



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office



Department
for International
Development

16th July 2020

Tom Tugendhat MBE MP
Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Tom,

I was pleased to appear before the Committee on 30 June to give evidence on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's consular response to COVID-19. During the session I undertook to write and provide some further detail on a few of the points raised.

You were interested in seeing comparator figures for the number of UK residents overseas at the start of the COVID-19 outbreak and suggested we might provide such figures for German and French travellers. We do not have precise numbers for German and French travellers overseas at the start of the crisis. We estimate that over 1.3 million British travellers returned on commercial flights and over 38,000 on our 186 charters. A further 19,000 returned from cruise ships. Germany and France kept track of returns differently, making direct comparisons difficult.

Germany says that they have returned 58,000 German Nationals on 260 charter flights, and actively helped facilitate the return of around 200,000 more (e.g., through helping obtain landing or airspace permissions for commercial flights etc). We also estimate that we helped hundreds of thousands to return home through similar support. France says that 186,000 people returned from over 140 countries, using charters and commercial Air France flights.

The Foreign Office does not record the number of British travellers overseas, who were the focus of the repatriation operation, and there is no requirement for British nationals abroad to register with their local Embassy. The FAC agreed (in their November 2014 Report) that the move away from trying to keep track of British people abroad to making it easier to contact during a crisis was a sensible response. The FAC agreed (in its November 2014 Report) that the move away from trying to keep track of British people abroad to making it easier to contact the FCO during a crisis was a sensible response. Previous crises have taught us that people rarely choose to inform

Embassies when they leave countries, and so standing lists rapidly become out of date. We have learnt that using gov.uk, and our 24/7 contact centres, combined with our “just in time registration systems” are more effective means of helping British travellers in times of crisis.

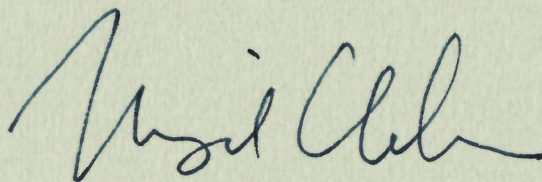
Mr Coyle enquired about the impact of COVID-19 on the Foreign Office’s consular staff and asked when we brought more staff in to work on the consular response. The Foreign Office in London redeployed staff into crisis work related to COVID-19 from January. From early March, significantly more staff were allocated into the crisis effort – by the end of April FCO HR had moved almost 1000 staff into the overall FCO COVID-19 response. This included around 60 SMS staff and some 130 staff from other government departments. Around 550 of this overall number went into the Repatriation Cell, which was staffed 24/7 (with the daily headcount at approximately 250 people at the height of the effort). A further 150 staff were allocated elsewhere in Consular Directorate. In addition to the deployment of FCO staff, 50 staff from other government departments joined the consular and repatriation response on 6 April, 21 from 27 April and 25 from 4 May. The Foreign Office also rapidly stood up a commercial call handling service to bring the call centre capacity up to 20,000 calls per day. In terms of the effect of the pandemic on our own staff, between 1 March and 30 June, there were 21 working days absence recorded relating to COVID-19 for UK based consular staff.

Mr Bryant asked about border regulations for the Channel Islands. The UK Government does not require passengers arriving at UK ports from within the Common Travel Area to complete a Public Health passenger locator form, nor to self-isolate for 14 days, providing they have been within the Common Travel Area for 14 days. This includes those travelling to the UK from the Isle of Man, Jersey and the Bailiwick of Guernsey.

Public health and related border measures in the Crown Dependencies are a matter for their respective governments. My colleague at the Ministry of Justice, Lord Keen, has been in regular contact with the Chief Ministers of Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man throughout their response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Finally, I wholeheartedly agree with your words of praise to all of the staff in the UK and around the world who have indeed “pulled a blinder” in this global repatriation effort.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nigel Adams', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Nigel Adams MP
Minister of State for Asia