

Written evidence from Sir Simon McDonald, Permanent Under-Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (AR60002)

UPDATE ON THE FCO'S DIPLOMACY 20:20 CHANGE PROGRAMME

At the Committee's oral evidence session on 22 November we discussed the FCO's Diplomacy 20:20 change programme. I promised to write with more detail once the programme had been reviewed by the FCO Management Board on 29 November.

I told staff about the first phase of these changes on 1 December. I have set out below the main elements that will drive the FCO's transformation over the next few years. As I said at the evidence session, my vision is of an FCO that is a more expert and more agile organisation, supported by a more efficient and effective platform.

Since the summer we have developed the programme under these three pillars.

Expertise

Knowledge of abroad is the FCO's unique offer to the UK. Building and deploying our expertise lies at the heart of Diplomacy 20:20. We are strengthening programme management and have appointed a new Strategic Programmes Coordinator. We have already launched the new Global Britain campaign and a cross-Whitehall soft power fund.

We're enhancing our offer to staff to help them to develop their expertise. This month we published a new Skills Statement, which sets out priority skills for the FCO to invest in between now and 2020. From January, we will reform processes such as recruitment and appointments to allow for greater recognition of skills and expertise alongside competences. Our Diplomatic Academy continues to roll out advanced level learning programmes for the skills our staff need. In October we launched FCO GLO (Global Learning Opportunities), a new digital platform bringing all our learning and development together in one place, accessible across the FCO network, on any device.

Agility

People are the FCO's most valued asset. Making our workforce more agile and flexible, while embracing diversity, is our strategic goal. The new FCO Workforce Strategy will help us to deploy, manage and develop our staff over the next four years and guide further Diplomacy 20:20 decisions in the future.

We are also making changes to the UKB promotion model to create more agility and give greater emphasis to skills, expertise and appraisal evidence alongside competences. The promotion assessment centres for our more junior grades will be replaced, with access to the next grade based on bidding for jobs, and substantive promotion coming after an assessment of performance against the competence and skills frameworks. We will keep the assessment

centre for promotion into the Senior Civil Service, but refine the process to take greater account of skills and ongoing performance.

On 2 December a new Secondment Unit launched to help promote the transition to a more permeable organisation in which outward secondment is seen as a natural part of an FCO career, and inward secondments a way of helping build our skills and capabilities.

As I mentioned in the evidence session, we have taken steps to reinforce the Europe network as part of our contribution to Brexit. By the end of this financial year we will take further decisions on the future structure, size and shape of the organisation, both overseas and in the UK.

Platform

Agility and expertise need to be underpinned by an effective platform, providing efficient services and systems that free up capacity for diplomacy. The Board on 29 November considered outline options for more efficient provision of Operational Support Services, to which we will return with worked-up business cases in 2017. Progress on Tech Overhaul continues apace, as set out in my update on FCO management issues of 17 November. We aim to provide more detail on this, and our data and digital strategies, early in the New Year.

Engagement

Our programme has been built upon engagement with staff – first through the Future FCO Review and since through the Diplomacy 20:20 workstreams. On 6 December we will launch a new committee for staff engagement that will meet monthly on Diplomacy 20:20 and other corporate issues. The committee will be chaired by Christian Turner, Director General for Middle East and Africa, and will include representation from a wide range of UK-based and local staff. Additionally, the first Board meetings in the New Year will consider the new Local Staff Charter, and a refreshed Diversity Strategy to 2020.

Taken together I believe this represents a significant package of changes. It is the first phase of a programme designed to run through to 2020 and which will result in an FCO better equipped to anticipate and respond to future challenges.

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