outset. I would like to build our capability to make sure we are adapting to the times. There is something about making the Department better at using data. There is some best practice in parts of it, particularly in some of the former DFID parts, but it is not systemised across the organisation. I think we can do that both to make smarter and better evidence choices around our policy and to be better at monitoring how we are doing in delivery.

You mentioned languages. One of our USPs has to be, as the premier international department of the UK, our ability to understand, interpret, engage with and influence other countries, and you cannot really do that effectively in my experience unless you can speak their language. We have made improvements over the past few years in the former FCO, but there is more to do in making sure we are embedding that in the Department and making us as expert as we can be.

I have mentioned two things in that area. I mentioned our global presence. I want to make sure that we are modern and reflective of the



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UK in our presence around the world—it is agile and impactful—and in the kinds of people from the UK who are representing us. I want to make sure that we are truly representative and give chances, employment and opportunities to everyone from across the United Kingdom in a welcoming culture that makes the best of people's talents and allows them to prosper, develop, feel rewarded, not necessarily in financial terms, and valued for what they do.

**Q262 Alicia Kearns:** Will you be bringing forward a schedule or programme to make sure we have more data-based policy making at the Foreign Office? Do you plan to launch a new initiative for languages? How will you monitor effectiveness?

**Sir Philip Barton:** We will absolutely do that. At the moment my first priority is the transformation of the new Department as we create it and make a success of that. We are in the process of working out how the new Department will work and organise itself at the UK end and decide who is doing what with whoever between themes and geography, but also looking very much at our corporate capabilities and working through what we should be aspiring to in terms of our people. We need a bit more time to go through that in practice. I am sure Juliet can say a little more about that side of our work.

**Juliet Chua:** To continue the conversation specifically about learning and capability and how we will invest in that, it is still early. We are scoping out the full extent of our transformation programme that Sir Philip described. Upskilling and investing in our people will be critical in achieving the full objectives of the Department and the sense of best of both.

We start in a good place. We bring together the International Academy, renamed to recognise that it provides a platform for development and diplomacy staff from when they first join the organisation right through to senior leaders preparing to go overseas. We have already started to introduce new modules for them in having access to different types of information as the two organisations come together, and then we will be scoping out what our learning and development offer looks like overall in targeting the sorts of things Sir Philip has been describing. This will continue to be an area of significant focus for us as part of the overall transformation.

**Q263 Chris Bryant:** I need to make a declaration. I am being crowdfunded to sue the Government for failing to do anything about Russia. I am not going to ask about that, but I will ask about the skills you are talking about. One of the skills we need above all at the moment relates to social media and the ability to negotiate that world as diplomats. Would you like to say a couple of words about that?

**Sir Philip Barton:** On the media side, there is a central review of the Government's communications effort but, for us the FCDO, the social media side is a big part of it. I think we have done a reasonable job, but



we need to carry on improving. Our digital work has been recognised as being strong. We have done innovative things, such as on how we use social media in crises and how we use it on the consular side. One of our learning points from the pandemic, picking up very much from this Committee's report, was thinking through how you can use social media to communicate with British nationals overseas at times of crisis, and we will carry on deepening that.

There is something about how you use social media for influence. Our global network has done a reasonable job over the past few years in using the new tools on the social media side, but we can do better. There is also something about how you can analyse what is going on around the world through open source and some of the social media. I think we can be smarter in our policy making by having better analytical approaches to what we can glean from open-source material as opposed to secrets.

**Q264 Chris Bryant:** Let me ask some specific questions. When the Prime Minister congratulated Donald Trump—sorry, not Donald Trump, Joe Biden—who drafted that on social media? Was that Downing Street or the Foreign Office? Normally, that would have started from the Foreign Office.

**Sir Philip Barton:** I do not know the answer to that question. If you want to write to me about that, I can give you the details.

**Q265 Chris Bryant:** If the skills are not there to be able to get it right first time, you end up with an own goal. Everybody around the world is now commenting that the British Government could not even work out who it was congratulating because the original had not been deleted properly. I would be grateful if you wrote to us. You must know, surely, who drafted the Foreign Secretary's congratulations in which he said, "While some of the processes are still playing out, it is now clear Joe Biden has won." Was it a Foreign Office decision to include "while some of the processes are still playing out," the most incompetent, half-hearted and back-handed congratulations by any Foreign Secretary so far?

**Sir Philip Barton:** The FCDO will have given the Foreign Secretary advice on all his public engagements as a Minister.

**Q266 Chris Bryant:** Therefore, the Foreign Office advised him to say, "While some of the processes are still playing out."

**Sir Philip Barton:** I cannot give you chapter and verse on the precise genesis of that phrase.

**Q267 Chris Bryant:** Do you or the Foreign Office believe that processes are still playing out in the United States of America?

**Sir Philip Barton:** Our position is clear, which is that it is for the American people and their systems to deal with the aftermath of the election, but we have said that Joe Biden is the next President of the



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United States, and that was what the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary were doing in congratulating him at the weekend.

Q268 **Chris Bryant:** That really does sound like having your cake and eating it. In other countries, like Belarus, we are very clear about who has and has not won elections.

**Sir Philip Barton:** We are clear. We have very clearly congratulated Joe Biden and Kamala Harris as the next President and Vice-President of the United States, but in the end it is for the US system and the US people to work through any residual issues around that.

Q269 **Chris Bryant:** It is the “but” here. You do not put “but” in for other countries, but apparently you do here. It just feels as if you are bending over backwards to help Donald Trump.

**Sir Philip Barton:** I do not recognise that description of what is going on here.

Q270 **Chair:** We are going through another comprehensive spending round, which appears to have gone from a three-year to a one-year programme, so I read in the papers and so the Treasury tells me. What are the implications of going to a single-year round for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office?

**Sir Philip Barton:** I will let Juliet say a bit more about this, but we had already put together a three-year bid because that was what we had been asked to do initially. The way in which we will be approaching a one-year settlement is to see it as the first year of a three-year approach. We are very keen to make sure that we can carry on doing medium and long-term planning, because that is the nature of the business in terms of both the transformation and corporate work and our programming, so we will approach one year as though it is the first year of three years.

Q271 **Chair:** You are assuming that you have put in a three-year bid and you are just getting paid in increments?

**Sir Philip Barton:** We will have to see what happens in the discussions with the Treasury, but in making sure there is coherence in the medium term for the resources we are seeking, we are not starting from scratch but from the work we did on the three-year settlement.

**Juliet Chua:** The spending review is due to be completed by 25 November. We are into the final stages of conversations with the Treasury, so I cannot pre-empt the outcome. As Sir Philip has described, the work to prepare has put us in a strong place. As we come together as a single Department for the first time essentially, assembling the financial picture for the new Department as we bring together the large programming budget of DFID and the large people and activity budget for the FCO puts us in a good place to think strategically in the medium



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term, and then we can have a one-year conversation with the Treasury on that basis.

Under all scenarios, we will want to make sure that we are putting forward a strong case for continuing to fund ambitious programmes and preserve our core funding streams to be able to make progress in the one year towards a multi-year picture in how we operate as an organisation, particularly as we come together through the merger.

Q272 **Chair:** You will be spending about three quarters of all ODA money that the UK contributes. Is that correct?

**Juliet Chua:** Just under 80%.

Q273 **Chair:** Last year that was about £15 billion. How much do you expect it to be next year?

**Juliet Chua:** The 0.7% is enshrined in legislation and reflects growths and falls in GNI. This year has been unprecedented and the economic impact of Covid has been captured by that. As it became visible this year, there has been a cross-Government process to anticipate that and to work within the context of a reasonable worst-case scenario where you might see it fall away from where the original forecast was prior to the impact of Covid. That identified up to £2.9 billion-worth of savings this year to be ready for this, depending on exactly where the GNI puts us, so that we do not overshoot or undershoot the 0.7% commitment.

Q274 **Chair:** As part of your three-year bid, are you assuming that that rolls over into years two and three, or is that a one-off?

**Juliet Chua:** I am talking about this year.

Q275 **Chair:** Indeed, but are you assuming it will continue or that, in the second year of the three-year bid you have just made to the Treasury, this will be reversed and will be back up to that figure?

**Juliet Chua:** We cannot pre-empt the outcome of the spending review.

Q276 **Chair:** I am not asking you to predict the outcome of the spending review. I am asking you to tell me what your assumption is in what you have requested to the Treasury in the spending review.

**Juliet Chua:** The 0.7% is enshrined in legislation.

**Chair:** Let me try this again.

**Sir Philip Barton:** We follow what the Treasury asks us to follow in assumptions about the size of the UK economy and what that therefore means for the amount of money available for ODA. Does that answer your question?

Q277 **Chair:** Not quite. We know it was £15 billion last year. You are assuming it will be £2.9 billion less for the coming year. What are you assuming—less or more than £15 billion—for years two and three?



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**Juliet Chua:** We will continue to follow the OBR forecasts, and it will be updated following the latest OBR forecasts.

Q278 **Chris Bryant:** Who bears the risk of exchange rate fluctuation—you or the Treasury?

**Juliet Chua:** In terms of our current arrangements?

**Chris Bryant:** For the next three years. Who is bearing it? You are spending British money; you are given pounds by the Treasury, but what that buys around the world may change.

**Juliet Chua:** The current arrangement on the FCO side reflected how we would respond to exchange rate risks, and we are in conversation on what that might or might not be as we go into the next spending round and come together as a single Department.

Q279 **Chris Bryant:** Who bears the risk?

**Sir Philip Barton:** As for the costs of running the global network, which were formerly FCO costs, the Treasury reimburses the FCO exchange rate risk up until the last quarter of the year and the final estimate. The ex-FCO carries the risk for the last quarter because the estimate is done and you cannot change the figures.

Money for development assistance is allocated in sterling. Some of it is spent in sterling and some is not, but the exchange rate risk is absorbed, as I understand it, within the development assistance budget.

Q280 **Chris Bryant:** The Treasury has won that little battle because it went back to the Treasury taking that risk, but, as far as I can see, you are saying that risk has come back to the new Department.

**Sir Philip Barton:** There has been no recent change in this. It has gone backwards and forwards. I am now talking about the FCO. There was a situation where the FCO was carrying the risk and then there was a partial move back to the Treasury carrying it in the way I have described. That is for the FCO funding side. I am not aware of any changes in the way in which development assistance money has been allocated in terms of exchange rate risk. There has been no recent change in this.

Q281 **Chair:** You were speaking about the changing budget. If you are making a three-year bid, presumably you are programming three years' worth of programmes around the world. Is that correct?

**Juliet Chua:** We originally planned for a three-year spending review, but the conversation with the Treasury is just for the coming financial year. The DFID side was historically a multi-year business. We make multi-year commitments to our programmes, partners and suppliers, and we do that essentially within an agreed limit in terms of forward plans with the Treasury. We will need to agree what that forward limit is as we come through the single-year spending round going forward. We keep that



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under review to ensure we have flexibility to have a strong pipeline of programming to fulfil the 0.7% commitment.

Q282 **Chair:** You also have the ability to drop below 0.7%, because the 0.7% may shrink effectively.

**Juliet Chua:** We have always retained flexibility. There is the ability to move payments around. Indeed, this year we have sought to minimise the impact of the savings we have made by looking at where programmes can be postponed or whether they can be shrunk within an individual programme to give some flexibility.

Q283 **Chair:** In order to save that £2.9 billion, presumably you had to make some strategic choices about where you were willing to make commitments and where you were willing to put them. Is that correct?

**Juliet Chua:** Yes.

Q284 **Chair:** How have you prioritised?

**Juliet Chua:** The Foreign Secretary, acting in his capacity as First Secretary, led a very thorough process that set a set of priorities against which we reviewed programmes. Those priorities were set as essentially prioritising ODA spend to meet the immediate Covid health requirements, to support education particularly for girls, to prioritise work on climate change and biodiversity and to ensure we are fulfilling the programming on open societies, human rights and force-for-good programming, as well as continuing concern about the bottom billion overall.

We also wanted to make sure we were protecting operational capacity, recognising this is a one-year reductions programme, and thinking about the impact on R&D and the UK research base part of it. That prioritisation framework then allowed us to identify a set of reductions across the ODA portfolio to try to minimise real-world frontline impact by seeking either to postpone programmes and payments or to shrink individual programmes within that framework.

Q285 **Chair:** You have assumed this is a one-year shrinkage.

**Juliet Chua:** We planned for this. This was an exercise conducted for this calendar year, with the 0.7% anticipating it.

Q286 **Chair:** You are anticipating a reversion to mean, as it were—an uplift.

**Juliet Chua:** We will continue to monitor the overall economic situation and reflect the latest OBR forecasts as we plan for future years.

Q287 **Chair:** Have you not made any assumptions for years two and three of spending?

**Juliet Chua:** We will continue to monitor it. We are expecting the OBR to be updated, at which point that will be reflected in spending review assumptions going forward.



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Q288 **Chair:** I am interested in the priorities you have just described. You described Covid-related health, education, particularly for girls, climate change, open societies and force for good. I am not quite sure what that means, but I am sure you can enlighten me.

**Juliet Chua:** It is specific programming on things like media freedom and open societies.

Q289 **Chair:** Those are some relatively clear priorities that ODA spending is aimed at. What are the Foreign Office strategic priorities to go alongside them?

**Sir Philip Barton:** I am not sure I recognise the term “Foreign Office strategic priorities”. We are a single Department.

Q290 **Chair:** Let me put it a different way. What are your diplomatic priorities?

**Sir Philip Barton:** Our diplomatic priorities are part of this. Part of our diplomatic priorities will be diplomacy around making sure that, as we spend this development assistance, it has the maximum possible impact. To illustrate what I mean by that, as you look to improve the educational opportunities of an individual girl, you can do that through building a school or providing a textbook, but if you want to have a long-term sustainable impact it is about having the means—the local government authority providing the education puts in place the systems so that you have an enduring education system that means generation after generation of young girls get a better education than they would otherwise.

That is where our ability to use diplomacy to influence Governments can enhance the impact of our development assistance. Part of our priorities on diplomacy in the year ahead will be around diplomacy that helps to deliver these development outcomes.

Q291 **Chair:** All of this sounds extremely strategically aimed and, frankly, it sounds like there is no point in doing the integrated review at all. Why are you bothering with it?

**Sir Philip Barton:** The integrated review will set the overall Government approach.

Q292 **Chair:** I thought that was what you just set out.

**Sir Philip Barton:** No. What I have just set out is how development and diplomacy can work together across our objectives on the development side. The integrated review will set out the Government’s overall approach across defence, security, diplomacy and development, so it is broader because clearly it includes the security and defence side.

Q293 **Chair:** Currently, defence and security are doing separate things that are totally unrelated.

**Sir Philip Barton:** The question was about how diplomacy is going to help deliver more through our development programmes. I have not been



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talking about the totality. I have been answering your question about how diplomacy will help in areas.

Clearly, the FCDO has a big part on the security side as well. For example, we will carry on wanting to play a leading role in NATO; we will carry on wanting to do the work we have been doing to counter those countries that are trying to do us harm; and we will carry on wanting to play a leading role, alongside others on the international side, in countering terrorism.

Q294 **Chair:** Given that you want to continue doing those things, I am not quite sure what the integrated review is bringing to the party.

**Sir Philip Barton:** The integrated review, when it comes, is going to set out the Government's overall approach across the four areas I have talked about. How are we going to do this? What capabilities will we have? What are we going to invest in? What will our priorities be?

Q295 **Chair:** Presumably, you have already put your submission into the integrated review.

**Sir Philip Barton:** "Submission" is not quite the right way of thinking about it. We have been intimately involved, both as two separate Departments before the merger but also as a merged Department, all the way through in giving policy advice, thought leadership and helping with some of the external international engagement around it, feeding into the process in an iterative way as it has gone along and the policies have been developed.

Q296 **Chair:** If you have been doing that, presumably your current priorities reflect the conversations you have been having with your opposite numbers in the intelligence services and the MOD.

**Sir Philip Barton:** Indeed. We talk all the time. Our priorities absolutely reflect their perspectives, and we work closely together. In addition to bringing together diplomacy and development into a single Department, one of the other big themes is overall coherence in our international effort. Therefore, in addition to us coming together as one Department, there is a big agenda to make sure we are totally aligned as we pursue the Government's international objectives with all the tools at our disposal, whether those are softer tools at one end of the spectrum through to the harder-edge ones through our military, being brought to bear on particular problems as appropriate in a coherent, integrated way.

Q297 **Chair:** What do you anticipate the three priorities of the integrated review to be?

**Sir Philip Barton:** I do not think it is for me today to set out the priorities of the review. The Prime Minister leads the review, and he will be setting it out in due course.

Q298 **Chair:** What have you made as your pitch for the priorities?



**Sir Philip Barton:** We have looked both at what we can bring to the party—the things I have talked about on bringing diplomacy and development together and increasing our impact. When the Foreign Secretary gave evidence to you last month, you heard him talk about the Indo-Pacific as a geographic priority and focus going forward. Those are the sorts of things we have pitched into the review.

Q299 **Chair:** What other areas would you pitch into it?

**Sir Philip Barton:** For me, it is part of the force-for-good agenda. Where are the areas—I think this was picked up in the Committee’s recent report—that the UK can add value globally? These are some of the areas where the rules of the road are less well defined than they might be, such as cyber, space and the work we do internationally to establish norms, making sure that, to the greatest possible extent, countries that share our values and overall approaches are leading the way in determining rules in these new areas.

Q300 **Bob Seely:** Can I ask a couple of questions about the balance of priorities, following up what the Chair has been saying? It is great that you have been talking about all these international campaigns, but where is the new balance in the FCDO between international campaigns and traditional state-to-state diplomacy?

**Sir Philip Barton:** They go hand in hand to my mind. For example, I go back to my brief tenure as high commissioner to India and what I was doing. I had a strategic consultation with my Indian opposite number last week. Some of it was about what you would describe as traditional bilateral diplomacy and some of the issues we are debating about bilateral matters between the two countries.

The bigger part of what we have talked about and what we are pursuing together is, for example, our work together on climate change. I do not think you can distinguish quite so clearly the differences, as we conduct relations with other countries, between the purely bilateral and the broader agendas we pursue with pretty much all countries around the world. Some clearly have more of a shared agenda than others, and we are working together in collaboration and partnership; in other cases it is about advocacy and perhaps trying to persuade and influence them to come round to our approaches to particular challenges.

Q301 **Bob Seely:** I do not doubt that all these things are in the national interest. I just do not always see it particularly well articulated where traditional state diplomacy feeds into these wider themes, be it anti-slavery, which is clearly a very important issue, or climate change. Do you think we will get a better articulation of the link between the national interest and international concerns in the review?

**Sir Philip Barton:** I would expect this to be really clear in setting out what the UK is trying to achieve and how it will achieve it in the world in the UK national interest.



Q302 **Bob Seely:** You have integrated development and the Foreign Office, which some people like and some do not. If done well, potentially there will be a greater sense of being able to integrate that. What about overseas trade policy and the MOD? Certainly the MOD and presumably International Trade will remain as separate Ministries. How will they be integrated into the suite of overseas policies, tools and methods that we have?

**Sir Philip Barton:** I have two or three things to say in response to that. First, as the Prime Minister announced the merger of development and diplomacy, he also said very clearly that our network of global trade commissioners should come under the authority of ambassadors. I think there is a move across the board for heads of mission, ambassadors and high commissioners to be empowered to lead the totality of the UK effort in that country, so there is an effort to make sure that we are all aligned, whether that is coming from a single Department like the FCDO now being development and diplomacy, or whether it is coming from other parts of the system, such as trade or defence.

We will align behind a clear, coherent, strategic plan for particular countries signed off by the NSC or Ministers as appropriate. That will be our overall agreed approach. All of us across Whitehall will want to fall in behind that.

The second part of it is empowering our people on the ground, under the clear leadership of heads of mission, to take a coherent total approach to their work.

In looking ahead, we are also working to align the terms and conditions of our staff overseas where there have been disparities to bring us closer together in our overall approach to our international work across the board.

Q303 **Bob Seely:** The majority of aid spending is done by DFID, which has a genuine reputation of doing it extremely well. Other Government Departments, including the FCO, have not had as good a reputation in the past. Should all overseas spending be funnelled through the DFID experts that are now in the FCDO so that we achieve the same high level of quality spending rather than have a somewhat mixed approach depending on the expertise within different Government Departments?

**Sir Philip Barton:** I will answer that in two ways. First, I think the FCDO should spend the bulk of our overseas development assistance, and absolutely across the whole organisation. For the ex-FCO parts, we should make very clear use of the very deep expertise coming in from the DFID side, which is very highly respected around the world.

The second part of your question is about others, if you like. I think there will continue to be a need and advantage for specialist parts of other Departments that can have an impact and make good use of development assistance to carry on doing that, but we want to do two



things. One is to make sure it is done in an expert way and make available to them the expertise we have in the FCDO, and the second is to make sure it is coherent and is part of an overall plan and approach to how we use development assistance in total, but also to a particular country or theme that they are being asked to work on because of their specialisms.

**Q304 Henry Smith:** A couple of years ago the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, as it then was, announced an expansion of its posts and staff overseas. How many staff have been deployed since that policy announcement?

**Sir Philip Barton:** I think it is 1,900 of the 2,000. Juliet, do you have the figures to hand?

**Juliet Chua:** The total uplift is 900 staff.

**Q305 Henry Smith:** Will the Indo-Pacific tilt result in the creation of additional posts and positions, or will it be a reallocation of existing resources towards that sphere?

**Sir Philip Barton:** When we get to that point, it will lead to an increased effort. What that looks like in practice will depend on the outcome of the spending review and the resources the Department has going forward. We have not got to the point where I could answer that question.

**Q306 Henry Smith:** Is the FCDO looking to ensure additional human resources for the trans-Pacific partnership?

**Sir Philip Barton:** It is an area where we will want to increase our focus and effort, but resource allocation will flow after we know the total resource allocated to the Department going forward.

**Q307 Alicia Kearns:** On the integration of different people working in different fields abroad, how happy are you with the current integration of international trade postings, and do you think they will be integrated further in the future?

**Sir Philip Barton:** At the moment—I will perhaps use India to illustrate it—it is well integrated. We have very good collaborative working overseas. As high commissioner in India, I worked hand in glove with the trade commissioner for south Asia, who double-hatted as our consul general for west India based in Mumbai. We had spread across our Indian network a team of trade advisers and experts supporting the promotion of British business and our broader trade policy agenda across the country. I think it is well integrated at the moment, although it does feed into a separate Department and Secretary of State.

**Q308 Graham Stringer:** May I take you back to Stewart Malcolm McDonald's question about COP 26? Do you believe China's statement that it will reduce carbon dioxide emissions to zero by 2060?



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**Sir Philip Barton:** It feels like a question that could have a yes/no response, but I do not think the answer can be black and white.

Q309 **Graham Stringer:** Most people do not believe China. I do not believe it.

**Sir Philip Barton:** I think that, across China, there is a realisation that climate change is being packed on China, and that China has a part to play in global solutions to it. We have had a dialogue with the Chinese about how this might be addressed.

As you know, there is also a desire in China to develop economically. Some of that is based on the use of less-clean energy sources, but there is a signal from China that it is interested in this agenda and it sees the need to do something about it. I do not know whether by 2060 it will have achieved that. I think it is premature to make a confident projection either way, frankly.

Q310 **Graham Stringer:** Is not the real signal it is sending that it is still building about two coal-fired power stations every fortnight and funding coal-fired power stations in Africa and elsewhere in the world? Is that not a much bigger signal than an aspirational statement? You said previously that having Biden as President is better for the conference than Trump. America, thank you very much, is reducing the amount of carbon dioxide it is emitting, while China has developing country status and is producing more and more carbon dioxide. What is your attitude to that for the success of the conference?

**Sir Philip Barton:** We are doing work in countries that are either investing in coal or are themselves using it on how we can help them transition to cleaner energy. Some of that is about support for alternatives; some of it is about broad economic development; and some of it is about advocacy where they are making choices about where they invest. That is absolutely part of the agenda.

Q311 **Graham Stringer:** But China is increasing the amount of carbon dioxide it is producing. I am afraid that did not answer my point.

**Sir Philip Barton:** In that case, would you repeat the question? I thought your point was about what we are doing on coal.

**Graham Stringer:** It is about China creating a lot more carbon dioxide and what your attitude is to that in terms of the success of COP 26. Are you content to give China developing country status so that it can carry on producing more and more carbon dioxide, and doing that in other countries as well?

**Sir Philip Barton:** Making a success of COP 26 will be a complicated jigsaw of different countries making different commitments and coming together as a whole to secure a changed trajectory for the climate, and China has a big part to play in that. If you want to go into the detail of China's position, I am happy to write to you, or you could talk to Peter Hill and those leading the discussions on COP 26.



Q312 **Graham Stringer:** I would be happy to receive a letter. I will not labour it further. Can you tell me what you see as the biggest difficulty in merging the two Departments?

**Sir Philip Barton:** The biggest challenge for me is that we are doing this in a period when a lot is going on internationally. It is making absolutely sure that, as we go through the sorts of things Juliet and I have been describing in creating something new, we carry on delivering day in, day out around the world, whether that is our consular work or our broader work on the challenges we face. For me, it is doing those two things at once. I am very confident that we are doing that.

Q313 **Graham Stringer:** What inefficiencies in the two Departments do you think you will get rid of? This is an opportunity to change things, is it not? What inefficiencies will disappear?

**Sir Philip Barton:** Efficiency and cost savings were not the main drivers of the merger. For me, the biggest advantage is increasing the impact and bang for buck of our international work. In a sense, you can get a positive gain from us being more coherent and more joined up in doing the sorts of things I described earlier in diplomacy and development. Juliet might be able to say a little more about the hard efficiencies in the merger.

**Juliet Chua:** As Sir Philip said, the clear objective of the merger is to maximise impact and effectiveness, but we anticipate that, longer term, there will be areas where we can identify some efficiencies, not least de-duplicating where there are similar functions. We need to do that work very systematically, and to think it through in the context of our spending review outcome and, as we look at the whole shape, size and structure of the organisation, identify specific areas for efficiency.

Q314 **Graham Stringer:** Do you not have areas identified now?

**Juliet Chua:** We can already identify areas where you can de-duplicate specific teams. Our intention is to have the majority of teams integrated by spring or April next year, so we will have worked that piece forward, but we also need to do that in the context of our spending round outcome.

Q315 **Graham Stringer:** When will you decide on senior posts and what the balance will be between those people who have come from DFID and those who have come from the Foreign Office?

**Sir Philip Barton:** We have appointed the director general. We had the senior leadership in place from 2 September so that the Department could put in place the proper corporate governance around that. We are now in the process of moving to a new director structure. We are making sure that one of the risks of mergers, which is that you end up being too large at the top, is mitigated. We are having a smaller number of directors in the total of the two Departments added together. That process will run over the next month.



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On where people come from, we are not going to have quotas or allocations; we will have a set of jobs that require a set of skills, and we will want to make sure we have the most talented people in those jobs from the right backgrounds. Some jobs will have a development focus or background; other jobs may have a particular geographic focus with less development expertise, or a thematic focus on security, for example. We will want the right people.

As for the vision of the Department, we do not want people thinking whether X or Y came from a DFID or FCO background, but whether that person has the right skills for the job. That will be the approach to appointments overall.

Q316 **Graham Stringer:** I am sure that is sensible. How many positions have been filled so far?

**Sir Philip Barton:** Everyone has carried on doing their old jobs, as it were. That is the approach we have taken, not least to make sure we can get on with business.

We have appointed the board of nine. We will have 42 new directors. We have had to do some things from the start. For example, we have only one Secretary of State now, so there is a need for only one main private office. We have gone to one communications directorate.

I cannot give you an absolute figure for people who have been appointed to new roles, but, as Juliet says, our ambition is to have integrated about 95% of the Department by the end of this financial year. We are stepping through that. We have done the DG level and are about to do director level. We will carry on down and look at our network overseas and how that might need to be restructured within missions where you have an ex-DFID presence as well as an ex-FCO presence.

Q317 **Graham Stringer:** I tried to follow the numbers, but well in excess of 50 senior posts have now been appointed.

**Sir Philip Barton:** Not yet, but they will be by the time we have done the directors in early December. We are doing the directors at the moment.

Q318 **Graham Stringer:** I want to ask about the aid budget, which you say will be cut by about £2.5 billion.

**Sir Philip Barton:** In this calendar year. It is less than that.

Q319 **Graham Stringer:** I understand that in previous years, because the budget was spending to a target of 0.7% of GDP, some of that went into trust funds to be spent in future. What percentage of the budget was spent in that way?

**Juliet Chua:** To understand your question, do you mean the use of multilaterals?



**Graham Stringer:** The spend in DFID this year was going into different organisations for future work. The spend in the Department hit 0.7%, but the actual cash would be spent in future. What I am trying to get at—it is not a trick question—is what will be impacted on the ground by that £2.5 billion cut. I assume there will not be enough money to put into future programmes. What was that percentage?

**Juliet Chua:** As I described, the framework with which we prioritised the reductions against essentially a worst-case scenario for GNI reduction sought to try to minimise the impact on the frontline as much as we possibly could in identifying both where payments could be moved around and where the start of programmes could be postponed and shrunk.

I can send you a follow-up note on the specific multilateral aspects that you are asking about, but we will not be producing a single list of programmes at this point. What we will do is publish, as we always do, a full breakdown of the detailed ODA spends for this year as part of the statistical release on international development next year. That will set out where the spend has gone at that point. Because programmes carry on changing year, for very good reasons in terms of the development impact—our portfolio continues to move all the way through the year—I suspect I may not be able to give you a definitive answer as to what that picture looks like for this year until after the year end, but we can certainly follow up.

**Graham Stringer:** I look forward to getting two letters.

Q320 **Royston Smith:** To follow on from Graham's points about staff, I want to ask about contract and pay harmonisation in the new Department. How do you intend to harmonise the pay, terms and conditions of both Departments?

**Sir Philip Barton:** Our aim will be to equalise in a way that is positive for staff and level up, but how you go about that is complicated. It will take a bit of time to work through issues about whether or not people of particular grades are at the same level and how we go about it in practice, because that will be the principle behind it.

**Juliet Chua:** This is clearly complex work that we need to do systematically, and we have started that work. Both Departments, as they came together, had different arrangements and slightly different variations in allowances, and they started from a different position in terms of pay structure. All of that is within the overall civil service approach to pay, so we are now starting the complex process of doing detailed work and will need to engage with our staff as we do that.

Q321 **Royston Smith:** My next question was going to be about levelling up, but Sir Philip answered that. How will it be possible for this merger to be cost-neutral if, when you merge contracts, you are going to do it by levelling up?



**Sir Philip Barton:** There are some choices we can make. We have been clear and honest with staff that the overall organisation will not, in total, be as large as the two organisations put together. That is already reflected in what I have said about the senior levels. Probably next year we will need to work through what the overall people plan is for the organisation—what people we need at what levels and with what expertise across the board, both at home and overseas.

There are also some ways in which we can reduce our pay costs in where we do our work. Some places are more expensive than others. We have to work through all of that. There are some ways in which we can reduce our overall pay bill costs that will help to answer your question as to how we will be able to afford a levelling-up approach overall.

Q322 **Royston Smith:** You have said that you will be looking at it over the next year. Does that have a timescale? My initial question was when you expected to complete it. When do you expect to have it completed?

**Sir Philip Barton:** The way it will work is that we will have our one-year spending settlement shortly. We are seeing that very much as the first year of a three-year approach to the overall resources of the Department. We will spend time between now and the end of this financial year looking at the overall structures and putting in place integration. That will allow us to look at where we need to do work and who is doing that work.

From there you can move on to, “Okay. This is the size of the workforce we need; these are the people we need; this is the overall approach we will take.” Probably the financial year beyond that—2021-22—would be the point at which we work through the terms and conditions issues and look to put in place the new arrangements. That is the sort of timescale we are talking about.

Q323 **Neil Coyle:** Thank you both for joining us today, and congratulations on your new role. As part of that role, you will have to work with a range of stakeholders, including the NGOs and CSOs who were surprised and even aggrieved at the disappearance of the Department for International Development, and doubly surprised to be told that they were consulted in advance of that disappearance. How are you working with the sector to restore their trust and rebuild their confidence?

**Sir Philip Barton:** I have been very keen to make sure that I am engaging with the sector. I have done that both through contacts with international organisations but also through talking, for example, to the Bond group, and I will carry on engaging with the sector in a systematic way.

As a Department, we will want to continue the very productive relationships that DFID had with the sector and carry on working in partnership with them, because that is a way in which we can achieve more in our shared objectives in the development space.

Q324 **Neil Coyle:** I am glad you mentioned Bond specifically because, after the



Foreign Secretary appeared before us on 6 October and told us that Bond in particular and others had been consulted in advance of the merger, Bond publicly claimed that that was not true. Other CSOs and NGOs were saying that their reputation had been damaged by the implication that they had agreed or supported the merger.

The Foreign Secretary was given the chance to correct the record in that meeting but chose to say that the sector had been engaged in advance. The Committee followed up that issue in correspondence and received this response yesterday, which says, "We have engaged with a range of stakeholders, including...NGOs and...CSOs on the creation of the" new FCDO. "...this included a roundtable meeting between FCDO Minister, Baroness Sugg, and 16 organisations, including Bond, which represents more than 400 organisations." Can you tell us when that meeting occurred and what the agenda was?

**Sir Philip Barton:** I do not have in front of me the precise date of the meeting. It was some time before 2 September, before the launch of the new Department.

Q325 **Neil Coyle:** The only meeting that seems to be referred to in correspondence is the one on 12 June. I hope you can confirm to the Committee, if you do not know right now—it is a shame that this letter was received only yesterday—if that is the meeting being referred to, what the agenda was and what the minutes are. I was told that there was no mention of the merger in that meeting, and that the agenda of that meeting was on Covid response and cuts to the Department for International Development only. Perhaps you could provide the details of the meeting referred to in the letter yesterday and the agenda and minutes of that meeting, and of the meeting on 12 June, if that is not the meeting referred to by the Foreign Secretary.

**Sir Philip Barton:** I am very happy to do that.

**Neil Coyle:** Thank you very much.

Q326 **Claudia Webbe:** I want to ask a little more about staffing. In your response to our merger report, you noted that a number of former DFID staff would not have met the FCO's nationality requirements. Has a decision now been taken on nationality requirements for the FCDO?

**Sir Philip Barton:** We made sure that the colleagues whom we wanted to carry on working in the Department could do so. We unreserved the roles that they were holding so they could continue their work. The Foreign Secretary is considering our approach going forward and working it through so that, as soon as we can, we can inform the staff concerned of where we are.

Q327 **Chair:** I am aware that a nationality requirement was introduced a number of years ago, which means that to have access to top-secret information a member of staff must be solely British. Is that correct?



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**Sir Philip Barton:** You need to distinguish between whether a Department is reserved overall as a Department and whether you can, as a matter of nationality, have a particular level of security clearance. They are often related, but they are not quite the same thing in law and the rules. They are slightly different. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office was a reserved Department for UK nationals. DFID, along with much of the remainder of the civil service, was an unreserved Department. There is a separate thing around security clearance, particularly at the higher levels.

Q328 **Chair:** Coming straight back to the reserved Department point, is the FCDO a reserved Department?

**Sir Philip Barton:** The Foreign Secretary is now considering what the position of the Department should be.

Q329 **Chair:** Is your advice going to be that it should be? Is your advice going to be that second passport holders are allowed to have access to security information?

**Sir Philip Barton:** We have given full advice to the Foreign Secretary.

Q330 **Chair:** I am asking what the advice is.

**Sir Philip Barton:** I am telling you that we have given full advice to him.

Q331 **Chair:** You are not answering the question. Up until the merger of the Department, the Foreign Office as a reserved Department did not allow dual passport holders. Is that correct?

**Sir Philip Barton:** That is not correct. I am confident that you can be a dual passport holder in the Foreign Office.

Q332 **Chair:** You could be?

**Sir Philip Barton:** Yes.

Q333 **Chair:** I was told that, up until recently, dual passport holders, including Irish nationals, had restrictions on the work that they could do.

**Sir Philip Barton:** You need to distinguish between employment and security clearance. If you have particular connections to foreign countries, that can impact on security clearance. Those could be through dual nationality or they could be through marriage or other reasons. That is not the same as whether you can work in the Department.

Q334 **Chair:** The reason the Irish question is particularly important is that there are some British citizens who, by treaty, are specifically recognised as dual nationals. I refer, of course, to citizens of the United Kingdom born in Northern Ireland who, under the Good Friday accord, have the right to dual national status and for one nationality not to impinge on the other. Are you going to ensure that that is respected in the appointment status of Foreign Office staff?



**Sir Philip Barton:** With apologies, you are now getting into detailed questions of nationality and our security rules, and things that really matter to some of our staff. I do not want to give you an answer on the hoof to a detailed question like that. Our overall approach, and this is reflected in the advice to the Foreign Secretary, is to do our level best to make sure that everyone's reasonable career aspirations as they came into the merged Department can continue.

Q335 **Chair:** It is traditional for the Committee to choose how it asks the questions, and to ask specific questions when it chooses to do so. In this case, a specific question is important because one of the biggest political issues that this House and this country is going to be debating is the status of Northern Ireland and the implications for the new US Administration. The treatment of Northern Ireland citizens of the United Kingdom is going to have implications on various other elements because we know that this White House and this President is going to have a particular interest in that.

We also know that that treatment is going to have an implication on the Good Friday accord and respect for it, and we know that is going to have an implication for the European negotiations. You may see it as a detail. I do not. I see it as fundamental to the way the British state treats British citizens, and that is why I ask very specifically whether or not you see UK citizens from Northern Ireland as full citizens of Northern Ireland, including their treaty rights, which means their right to have an Irish passport.

**Sir Philip Barton:** I apologise. I did not mean at all to imply that that was not a very important question. I simply said I did not want to give an answer I was not fully confident in. That was all. I recognise its importance, and I do not want to say something now that I have to correct later. With apologies, I would much prefer to write back to you on that point. It is not that I do not understand the importance of the question.

**Chair:** I look forward to the letter. Thank you.

Q336 **Claudia Webbe:** You have asked a critical question, Chair. It would be helpful if we had some understanding of when the advice about nationality can be made known to us. We all know there are huge differences between DFID and FCO arrangements in relation to nationality, but it is really important that we understand what your advice will be. If you are not able to outline that here now, when can you tell this Committee what your advice is? That is quite critical. Has a decision been taken on what will happen to former DFID staff on fixed-term contracts?

**Juliet Chua:** DFID and the FCO had quite different models. As we come together as a single organisation, about 15% of our staff are on what is called interchange—secondments, loans and fixed-term contracts.



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Overall, 5% are on fixed-term contracts. The majority of those are on the former FCO side.

In the summer, at the point when the merger was announced, for the reasons we have discussed in terms of overall expectations of the shape and size of the organisation, we took the decision to pause permanent recruitment while we worked through the set of questions about what the shape and size of the organisation would be, anticipating that the Department would need to get smaller. We recognise there are incredibly talented, diverse and skilled staff among that cohort. We have made sure that the opportunities are there for them to bid in for roles this autumn, and indeed lots of our fixed-term contract staff are bidding in.

We have also extended contracts where they are in business-critical roles and will be supporting those who want to be redeployed across Government as well. That has been an area of high priority for us.

On your question about timescales for the non-UK national decision, I recognise this is a high priority for our staff. It affects a significant number of staff within the former DFID—over 150 staff—so we will seek to try to work this through rapidly and be able to come back. I have been in regular touch with the non-UK staff within the former DFID through this period to keep them updated, because I recognise that they are keen to know what the answer will be. That is high in our collective mind.

**Q337 Claudia Webbe:** About 200 DFID staff are EU nationals and do not have any assurances about their future. I am sure, like staff on fixed-term contracts, they are watching this with some degree of anticipation and anxiety. The quicker this Committee and the staff can get an understanding of the advice and what will happen going forward, the better. I cannot stress that enough.

In your response earlier, you talked about the number of staff recruited to senior posts. My colleague was able to determine that you were talking about just over 50 staff. Can you tell me what the diversity of that recruitment is and how it reflects the diversity of the prior DFID and FCO team, and what the diversity of the new FCDO will begin to look like?

**Sir Philip Barton:** The 50 include the directors whom we are in the process of recruiting, and we will be doing so over the next month. In terms of answering your question about the diversity of that group, we have not yet completed the selection process, so I cannot give you specifics.

The one thing I would say is that we are absolutely determined to make sure that we have a diverse senior leadership in terms of gender and BAME representation. Senior appointments at DG level are reflective of an increasing diversity in terms of BAME in particular. If you look at our overall board and who is on our board, it is in a reasonable position. It can be better on gender, for example, and we will want to carry on reflecting that both in how we do further senior appointments and how



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we think about building our leadership pipeline as the Department develops over the years ahead.

Q338 **Claudia Webbe:** To be a bit more specific, if you can, how many people from African-Caribbean, Asian or minority ethnic communities are on the board?

**Sir Philip Barton:** At DG level?

**Claudia Webbe:** Whichever way you want to play it. How many?

**Sir Philip Barton:** There are three out of nine.

**Chair:** So it is a third.

Q339 **Claudia Webbe:** I think you said that 42 directors have been recruited to date. How many are from African, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds?

**Sir Philip Barton:** I apologise. I was not clear when I spoke to Graham Stringer. There are 42. Those are the people we are recruiting now. I cannot answer your question because we have not completed the recruitment. I apologise if I confused the Committee earlier with the number 50. The 42 part of that are still being recruited. That is not completed.

Q340 **Claudia Webbe:** Are you able to say how many have been recruited thus far? You said that you are not going to implement targets. You want people to be appointed on merit. What does that mean in terms of how many have been recruited?

**Sir Philip Barton:** We are doing them together so that we can be fair to all the existing people at that level. We have not yet completed any of those recruitments. It is a process we are kicking off now and will have completed by early December.

Q341 **Claudia Webbe:** Will you be able to send this Committee a report once you have completed that?

**Sir Philip Barton:** Yes, we can let you have the details.

Q342 **Claudia Webbe:** What percentage of DFID staff left after the merger was announced, and what plans are in place to replace them?

**Juliet Chua:** Staff retention is clearly a critical issue for us, as Sir Philip has described. The vision for the new Department is one where staff progress and develop, where we are able to attract really world-class talent and where we retain a really strong development and diplomacy capability. We are watching and monitoring our staff data to understand the risk of retention.

When we have spoken to other partners in Government who have gone through a merger process, and when we have talked and drawn on the



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experience of machinery of government elsewhere, clearly retention is absolutely critical.

We only saw a small number of staff leave in September, since the merger began—in the tens—and, when we look at the reasons, that looks within the range of very normal attrition as contracts or loans come to an end. We will continue to monitor it closely and make sure that we think about it as we work our way through the processes that you have just discussed with Sir Philip. We are absolutely thinking about talent all the way through this and ensuring that we think about retention of our staff as we go through it as well.

Q343 **Claudia Webbe:** Can you summarise the steps you are taking to make sure that FCDO retains former FCO and DFID staff?

**Sir Philip Barton:** In terms of the existing workforce, in a sense that is where we are recruiting from as we fill senior positions. That is our starting point.

The other thing I would say, particularly in relation to development colleagues who used to work in DFID, is that there is a key role, including for me as the permanent under-secretary, in making sure that we demonstrate the value we place on their profession, which is development work, and that we champion that, value it and highlight it. Also, as we design how the new organisation is going to work, a young new entrant to the Department who wants to work in development can see a career trajectory for them up through the organisation and can quite clearly see how, by having development as a career anchor, they can prosper, just as we will want to do that for people with diplomatic skills, programme skills and other skills. That is also part of how we retain our talent. It is by showing career pathways and showing real value and appreciation for the work, expertise and value that that brings.

Q344 **Claudia Webbe:** How different were the cultures of the two Departments, and how are you seeking to merge them into the FCDO?

**Sir Philip Barton:** The honest answer is that we are trying to create something new that builds on the two cultures and the two strengths, as it were, of the predecessor organisations. Both the FCO and DFID, before FCDO came into being, did fantastic work internationally. The FCO had a reputation for being agile and for being a Department that worked much more in the here and now. One of DFID's strengths was stepping back and looking at the long term and how you can affect long-term change to improve the lives of the most disadvantaged around the world.

As we build a new culture, it is building both of those things in and making it both long term and agile in our approach.

Clearly, there are then some people differences. Juliet and I came from different legacy Departments. One of the strengths of our leadership team is that we are all a bit different, and we now come together and are building a team in a leadership sense and learning from one another, and



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really making sure that, as we put the new Department together, we are not privileging one side or the other. We are putting in place something new and better than either was before.

**Juliet Chua:** I am glad you raised this. We have talked quite a lot about the technical end of the merger—the actions around bringing together merged teams and all the technical end of it. Culture is absolutely at the heart of this, and it is one of the things that comes through very strongly in all the evidence about how you successfully merge organisations. It is something we paid attention to.

We had a significant conversation and engagement activity over the summer that was about both the organisations, in advance of the merger, talking about what they wanted and what they saw in terms of culture. Both organisations had high levels of engagement—staff who come to work because they passionately believe in what they do—and bring together staff who enjoy international work and who think it is important and that there is an opportunity to act in the UK national interest across the board in achieving significant outcomes.

We had more in common than we might have assumed at the beginning of the summer, as we came together as an organisation. The work now on culture, as Philip has described, is really to think through the specific decisions we will make about systems and processes that will create an environment in which staff operate, but also talking a lot about the opportunity, the shared objectives and how we do that work together.

One thing staff particularly talked about was an inclusive culture. That came loudly from both sides of the organisation as it came together. It will continue to be a priority for us.

Q345 **Claudia Webbe:** I would like to concretise this a bit more. In July, you will be aware that Nick Dyer told the International Development Committee that he had spoken to his Canadian counterpart and that she had underlined the importance of core training in finance and accountability and accelerating cultural change. Is this taking place?

**Juliet Chua:** Financial accountability is critical. We are a Department that spends a significant amount of public money and will ensure that everybody who is responsible for finance and programme spend is fully skilled and supported to do that. That is critical.

We made a decision this year, as we came together, to maintain the legacy DFID and FCO systems. The existing controls were clearly in place and the accountability lines were absolutely explicit. As we go through our restructure, we will be establishing a new set of accountability lines through the organisation and ensuring that anybody who is a budget holder or is making key finance or programme decisions is supported.

I talked earlier about the International Academy training that has been put on as individuals are getting ready to deploy as heads of mission or



as deputy heads. There is a new section of that training looking at things like strategic programming, and we will look at financial training across the board as part of our new finance operating model as we plan for that change and move off the legacy DFID and FCO core finance systems. I strongly agree with Nick.

- Q346 **Claudia Webbe:** The independent aid watchdog, ICAI, which reports on the quality of aid spend, gave an amber-red warning to the conflict stability and security fund in 2018, which is mainly financed and managed by the FCO. It specifically said, "There is little reliable data on whether projects are receiving their intended results or delivering value for money."

Do you have concerns that, if the FCO has managed aid money poorly in the past, it will be equipped to have its budget increased up to tenfold under this merger? In this change of culture, what do you say about the ability to train diplomats to be project managers like the brilliant managers in DFID?

**Sir Philip Barton:** One of the opportunities of the new Department is to bring together the expertise in programming that former DFID colleagues have with the agile way in which we have used things like the CSSF in places like Syria, for example, to be really nimble in supporting our objectives. There is already a cadre of people from the former FCO who are good at programme and project management, but I am sure there are also areas we can improve.

As we come together as a new Department, and, as Juliet described, we bring together our financial and programme management processes in a single aligned process for the whole Department, we can build on the strengths coming from both parts but, in particular, from ex-DFID's deep programming expertise.

- Q347 **Alicia Kearns:** As the number of multilateral organisations that the FCDO is going to be responsible for increases, are there plans to streamline the processes and mechanisms of funding for those multilaterals? Are you confident that we have sufficient learnings across the different teams sat in different multilateral posts on how to tackle the techniques that we see deployed by states that are hostile to those multilaterals? They use the same techniques and tactics in every multilateral, but I am not confident that we have the inter-post conversations taking place to make sure that we are shoring up our multilaterals at the same time and learning from each other.

**Sir Philip Barton:** You are right to flag that, as the FCDO, the organisation as a whole is responsible for the relationship with more multilaterals than either legacy Department was. There are two things I would say. First, these organisations are different and we need to recognise that, but there are some things that we can learn from the approaches we have taken. In particular, one is that we can make sure, for example, how we have used our funding to try to support the changes



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we want to see. We can make sure we do that systematically across all of our relationships with multilaterals.

Was the second part of your question around the way hostile states approach these multilateral organisations and what we can do to support them?

**Q348 Alicia Kearns:** Making sure that the multilateral posts are talking to each other. Rather than leaving the team in New York to focus on, for example, how the Russians, Chinese, Venezuelans and Cubans are trying to undermine the UN, we make sure they are talking to the posts at WTO, Interpol and so on. It does not seem as if there is any shared learning as all these multilaterals are under attack, but they are all seeing the same tactics being deployed against them.

**Sir Philip Barton:** There has been shared learning. One of the things we have talked about is how precisely we do that both in terms of learning what other countries are trying to do against our interests but also making sure that, as we agree UK objectives and priorities, we pursue them across the waterfront of our multilateral relationships. We will ensure that in our new director structure, as we put that in place and bed it in, there is exactly the co-ordination that you are describing across all the multilateral relationships the FCDO is responsible for.

**Q349 Alicia Kearns:** It would be fantastic if you wrote to the Committee to talk about how the different posts in different multilaterals are going to work together to counter those threats—they face the same ones—once that work has been undertaken.

**Sir Philip Barton:** Sure, I am very happy to.

**Q350 Alicia Kearns:** I am really concerned about the current approach to atrocity prevention. I must declare that I am a former FCO staffer working in Iraq and Syria and across the middle east. When there is an emergence of mass human rights abuses, all of a sudden that country team—the in-country team, as well as the posts in London—is suddenly expected to become an expert in genocide prevention or human rights atrocities prevention. That is very difficult for a team to do at speed. Surely it makes sense for us to have some sort of central atrocity-prevention unit that can have a legal expert, an open-source intelligence expert, a programming expert, an aid expert—people who can support a team—to be able quickly to skill up to what they need, rather than leaving teams to struggle and try to find their own way to create quick reaction tools that prevent mass human rights atrocities.

**Sir Philip Barton:** That is what we try to do through the central resource we have, focusing on human rights in a generic way and not just in a geographical way. It is absolutely to make sure that, as a particular part of our global effort is faced with those issues, they have the best expertise that we have available to us on hand to help and advise them.

**Q351 Alicia Kearns:** The human rights directorate, at least during my time,



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was never brought into any meeting in any team in which I worked in the Balkans, Africa or the middle east to advise. The human rights directorate did standalone, separate pieces about promoting human rights or big campaigns, or would provide advice on wider FCO policy. They never worked on programming or gave specific help for country teams to develop their policies to react immediately on the ground to prevent or reduce the effect of an unfolding human rights atrocity.

**Sir Philip Barton:** We are all about coherence and making the most of the expertise we have, so we will absolutely want to ensure that what you have described will happen in future.

Q352 **Alicia Kearns:** On LGBT rights and making sure we are promoting them abroad, are we doing enough to advance the protection of LGBT human rights and, in particular, the banning of so-called conversion therapy, particularly in overseas territories and Commonwealth countries where we have a particular duty to try to protect and advance the rights of LGBT communities?

**Sir Philip Barton:** This is an important issue. Particularly in the overseas territories, but also in our relationships with Commonwealth and other countries, we have pursued the whole range of LGBT rights, and we will carry on doing that.

Q353 **Alicia Kearns:** It would definitely be of interest to a number of the members of this Committee to understand what specifically the FCDO is doing, particularly in overseas territories and on the issue of conversion therapy, because there are far too many countries where being gay and living your life as you should rightly have the freedom to do so is highly criminalised.

**Sir Philip Barton:** Absolutely.

Q354 **Alicia Kearns:** We will wait to hear from you on that.

A number of teams across the FCDO are doing work to counter hostile threats and activities. What comprehensive centralised approach do we have to make sure that we are being as effective as possible? The problem we face is that our enemies and those who seek to undermine and hurt us are very good—in autocratic states, in particular—at having all potential levers and influence available to them and unabashedly using them.

It does not seem that we have that centralised operational model as yet where we recognise all the potential levers and utilise them not just within the FCDO but across Government. What assurances can you give that, on countering hostile state activity, we are where we need to be?

**Sir Philip Barton:** Across Government, the Cabinet Office has led—I do not want to use the term “hostile state”—on our work to try to make sure that we have the capabilities across the whole of Government, not just within the FCDO, to address these issues.



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The FCDO has taken a geographic lens to this. With Russia, for example, you have your Russia expertise on top of the technical expertise you need in the kinds of things you can do and need to do to protect yourselves to make us resilient and to counter hostile state activity.

That is the most effective way of working in that space. We best protect ourselves by combining the generic ways of working in countering hostile states with the geographic expertise around what we are working on with or against a particular country. That is the approach the FCDO will take going forward.

Q355 **Alicia Kearns:** Do you think it is working? Do you think we are effectively combating hostile state activity?

**Sir Philip Barton:** I think it is working in some areas. It is probably work in progress in other areas.

Q356 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** What is the Government's policy on Nord Stream 2? From my reading of it, it seems that the Government do not have a policy on Nord Stream 2.

**Sir Philip Barton:** The Government have been clear that they have concerns about Nord Stream 2 and the position that Ukraine will be left in if Nord Stream 2 is completed.

Q357 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Admittedly, this was under the previous—

**Chair:** Stewart, you are very difficult to understand.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Is that volume or accent?

**Chair:** It is purely volume, which is very unusual for you.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** I recall—this was under a previous Conservative Government, admittedly—Sir Alan Duncan, a Foreign Office Minister, responding to a debate on Nord Stream 2. It was made quite clear by Ministers at that point—I am not aware of any change—that they did not regard the issue of Nord Stream 2 as a major priority. The reality is that, if this was a Chinese-owned gas pipeline, it would be a priority. Why have the Government not been more vocal and active in their opposition to Nord Stream 2? Is there something I do not understand?

**Sir Philip Barton:** As the permanent under-secretary of the FCDO, I want to talk about the Department and the policy now rather than under a previous Government. The Government do not support the idea of Nord Stream 2 in terms of Ukraine's energy security. In the end, it is for others to take their decisions around Nord Stream and how that is or is not taken forward. We will take an overall approach to that in our conversations with our European partners and other partners.

Q358 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** I understand that as the Government's chief diplomat you have to be diplomatic. This is all nonsense. This is all we hear: conversations, European partners, blah blah blah. What is the



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policy, and what will be done about it? That is what I want to know.

**Sir Philip Barton:** Our policy is to be really concerned about what this means for Ukraine.

Q359 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** That is not a policy. Being concerned is not a policy. I am concerned that I might be hit by a bus when I leave the house, but it is not a policy. I want to know what the policy is and what you are doing about it.

**Sir Philip Barton:** We are talking to our close European friends and partners about our overall concerns about the energy security of Europe but also of how Ukraine will be left if Nord Stream goes ahead.

Q360 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** It sounds like the Russians do not have much to worry about. No response?

**Sir Philip Barton:** The Russians will make their own judgments.

Q361 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** It has been a few months since the Russia report was published. What major changes can we expect in the FCDO as a result of the ISC report on Russia?

**Sir Philip Barton:** The Government have responded to the ISC in the usual way. The FCDO has been a big part of the effort over the last few years to step up our work on Russia. One of the points that the ISC made was around clear lines of accountability, and that is being done through the national security implementation group on Russia, which is led by an FCDO official. We host and actively lead a cross-departmental effort out of our Department to make sure that we are fully joined up in pursuing our Russia strategy.

Q362 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** One of the things in the ISC report was that the Government should instruct the intelligence agencies to investigate whether there was any interference in the EU membership referendum in 2016, but the Government have refused to do that. When you say the Government have taken the report seriously, why are they choosing to discard that bit? That is a political choice, surely

**Sir Philip Barton:** We are not aware of any evidence of successful intervention in the European Union referendum.

Q363 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** The Committee said that is because the Government did not look for it, but they should look for it. My question to you is: why did they discard that advice from the report?

**Sir Philip Barton:** The Government have responded to the report, but, on the point you make around the EU referendum in 2016, no evidence was seen of successful interference.

Q364 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Sir Philip, you are a clever man. You are much smarter than I am. The report says that the reason there is no evidence is that the Government did not look for it. What the Committee has recommended in the report is that the Government go and look for it.



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I am asking you why the Government are discarding that recommendation of the ISC.

**Sir Philip Barton:** The Government have responded to the report in the normal way. There is no evidence of interference in the EU referendum. The agencies and all the other bodies who are responsible for the integrity of our electoral system, and responsible for spotting, detecting and countering hostile activities of this kind, are absolutely on the lookout for this. The Government are taking steps, including through legislation, to increase the protections of our electoral processes.

Q365 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Okay, I detect I am not getting anywhere here.

We can expect and are already experiencing a big Russian campaign of disinformation with regard to a Covid vaccine. I hope that the UK Government's efforts are going to be slightly more robust than their concern about Nord Stream 2. Can you talk the Committee through how your Department is working on that?

**Sir Philip Barton:** We will work with the partners we work with, in Government and outside, to counter disinformation. We will do that through being really clear on what is accurate information and we will do it by calling out false information, and by other means as well.

Q366 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Do the Government view RT, formerly known as Russia Today, as a disinformation output on behalf of the Russian state?

**Sir Philip Barton:** In the UK, Ofcom is responsible for regulating—

Q367 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** I know that. I am asking what the Government—

**Sir Philip Barton:** It is for them to make judgments around broadcasters and not for the Government.

Q368 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Do you think it is an honest news channel? Will you go home tonight to watch it as an honest news channel?

**Sir Philip Barton:** No, I will not go home to watch RT as an honest news channel.

Q369 **Royston Smith:** We have spoken to—I have and others have—all sorts of people, and other countries seem to have handled the Covid pandemic better than we have. We have had the Foreign Secretary in front of us twice, and we have had your predecessor in front of us, and now you. Talking this morning to the Foreign Minister from Taiwan, where they have had really low instances of Covid and particularly low death rates thankfully, their answer was, broadly, the hands, face, space issue. They started early with masks, early with sanitisation and they secured their borders. We were late with the sanitisation; we were late with the masks; and perhaps we were too late with the borders. Would that be a fair



representation of how we have handled Covid?

**Sir Philip Barton:** I will not do something that I am not qualified to talk about, which is the Government's response in terms of medical expertise around Covid-19. I will happily talk about what the FCDO has done in this space. We have used our global network to make sure that, as the UK Government and the Governments of the different parts of the Union are taking decisions around the UK's overall approach, they have the best pot of information about what other countries have done and an understanding of the situation in other countries, and we have been able to learn from overall international experience.

Q370 **Royston Smith:** Did we take advice from Japan, Taiwan and others that did better than we did, and did we act on any of that advice?

**Sir Philip Barton:** We have put a big effort into making sure that, as the relevant UK authorities look at what we should do and the choices that we should make in the United Kingdom, they have the best possible information and analysis around what other countries have done, how they have responded and what the impact of that has been, and we fed that into the policy-making process.

Q371 **Royston Smith:** To take a country at random, Pakistan, for example, has done better, or appears to have done better, than us. What is the reporting mechanism? How would that information be gathered? Where would it be reported to, and how would that be acted upon?

**Sir Philip Barton:** I hesitate to make international comparisons, but, in terms of a country like Pakistan, the Foreign Secretary covered this in his letter to you. Reporting from our high commission in Islamabad will feed back into the FCDO, and that will be fed into those in the UK system who are looking at these issues, such as PHE and others. DHSC is the Department with lead responsibility, and it is the centre of our Government in the information and analysis that we get from around the world, Pakistan and other countries.

Q372 **Royston Smith:** We have had pandemics before. We have had epidemics before. We have a plan. We always had a plan. We need to dust it off and put it into practice. It has now been shown that the plan is not fit for purpose. The next pandemic that comes along may be far more severe than the one we are living through currently. What lessons are we going to learn, first, for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and, secondly, to ensure that, in the event that we have another pandemic—and we almost certainly will—we are much better prepared next time?

**Sir Philip Barton:** We absolutely want to be a lesson-learning organisation. I know my predecessor on the FCO side appeared before you in response to the Committee's report on the repatriation of British nationals, and we have done our best and are doing our best to learn the lessons from that. We have put in place increased capability for call handling, for example. We have retained a repatriation unit who will build a long-term capability to make sure that, if we need to step up, step in



and charter aircraft to repatriate British nationals from around the world again, we have a standing ability to do that. We are trying to learn other lessons from our response, as the FCDO, to that aspect of the crisis.

Q373 **Chris Bryant:** We have been doing work on overseas territories for some time. Where are we on financial transparency and the requirement that their beneficial ownership registers be public?

**Sir Philip Barton:** If I remember rightly, they have now all signed up to that. You are about to correct me.

Q374 **Chris Bryant:** I do not know. I hope you know more than I do, because you are in the job. Will you write to us to clarify that one?

May I ask you about other European capitals? We are leaving the European Union. None the less, what happens in Paris, Berlin, Madrid, Rome and so on matters to us both in terms of our trade and in any issues that we try to pursue, whether it is the Iran deal, peace in the middle east or, for that matter, Nord Stream or whatever. What is our strategy for European capitals now?

**Sir Philip Barton:** As part of the global uplift we talked about earlier, some of that has gone into reinforcing our network of posts across Europe. They are going to have a fundamental role to play in our relationships with European countries going forward. We are investing in the sorts of places you would expect across Europe, and they will have a key role to play in our bilateral relationships.

Q375 **Chris Bryant:** Lots of foreign policy issues get decided within the European Union, and we are obviously not in the room any more. How are we going to make sure that we get them to align with us or do what we want?

**Sir Philip Barton:** It is a perfectly legitimate and good question. We will do two things. We will influence Brussels and, through our UK mission to the European Union, the member states of the EU as they come together on issues across the board, but in a co-ordinated and joined-up way we will influence on those same issues in capitals. There will be some issues that we may pursue with one state, with one or two states, or with a group. There will be some issues that are pan-European or pan-EU, and we will try to do that both in Brussels and across all the capitals, and we will work in that way.

Q376 **Chris Bryant:** Is there a plan? I could have said that without being a member of the FCDO.

**Sir Philip Barton:** We have put in increased resources. It comes down to a particular dossier, for want of a better word. Who are the key players, for example, on Iran? It is a very important issue. We work very closely with France and Germany because we have a particular role with France and Germany on the Iran deal.



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We talked earlier, for example, about policy towards Russia. We have built a set of relationships with countries like Poland, who have quite a similar view to the UK, and we make common cause with them and work with them, including in seeking to influence the position of the European Union. It is issue specific.

Q377 **Chris Bryant:** It is dossier by dossier.

**Sir Philip Barton:** It is. We have thought it through in terms of the key dossiers where we know we will want to influence our European neighbours going forward.

Q378 **Chris Bryant:** Are there any plans for doing a UK-France-Germany line up? Historically, once you had those three countries lined up—

**Sir Philip Barton:** We will be seeking to work closely with France and Germany both individually and together. I have cited Iran as one example, but I am sure there will be more.

Q379 **Chris Bryant:** On the US, I would be delighted to know what the strategy is for even getting in the door. Over the last few days, Britain has been one of the slowest countries to congratulate Joe Biden on winning, with the double-headed tweet from the Foreign Secretary, and now this rather sad cock-up from Downing Street. You have had Lord Kilclooney—he may not have much respect around here, but in international media he is regarded as a British lawmaker and a Member of the House of Lords—using racist language about the Vice President-elect. What is our strategy now? Are we going to offer the President a state visit within his first year?

**Sir Philip Barton:** In terms of contact with the incoming Administration, we need to remember that they will be cautious in their international context in light of the experience of the Trump Administration when it came into office.

Q380 **Chris Bryant:** Could you unpack that? I did not understand it.

**Sir Philip Barton:** There are rules in the United States about contact with foreign Governments.

Q381 **Chris Bryant:** Because of Trump and Russia, you mean.

**Sir Philip Barton:** Before you are formally in office. There are rules about that.

**Chair:** They have spoken to the Prime Minister of Canada.

Q382 **Chris Bryant:** And the Taoiseach, but not the British Prime Minister.

**Sir Philip Barton:** I am sure a call with the Prime Minister will happen. The key to this, if you look at the international policy agenda of the UK Government and the likely international policy agenda of the US Administration under President Biden, is that there is a whole set of



issues where we share values and objectives, and those are the issues on which we will work very closely with the US Administration.

Q383 **Chris Bryant:** I get this going dossier by dossier, which is, I guess, the strategy for America as well. A lot of international diplomacy is about personal relationships. Every diplomat knows that. You know that from your own previous experience—the people you got to know and you were able, therefore, to ring easily. It is about a certain amount of flair and good timing, and things like that. I just do not see any of that on the horizon in terms of our relations with the United States of America so far. I disagreed with giving President Trump a state visit within his first year. I thought that was a sign of desperation, as we had never done it previously. We had never done it for any previous President. What is in our box of fireworks? Is there anything?

**Sir Philip Barton:** The United States is our closest and most important ally, and that runs through pretty much all of our international objectives, from the highest, most important security objectives, all the way through to the soft side and global issues like climate change. We will carry on having a really deep, broad and important strategic relationship with the United States. As parties of Government in either country change, there are some things that go up in terms of their importance to one country and there are some things that go down. Similarly, as leaders change, the dynamics can change as well, and we have seen that over history. The fundamentals of the importance of the relationship and our ability to work really closely with the US Administration do not change.

**Chris Bryant:** But they do. That just feels like relying on inertia to carry us through. Sorry, that is not a question. I will shut up. I have finished. I am very depressed.

Q384 **Chair:** I will take you through four final points. First of all, Ghana's constitutional reforms are being done under the new democratic President, and it looks like female genital mutilation may be removed from the constitution. Can you assure me that you are going to be in full communication not only with the Ghanaian Government but other Governments that have this practice to make sure that all pressure is made by our high commissioners and our ambassadors to outlaw this practice?

**Sir Philip Barton:** Absolutely.

Q385 **Chair:** Thank you. Could you give us a very brief update on how you see Britain's role in any peace treaty in Nagorno-Karabakh?

**Sir Philip Barton:** We have been pressing both sides to end the violence and end the conflict. That was the immediate need. We will watch closely how things develop in the latest news. We are keen, together with our Canadian partners, to see the Minsk arrangements reinvigorated. We want to see a pathway to sustainable peace, and we will watch closely what regional actors who have been involved do next in terms of, for example, presence on the ground and how that plays out.



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Q386 **Chair:** Thank you. It is something we are almost certainly going to be coming back to.

One of the issues that has come up recently is the elections to various UN bodies, and the UN Human Rights Council has raised its head again. There are many members, and I understand that this is in some ways different from many other UN bodies that have more restricted membership.

This one, rather laughably, includes gross human rights violators from China, whose detention camps in Xinjiang have been well reported, to Venezuela and Cuba. I can go on. Rather extraordinarily, they are summoning various different countries—democratic and law-abiding states, including the United States—and seem to spend a massively disproportionate amount of their effort on Israel. Can you assure me that the Foreign Office is going to look hard at the membership and support it gives to the UN Human Rights Council in engaging partners to make sure it actually does its job?

**Sir Philip Barton:** The FCDO will want to make sure that the Human Rights Council can be as impactful as it can be around the world in, first, shining a spotlight on genuine human rights abuses and abusers, and, secondly, in improving the situation.

Q387 **Chair:** Will you invest time and effort with partners to try to get some decent members on it, rather than those who seem serially to violate human rights and then use it as a whitewash?

**Sir Philip Barton:** Yes, we will want to work with partners to make sure that the membership is as good as it can be.

Q388 **Chair:** That is a very caveated approach.

Finally, you will be aware that various young people in Hong Kong have been arrested under the recently introduced national security law. What actions are Her Majesty's Government taking to seek their release and to see that the rights guaranteed under the Sino-British joint declaration are adhered to?

**Sir Philip Barton:** We are pressing the Chinese Government to rectify this. We are absolutely pressing them to release people who should not have been detained, and we have made clear our concerns.

Q389 **Chair:** Are you having any impact?

**Sir Philip Barton:** Self-evidently, they have not been released, but we are able to get a hearing.

Q390 **Alicia Kearns:** Over the last few days, we have had the expulsion of two British diplomats from Belarus, and we just announced that we will be expelling two Belarusian diplomats from the UK. What is the endgame on Belarus for the UK, and what do you think we are currently achieving in making sure that the democratic rights of the people of Belarus are respected?



**Sir Philip Barton:** The endgame for us would be fresh, free and fair elections. We have been very clear throughout that the President's elections were deeply flawed, and we have led internationally in calling that out, but also calling out the repression that has followed in terms of reactions towards peaceful protesters on the streets of Minsk and elsewhere in Belarus. You will have seen the Foreign Secretary's reaction to the initial expulsion of two of our colleagues who were expelled in a completely unacceptable and unjustifiable way. The UK has reciprocated in a proportionate way.

This is not really about the UK and Belarus. It is about what is happening in that country. Lukashenko is trying to deflect from the situation he finds himself in, where he faces a population who recognise that they were cheated at the ballot box, and we will want to carry on increasing the international pressure on him to allow proper free and fair elections so that the people of Belarus can have their vote and it can count.

Q391 **Alicia Kearns:** A Bellingcat report a couple of weeks ago provided the final open-source public evidence of what the Government have been saying, which is that the Russian Government were behind the attack in Salisbury. The OPCW just completed a chemical weapons inspection of Russia. Will the UK, through the FCDO, raise at the OPCW the fact that the Russian Government clearly continue to develop chemical weapons—specifically new delivery mechanisms of Novichok—and will we make sure that we continue to make the case and stand up to this egregious breach of international law?

**Sir Philip Barton:** I am absolutely confident that we will pursue Russia's approach to chemical weapons, including in the OPCW.

Q392 **Chair:** You presumably will be getting ready for the launch tomorrow of the National Security and Investment Bill, to which I am sure you had some contribution. Is that right?

**Sir Philip Barton:** The FCDO has played a big role, and we will carry on doing that. We look forward to playing our part in the Bill.

Q393 **Chair:** Thank you very much indeed for coming. You have just taken over one of the greatest jobs in Government and one of the best jobs in the world. You leave with our very best wishes and enormous thanks for the efforts that you have already put in. We look forward to seeing you again relatively soon.

Will you please pass on our huge thanks for the amazing work of the teams not just in Whitehall but, most importantly, around the world, who do so much to keep us safe and secure here at home?

**Sir Philip Barton:** Very happily. Thank you very much, Chair, and it was nice to talk to you all.

**Chair:** Thank you very much.