



## Stakeholder Survey 2006

A Report for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office from Indepen and  
Accent  
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## **Glossary**

|       |   |
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| Defra | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  |
| DFID  | Department for International Development  |
| DTI   | Department of Trade & Industry  |
| FCO   | Foreign & Commonwealth Office   |
| NGOs  | Non-governmental organisations  |
| MEP   | Member of the European Parliament   |
| Posts | The FCO's global network of embassies, consulates, high commissions, representations and delegations to international organisations, as well as trade and other offices |

## Executive Summary

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Board commissioned this survey of external stakeholders as a follow-up to a similar survey undertaken in 2002. It was required to assess progress in meeting stakeholder expectations; ascertain future needs and expectations; understand what influences stakeholder views of the FCO and how it might engage better with them; and provide material to measure progress in meeting these objectives by benchmarking the FCO against comparable organisations.

103 stakeholders were interviewed from Whitehall and government, Parliament, business and City, non-governmental organisations, the news media and representatives from faith groups, using a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions.

### What stakeholders said

The picture that emerges of the FCO from its stakeholders is overwhelmingly positive. This applies particularly to the quality of service provided and the extent to which the FCO meets or exceeds stakeholders' needs and expectations. The FCO's communication with most of its stakeholders also scores highly, with a slightly more mixed picture for business and faith groups.

Most stakeholders are aware of the UK's International Priorities<sup>1</sup> and a clear majority feel that they have either some or a big impact on the way the FCO works with them. The FCO also comes out well in comparisons – both with its own service compared with 2002, and particularly so when compared with other government departments.

### Key themes and issues

The future trends identified by stakeholders broadly follow those identified in the 2006 White Paper, and include the increasingly blurred lines between domestic and foreign affairs, rising demands on posts abroad, ever-faster global communications and the increasing political impact of religious faith.

Stakeholders also considered how the FCO can improve its services. For some stakeholders this means how to reduce the variability they experience in service delivery, while for others it is how to deliver an even better service. But whatever the standpoint, a number of consistent themes emerge.

- The FCO will benefit from a stronger appreciation of the value it can add through the development and articulation of its own distinctive vision, translated into a stronger and clearer set of objectives, targets and plans, with measured outcomes.
- The FCO's staff are generally held in high esteem. Stakeholders see scope for continuing improvement through training (especially in management skills and business awareness) and in developing systems to ensure more consistent service delivery. Also suggested are more exchanges with and recruitment from organisations outside the FCO to ensure a sufficiently diverse range of staff with professional and other skills.
- Continued scope for improvements to back-office services and IT systems.
- The FCO's outward communication is seen as good, but there is scope for improving the channels of communication, and in particular for developing more pro-active stakeholder engagement, focusing on two-way dialogue and consultation.
- In terms of its culture and image, the FCO should recognise and celebrate its strengths, while presenting a more open, clear and confident external image.

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<sup>1</sup> Active Diplomacy for a Changing World: The UK's International Priorities. White Paper published 28 March 2006.

## Introduction

### What we were asked to do

In autumn 2002 the FCO commissioned a survey of external stakeholders, which contributed towards compiling its strategy for the following five to 10 years. Earlier this year, the FCO Board commissioned a second survey to establish how its efforts to work with and communicate to external stakeholders have been perceived, the extent to which its strategy is understood by external stakeholders, and how key relationships can be strengthened.

The survey was required to

- assess progress in meeting stakeholder expectations since 2002, with particular reference to the FCO's new strategic priorities<sup>2</sup> and organisational change
- ascertain the future needs and expectations of key stakeholders
- understand what influences external views of the FCO and how it might engage better with key stakeholders and
- provide material for measuring progress in meeting these objectives by benchmarking the FCO against comparable organisations.

### How we did it

As did the 2002 stakeholder survey we used a mix of qualitative methodologies, namely in-depth face-to-face and telephone interviews which also included some quantitative questions.

We held 103 interviews (29 face-to-face and 74 by telephone) in May and June with the following groups

- Whitehall and Government (35 interviews)
- Parliament (11 interviews)
- Business and City (22 interviews)
- Media (10 interviews)
- NGOs (including charities, campaigning groups, think tanks and academics. 16 interviews)
- Faith groups (9 interviews).

Appendix A gives more information about the methodology and range of people to whom we spoke. Appendix B is the questionnaire we used.

One focus group comprising people from a variety of Whitehall departments was held to validate and explore further the emerging findings.

### This report

The report is divided into the following sections.

Section 1: What stakeholders said – is a descriptive overview and includes the results from the quantitative questions.

Section 2: Key themes and issues – analyses the information gathered from the interviews.

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<sup>2</sup> Active Diplomacy for a Changing World: The UK's International Priorities. White Paper published 28 March 2006

Section 3: Conclusions and actions – includes the lessons we drew from the exercise and actions we think might be taken.

The report is a summary of the wealth of information obtained from a wide range of stakeholders on a complex set of issues. Throughout it we have sought to represent faithfully the range of views expressed. We have also drawn together the views of the separate stakeholders groups and, to avoid undue repetition, only record by exception the views of individual groups. On occasion the views are contradictory.

Views recorded and recommendations made are also based on the perceptions of and views expressed by stakeholders. Consequently, they may not always take into account what is happening in the FCO which might imply a gap in information or understanding.

All comments were made on a non-attributable basis although some specific points have been raised directly with the FCO with the agreement of the interviewee.

### **Some thanks**

We were impressed by the fact that many senior people from all the stakeholders groups identified were willing to give the time to participate in the survey. This compares well with our usual experience and we believe it is a demonstration of the regard in which the department is held. We would like to thank all those who participated in the survey for their time, their interest and always thoughtful contributions.

We would also like to place on record our thanks for the professional and helpful approach of all those people in the FCO with whom we had dealings in the preparation of this report.

# 1 What stakeholders said

## 1.1 Views and perceptions

Almost without exception, stakeholders see the FCO as an impressive, high quality organisation. As with all organisations, it can do better, while many stakeholders can be characterised as saying it can do *even* better. It is seen as having some of the highest calibre people in Whitehall, especially at the most senior level, although many stakeholders draw attention to the need for greater consistency in quality, especially at more junior levels.

FCO employees are perceived as displaying many positive attributes in their dealings with stakeholders. Not only are they seen as helpful and courteous but also as bright, articulate and intelligent people who are professional in their approach. Stakeholders see them as knowledgeable and well-informed with excellent interpersonal skills. There is a wider variety of views about the degree to which they are all committed and motivated, or responsive and efficient.

The FCO itself is generally well-regarded and is seen as having a good or excellent reputation. Stakeholders ascribe many of the same attributes, such as professionalism and intelligence, to the FCO as they do to its staff. In the main stakeholders see the FCO as an organisation that is reliable and can be trusted. There is a greater variety of perspectives on the degree to which it is seen as traditional and old-fashioned or accessible and modern. Most recognise that it is changing and becoming, for example, increasingly commercial and business friendly. Some see it as an organisation under pressure – being asked to undertake more with fewer resources.

Personal experiences of interactions and the quality of service received, rather than that received second-hand or through the media, shape the image of the FCO held by the majority of stakeholders. Nevertheless, stakeholders do understand the need for the FCO actively to manage its image as represented in the media.

## 1.2 Expectations and critical success factors

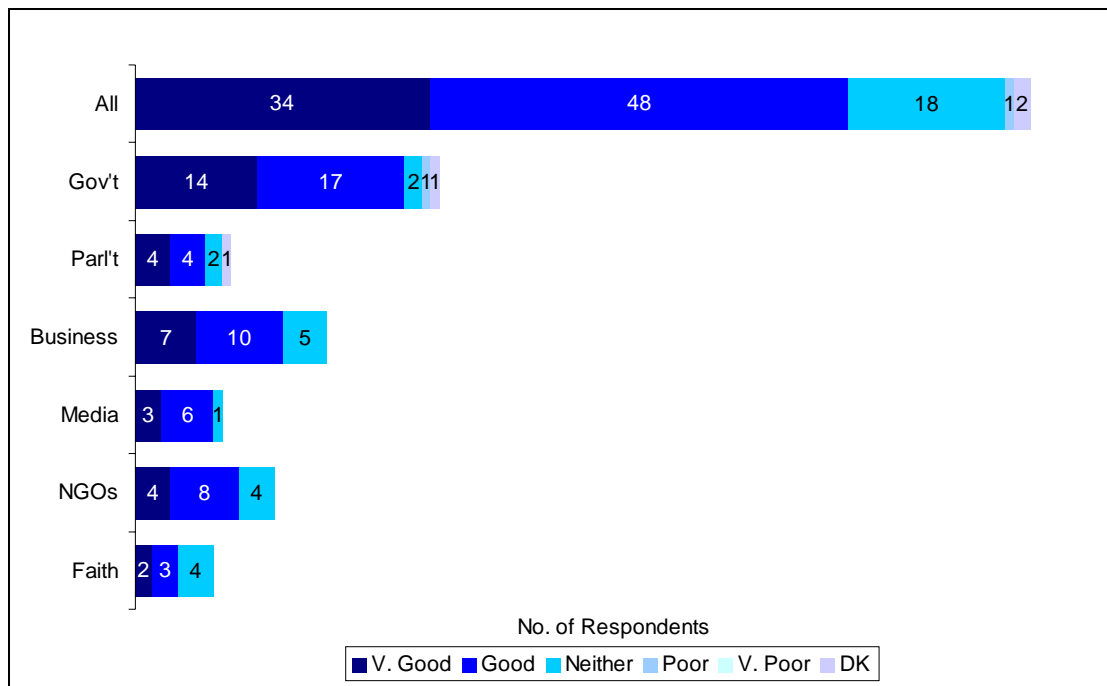
As shown in Figure 1.1 the vast majority of stakeholders (80%) believe that the FCO provides a good or very good service. Only one stakeholder saw it as poor. The scope for improvement is greatest for stakeholders in business, NGO and faith groups.

A number of factors emerged consistently as critical to the success of the FCO in delivering a first class service to stakeholders, the most important being an understanding of their needs. The possession of relevant skills, both diplomatic and general as well as the specific such as commercial or scientific, is also often mentioned. Posts abroad are particularly highly regarded: stakeholders value the FCO for its local knowledge and contacts in overseas countries. These are things stakeholders cannot match or easily replicate.

Other important factors valued by stakeholders include reliable, responsive and timely delivery, especially in a crisis. Others value judgement and insight as well as openness and transparency. Collaborative working and 'buy-in' to shared priorities are also referred to.

The FCO is praised in particular for the quality and insight of its briefings and advice, which demonstrate its political understanding. The support it provides overseas also receives praise. Others commend its analysis of international events and despatch of diplomatic business, including its handling of international discussions and negotiations.

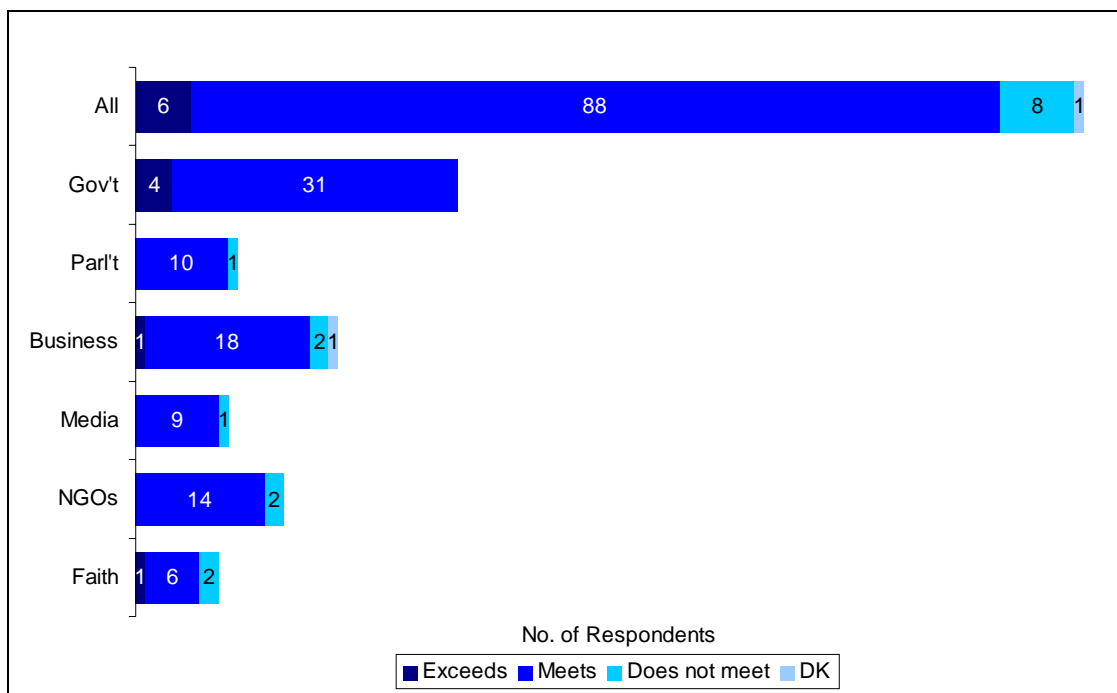
Figure 1.1 Rating of the service provided by the FCO



Base: 103 interviews

The FCO is meeting the expectations of the overwhelming number of its stakeholders, with 91% saying it meets or exceeds expectations (Figure 1.2). The FCO again scores very well on delivering intelligent political analysis. It is also commended for being an increasingly customer-focused organisation and delivering briefings in a timely and effective manner.

Figure 1.2 Does the FCO meet stakeholder needs and expectations?



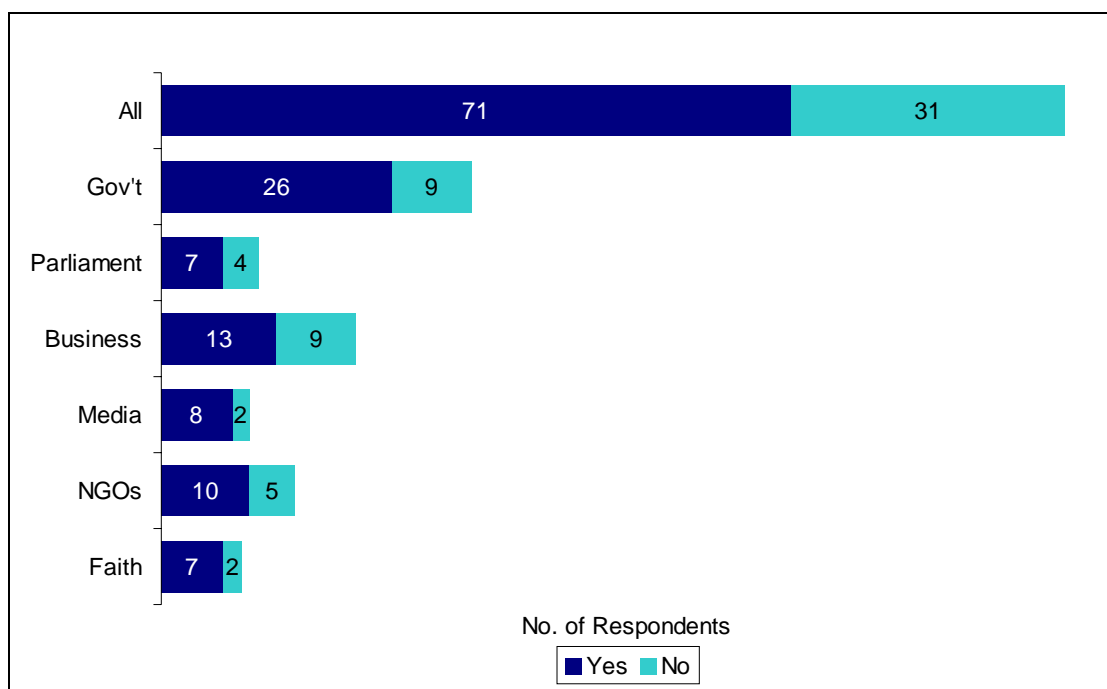
Base: 103 interviews

Stakeholders also hold views about what the FCO has to do to continue to meet their needs and where it might improve. Frequent rotation of staff in specific posts is seen by stakeholders as a lack of staff continuity and is often a source of frustration as it results in a reduction in understanding and expertise.

Stakeholders also wish to see the FCO being more proactive in its dealings with them, especially in its communications, and to see an improvement in clarifying roles and responsibilities within the FCO itself and in relation to other government departments.

While over two thirds (69%) of stakeholders are aware of the Government’s International Priorities, Figure 1.3 demonstrates that a significant proportion, especially within Parliament and business, remains unaware of them. Stakeholders are not always aware of specific initiatives in their fields.

**Figure 1.3 Stakeholder awareness of UK International Priorities**

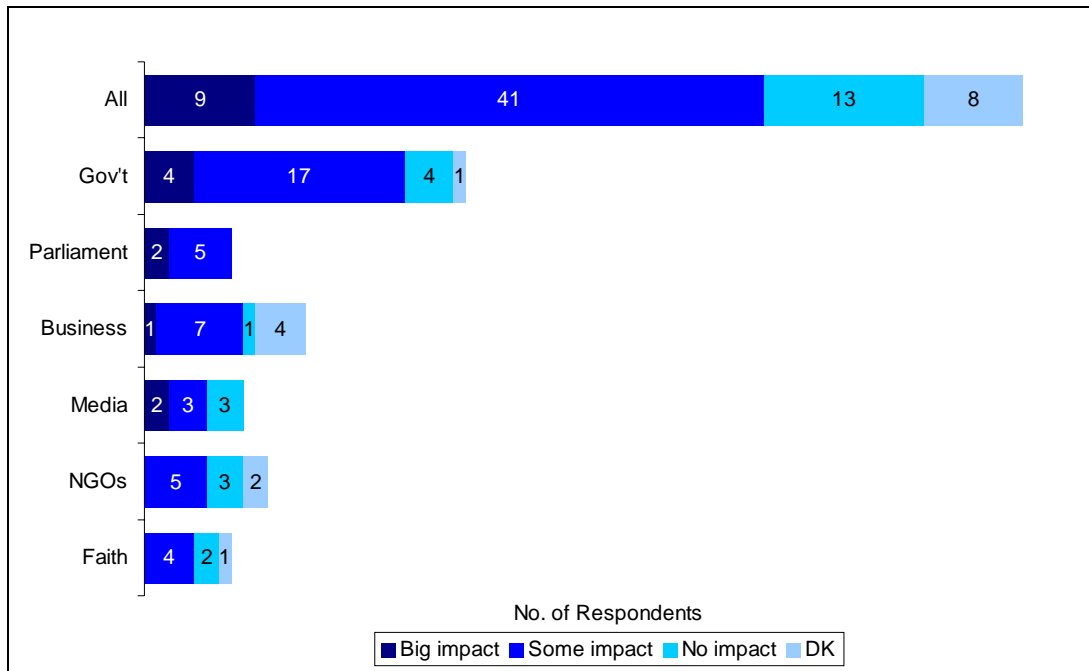


Base: 103 interviews; one interview did not finish

Of those that are aware of the Priorities, 70% believe that they have had a big or some impact on the way the FCO works with them on their agendas (Figure 1.4).

Those that had been involved in the development of the International Priorities, notably many in government, generally praise the process that had been adopted for establishing them. Some feel that they confirm what are already priorities, whereas others feel that they herald change and are now looking for delivery.

**Figure 1.4 Impact of International Priorities on the way FCO works with stakeholders**

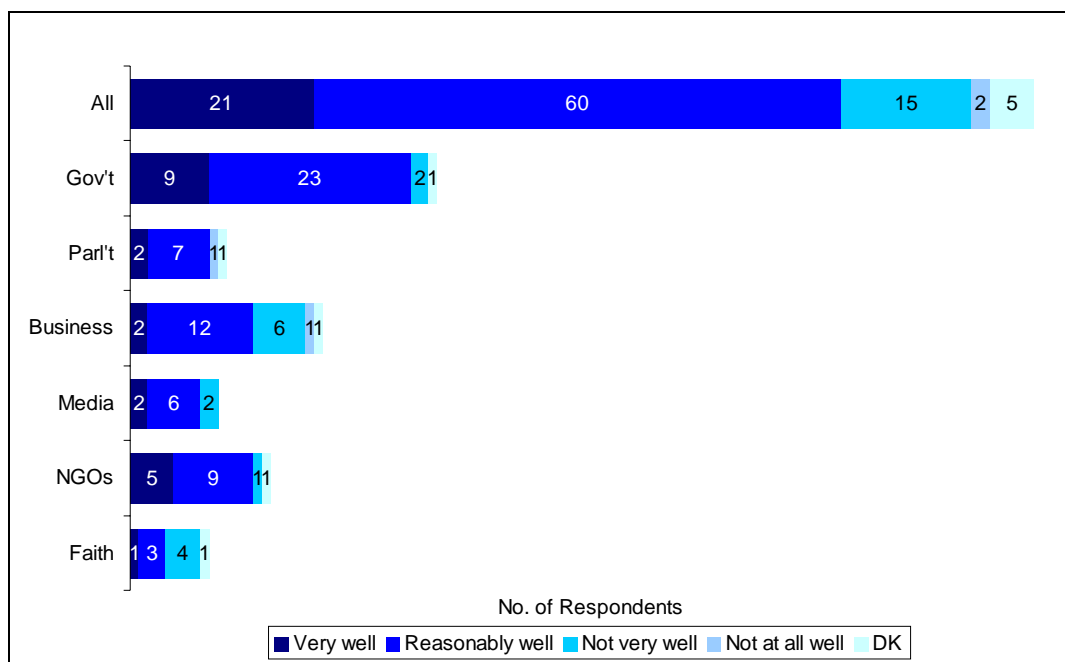


Base: 71 interviews from Figure 1.3

### 1.3 Communication

As shown in Figure 1.5, a large majority of stakeholders (79%) says that the FCO engages and communicates with them reasonably well or very well. The business and faith groups are the least

**Figure 1.5 How well the FCO engages and communicates with stakeholders**



Base: 103 interviews

satisfied, especially with respect to engagement. Of the few that mention the FCO website, some find it bland, dull and not very effective but others describe it as excellent and informative.

## 1.4 Comparisons

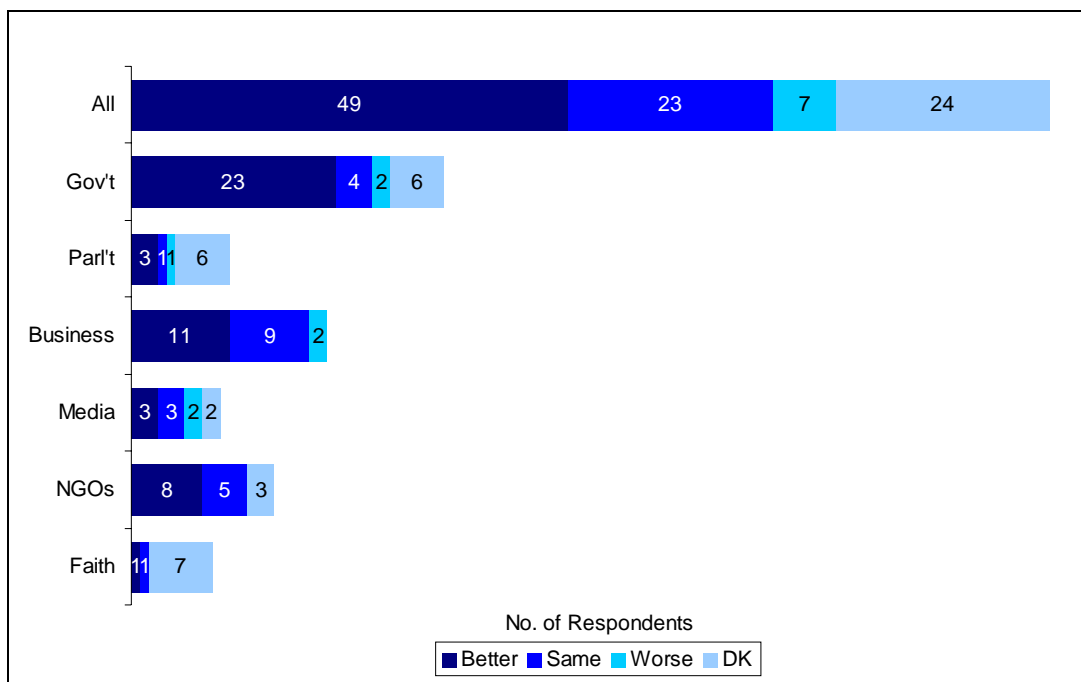
The FCO comes out well in comparisons over time with other government departments and with other countries diplomatic services.

48% (Figure 1.6) of stakeholders feel that the FCO's level of service has improved over the last four years, becoming more efficient and quicker, and exhibiting a much better understanding of stakeholders' issues. Stakeholders also comment on a greater customer focus since 2002 and an improved commercial and trade focus resulting in better stakeholder relationships.

Pressure on resources or a duplication of effort within government are often mentioned when stakeholders perceive that the FCO's level of service has stayed the same or got worse.

However, 23% of interviewees do not have the information to or feel unable to answer this question, including seven out of the nine faith interviewees.

Figure 1.6 Service now compared with 2002

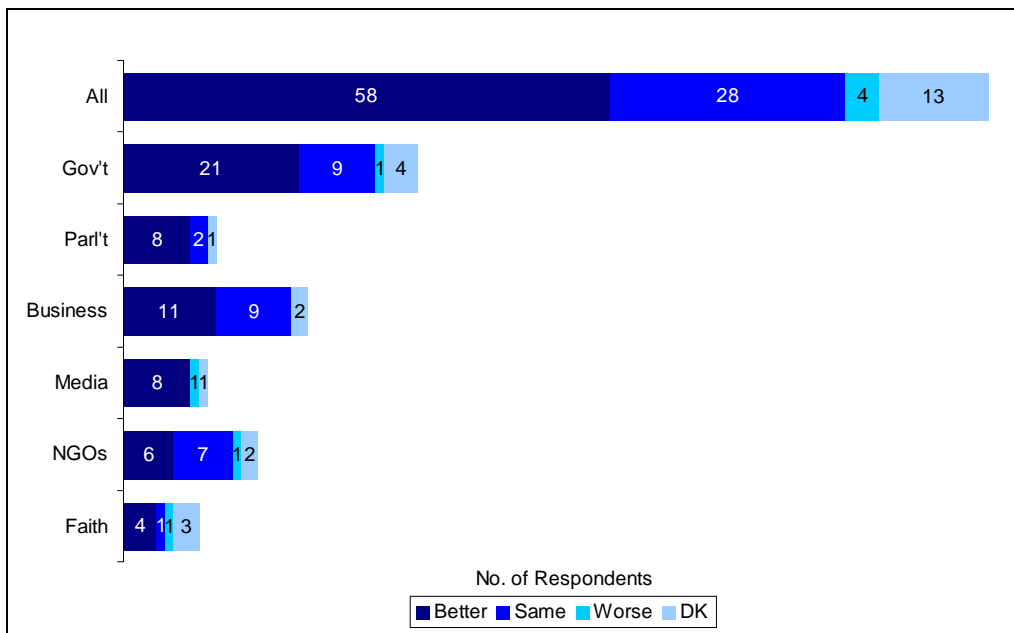


Base: 103 interviews

The FCO comes out favourably when compared with all other government departments and very favourably compared with most. It is seen as being fully accepting of the need to work outside its own silo.

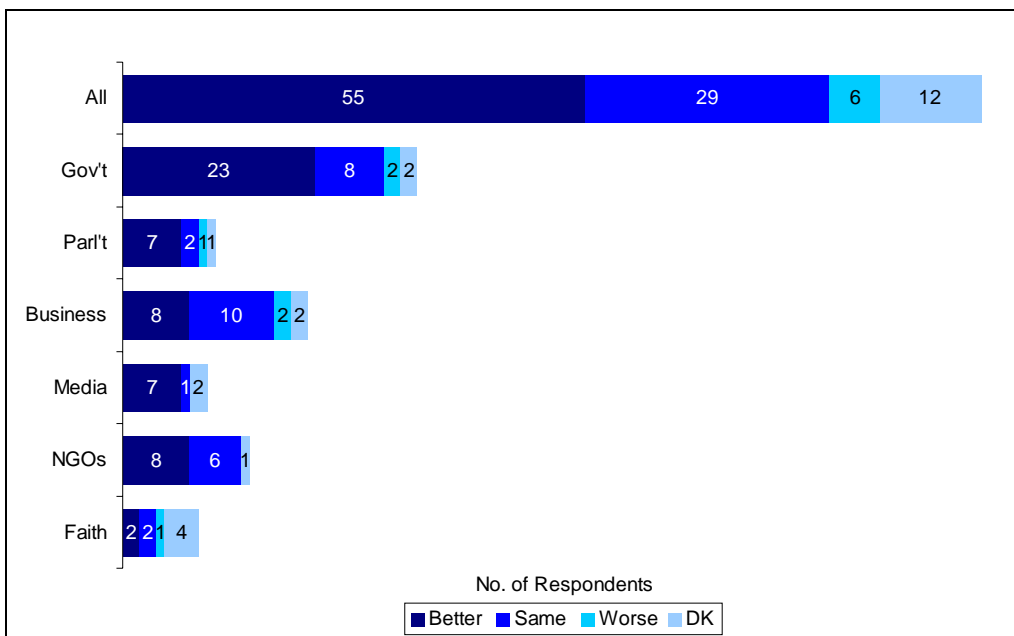
56% of stakeholders say the FCO is better than other departments with which they have dealings (Figure 1.7) and 54% say it is better at communicating (Figure 1.8). 83% and 82% respectively say it is the same or better. To some the FCO is on a par with the Cabinet Office and the Treasury. NGOs rate DFID quite well and some businesses also rank the DTI on a par with the FCO, although others do not.

**Figure 1.7 Dealings with FCO compared with other government departments**



Base: 103 interviews

**Figure 1.8 Communications with FCO compared with other government departments**



Base: 103 interviews; one interview did not finish

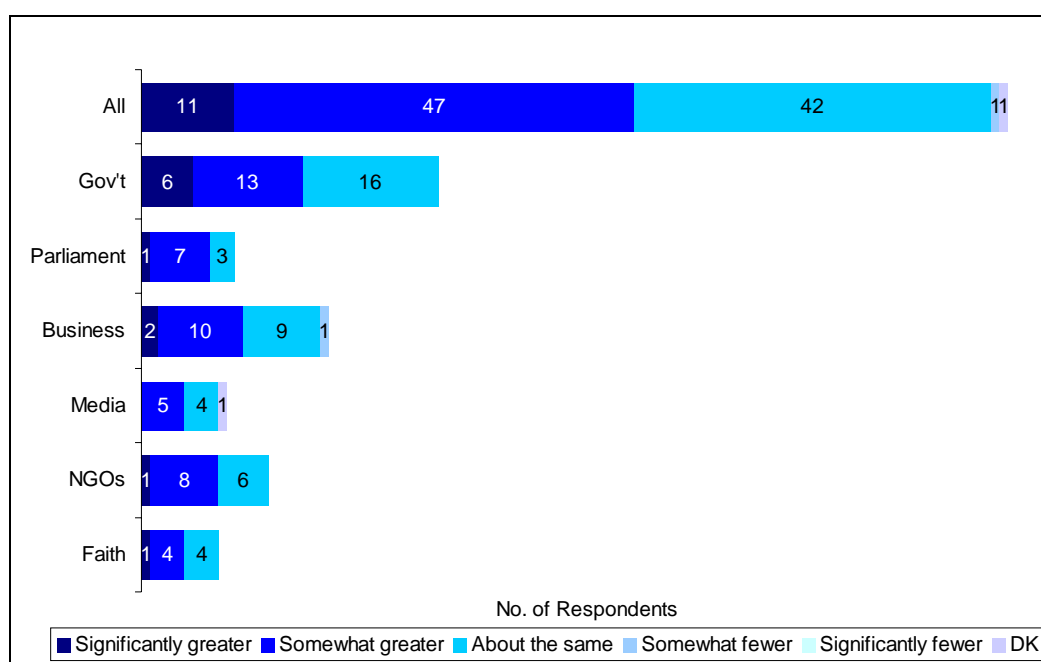
In a number of cases, stakeholders spontaneously compare FCO services favourably to those of other countries' diplomatic services.

## 2 Key themes and issues

### 2.1 Future trends

Consistent with the White Paper on the UK's International Priorities, stakeholders identify a number of major trends that they feel have important implications for the FCO. These include how it works with Whitehall and the rest of government, increasing demands upon its global network and meeting the higher expectations facing all public services. Figure 2.1 indicates what impact stakeholders believe these changes will have on their requirements of the FCO. 57% foresee somewhat greater or significantly greater requirements and a further 41% foresee them staying about the same.

Figure 2.1 Stakeholders' predicted future requirements of the FCO



Base: 103 interviews; one interview did not finish

#### The nature of diplomacy is changing

One trend frequently mentioned is that national diplomacy has been waning in relative importance as more diplomatic work is carried out in larger power blocs (eg the US, EU and G8) and in global institutions. As well as long-standing organisations such as the United Nations, NATO and the OECD, newer ones have emerged, such as the World Trade Organisation, and smaller, trans-national non-governmental organisations such as global think-tanks, and financial, professional and defence organisations. Some stakeholders also raise the role of the Commonwealth. Stakeholders feel that this new and more complex model of global and international relations will require the FCO to become more agile and to form even better networks of external contacts.

#### There are increased demands on the FCO's services from business...

Business stakeholders generally predict that globalisation and growth in world trade will increase the demands on the FCO in representing British interests abroad in developing trade and commerce. As the balance of opportunities shifts away from more familiar markets in the US, UK and Europe towards emerging markets in Asia, Africa and South America, businesses are likely to need more assistance than they do in their traditional markets.

### **...and individuals**

Government and NGOs in particular predict increasing demands on consular services as global travel becomes easier and cheaper in real terms, and as increased social mobility sees more people living and working overseas. These demands will include those arising from the increasing number of British people travelling abroad who might need assistance (again in less familiar countries), as well as the need for specialist human rights and legal services. Increasing demands on visa services for those visiting the UK were also mentioned.

### **There is a blurring of the line between domestic and foreign affairs**

The line between domestic policy and foreign affairs is increasingly blurred by the growing emphasis on major issues that have an international dimension, such as terrorism, energy, trade, climate change, human rights, infectious disease and poverty. This is seen by many as calling into question the traditional roles of the FCO, Downing Street and other government departments (especially the DTI and DFID) and the boundaries between them, as well as changing how thinking and policy are developed.

### **Communications are becoming faster**

A few stakeholders highlight the continued development of communications technology. This means that events elsewhere in the world are increasingly reported in the UK as they occur, and that reports are coming from a greater variety of sources. Combined with the ease and speed of travel, this is changing the traditional role of the FCO in handling and reporting such events (although it is still regarded as an authoritative and trusted source). It also raises public expectations about the speed and efficacy of the response – as well as the scrutiny to which that response is exposed.

### **The political impact of religious faith is increasing**

A number of stakeholders note that the role of religion in politics is increasing everywhere, not only in ways which are familiar in regions such as the Middle East, but also in Africa and the US. In many cases this adds complexity to the politics of these areas.

### **Public service developments bring their own demands**

Stakeholders note broader trends in public services in the UK that will affect the FCO. These include: developments in information technology; a continued pressure on resources and the need to focus on priorities; rising public expectations of the service; and changes in employment conditions for staff, including issues such as work-life balance and diversity.

## **2.2 Strategy and resources**

### **Articulating a role for the FCO within the White Paper's vision**

Most stakeholder groups feel that the FCO needs to develop greater self-confidence to respond to trends and communicate a clearer vision of the department's role. This includes further work to clarify the role of the FCO in meeting the challenges of the new model of global and international relations, as well as being clear about its unique contribution and where it can best add value for the UK and its people. The focus on, and stated commitment to, delivering shared international priorities is welcomed, but it necessitates clear and agreed roles of, and boundaries with, other departments. Some stakeholders feel the FCO should take the lead in this debate.

This distinct FCO vision should be articulated clearly both within and outside the department, and seeing it through will require strong and determined leadership. The FCO needs to be capable of changing those aspects of its culture which can impede effective progress.

### **Implementing the strategy**

Operationally, the FCO vision should be translated into a strategy that includes clear organisational objectives, funding, plans and processes; and then be implemented throughout the FCO. Achievable targets need to be developed and the systems put in place to ensure they are met.

Clear articulation of objectives might help resolve a variety of expectations that exist about what represents the 'national interest'. For example, a number of faith groups highlight the tension between what the FCO is doing in handling certain international issues to meet short-term perceived needs over, say, security, and what is in the long-term best interests of the country. Other groups suggest that the FCO might do more to represent the interests of British nationals and business abroad. Finally, some government departments are not always clear how the British interest is represented in negotiations led by the FCO.

Last year's UK Presidency of the EU is cited by some government departments as an example of where clear and shared objectives, regular contact and shared success bore fruit. They feel that the shared understanding and openness which results from such an approach can help to deliver clarity in the FCO's role in managing the UK's relationship with the EU, particularly vis-à-vis other departments. It could also help determine the scope for other possible developments, such as shared EU-wide resources, that could meet the FCO's objectives.

### **Establishing priorities...**

A majority of external stakeholders is clear that, in developing its strategy, the FCO cannot please all stakeholder groups, be they business, NGOs, or others: the overall long-term national interest should be the benchmark. At the same time, they feel that the routine base-load of activity would benefit from more active management and prioritisation, with a clear articulation of what can and cannot be delivered within existing resources, and what the impact of that might be. Expectations should be managed accordingly. In this context, many stakeholders want to see increased policy continuity and follow-through. For those stakeholders who are aware of them, this means having fewer 'set-piece' initiatives, with a stronger emphasis on more consistent long-term action.

A specific request from some non-governmental organisations was for the FCO to re-think the status quo in specific policy areas and, for example, to become more assertive in countries such as Myanmar and Sudan.

### **...and allocating appropriate resources**

Stakeholders say resources should be allocated and decisions taken, including difficult ones about closing posts, in line with agreed priorities. Relevant stakeholders would welcome consultation on this process. Where posts are closed, greater mitigating action to minimise any consequent vulnerability and to protect British interests needs to be taken.

Some feel that posts are generally under-resourced to meet current demands, especially in countries and emerging markets in central Asia, South America and Africa. This is particularly the case from a business and NGO perspective. Many stakeholders suggest that there should be further re-balancing between posts in developed countries and the areas of new opportunity since, for them, the added-value of posts is greatest in those countries whose languages and cultures are less familiar, and where they find it harder to develop appropriate contacts independently. Others, notably in Whitehall and government, see a continuing need for a significant presence in developed countries.

### **Stakeholders can help**

A number of stakeholders across Whitehall, government, Parliament and in faith groups point out that they are more than customers or audiences of the FCO and even provide a service to the FCO. They

suggest they can be used as partners or tools in the delivery of the FCO's objectives and that this should be planned on a more systematic basis.

### **Recommendations**

- Articulate a clear internal vision for the FCO to deliver the 2006 White Paper, highlighting where the FCO can add value, with clear roles and boundaries agreed with the partners needed to achieve this.
  - Translate the vision into clear organisational objectives, funding, targets, plans and processes, and embed these within the organisation.
  - Commit to fewer, more focused initiatives each with a long-term plan and the necessary resources to follow them through.
  - Adopt a long-term strategy for posts, developed with the involvement of stakeholders, that optimises the deployment of resources.
- ❖ **The FCO should ensure that the UK's International Priorities are underpinned by clear objectives, appropriate funding, targets and plans focused on outcomes.**

## **2.3 People and organisation**

### **Ensuring consistently high quality staff...**

Stakeholders recognise that individuals make the FCO. Overall, they are held in high esteem, with the high calibre of staff, especially at senior levels, recognised as representing the best of the Civil Service. Staff in posts abroad are especially valued for the service they provide, and some compare them favourably with their equivalents in other countries.

Stakeholders recognise that the FCO has made progress since the 2002 Stakeholder Survey in ensuring that staff performance across the organisation is more consistently good. Quality still varies, in some cases significantly, depending on the individual. This is felt to be more the case, although not exclusively, at the junior level.

In terms of attitude, stakeholders are overwhelmingly positive, with FCO staff seen as helpful, ready to listen and co-operative. These remarks are tempered by the occasional less positive experience, again relating to individuals.

Some stakeholders feel that a degree of variability is inevitable in such a large organisation, but the majority view is that the FCO needs to continue its efforts to improve individual performance and attitudes where they are not satisfactory. This would improve accountability as well as the overall collective impact of the FCO.

### **...with skills that are 'fit for purpose'**

Stakeholders recognise the strength of intellectual, interpersonal and language skills in the staff of the FCO, their ability to think creatively and imaginatively about issues and their knowledge of specific subjects. Analytical skills in traditional areas, such as politics and people, are also regarded as excellent. At more junior levels some stakeholders express concern that staff have too broad a range of responsibilities to develop in-depth skills and experience. A few saw this as a lack of authority, ability, desire or time to think widely round a subject or beyond an immediate task or objective.

Business stakeholders in particular recognise the progress achieved over the last 10 years, and since the survey in 2002, in improving commercial awareness and individuals' knowledge of economics and financial markets. In some cases, stakeholders feel the problem is a lack of interest in business

matters rather than a lack of expertise but, overall, there is a strong consensus from business stakeholders that this area of development needs to continue to ensure that the FCO's staff have the skills needed to meet agreed objectives. Progress in acquiring other specialist technical skills such as in science and technology is also commented upon favourably.

For their part, many of the faith groups suggest that FCO staff need a better understanding of the diversity of minority communities, their needs and interests, as well as the variety of faiths themselves, before they are able to engage with them equitably. The under-representation of such communities among FCO employees is seen as a further issue. Stakeholders more generally comment on the need to continue to broaden the diversity of FCO staff.

A number of stakeholders, especially from Parliament, Whitehall and government, comment that while a start has been in implementing the public sector reform agenda, the FCO has further to go. They also recommend more professionally qualified staff to manage finance, IT, estates and other management activities.

### **More staff exchanges and recruitment from outside the FCO**

Secondments and staff exchanges with the FCO are regarded by business and other government departments as being valuable to both parties, and a good way of introducing new skills and knowledge into the FCO. At a more day-to-day level, briefings are valued as a useful way of exchanging knowledge and views. A much greater level of *two-way* interaction and staff exchange with the best of the private and public sector is suggested.

Some stakeholders feel that the retention of the FCO's separate recruitment and development channels is artificial in a world where the boundary between domestic and foreign policy is blurring. Others value the asset represented by the 'diplomatic family'. Additionally, a significant number of stakeholders said that they find the frequent rotation of staff in specific posts frustrating. This means that when individuals depart, their experience, depth of understanding and development of personal contacts is temporarily lost. They feel this contrasts unfavourably with practice in the commercial sector.

### **Equipped to deliver efficient services**

Service delivery is seen as continuing to improve, with the best cases being cited as outstanding, and some posts being described as dynamic and well-run. However, examples of poor service still exist and there is a desire for greater consistency in casework. Examples include well intentioned efforts to help which have been compromised by taking action too late, too slowly, or not involving the right people early enough.

Inconsistent provision of services can also result in customer disappointment, irrespective of whether that service is good or bad. Poor service will always disappoint but exceptionally good service in one post, if significantly over and above agreed levels of service, can lead to enhanced expectations that will not and should not be met elsewhere. Being clearer to stakeholders about what services are provided, to whom and, if appropriate, what is charged for them, as well as consistency in delivery, will help manage expectations.

However, this needs to be balanced against the views of some in government, business and NGOs that there should be less bureaucracy and a greater degree of flexibility to maximise opportunities as they arise.

Stakeholders recommend that a more systematic approach to casework should be adopted across the organisation to deliver greater organisational consistency. This requires a clearer customer focus, stronger management, more staff development and improved quality-assurance processes, as well as

a more general recognition that the FCO is essentially a service organisation. Staff should remember that other groups can help deliver the FCO's objectives or act as partners in specific areas.

### **Recommendations**

- Embed commercial awareness, economic literacy and management skills in staff training and ensure a senior management lead for this skills development is in place and communicated.
  - Implement more two-way staff exchanges with the rest of Whitehall, and beyond, especially for providing key professional skills and filling specialist roles.
  - Staff assessment, management and development should include consideration of customer needs and customer service performance, adopt a more systematic approach to casework, and aim to identify and spread internal best practice.
  - The FCO and its staff should be clear about what services can and cannot be provided, and at what price.
- ❖ **Harness the practices of the best individuals to deliver better results collectively and consistently across the FCO.**

## **2.4 Systems and processes**

### **Information Technology**

Stakeholders' experience of the FCO's IT systems varies, but some feel that the systems can be improved. Other public sector organisations find that e-mails fail to reach their destination because the FCO's security levels are set too high for routine electronic communication. Businesses and other stakeholders say that too much is on paper and that the quality of the IT appears to lag behind that in the private sector.

### **Back-office support**

Other government departments that use or share FCO facilities say that it needs to develop more professional back-office support that represents value for money and ensure that these services are managed by appropriately skilled staff.

### **Recommendations**

- Talk to stakeholders to establish the degree to which the problems they have with FCO IT systems are real.
  - Where resources are shared, establish with users what would represent value-for-money services and how they might be provided.
- ❖ **Ensure back-office and technical support is professional and provides value for money.**

## **2.5 Engagement and communication**

### **A two-way process**

Routine communication, especially *from* the FCO, is seen as good, and improving, by most stakeholders. With a few exceptions, however, almost all feel communicated with but say that the FCO needs to improve its ability to listen, engage with its stakeholders and actively manage the relationship with its stakeholders. Those that were consulted about the White Paper on International Priorities felt engaged at the time and would welcome renewed engagement on it now that the revised White Paper has been published. Other stakeholders are unaware of it. Equally, communication and

consultation need to be followed through in the long term. Stakeholders cite a number of occasions when their expectations have been raised, resulting in a favourable impression of the FCO, only for them to be disappointed by the follow-up. For NGOs and faith groups this suggests a lack of understanding of their issues.

A number of stakeholders, including those in Parliament, speak about what they perceive as the need for improved transparency in the way the FCO operates. They feel that much information is only released when it has to be and that there are benefits to be had in sharing it more readily. Some contrast good engagement and communication on policy issues with scope for improved communication on management and service delivery topics where there are issues or problems that might require addressing.

### **Making the FCO accessible**

Most senior stakeholders who have access to senior staff say that this works well for them, but their own staff and other stakeholders sometimes find it harder to get hold of the right person at more junior levels (especially in the UK). Some poor experiences are cited on this issue. Many stakeholders think that investment in front-line communication systems would pay dividends, with some business stakeholders requesting company-specific contact points.

### **Even better briefings**

Briefings and 'telegrams' (now 'e-grams') are often good and frequently cited as excellent, especially where FCO staff have a thorough understanding of the issues. In contrast, there are examples where the quality of information is variable and lacking in substance. Some stakeholders feel that more proactivity and greater collaboration in briefing would help make the process more transparent, simpler and shorter, and enable the full depth of the FCO's potential to be used. Others ask whether the output is always visible to and directed at the right audiences.

### **Customer feedback mechanisms**

A large number of stakeholders think that a better, more systematic 'customer' feedback mechanism would pay dividends for the FCO, in helping it to identify and reward good practice, and in enabling it to tackle examples of poor service. It would also enable it to track progress and improvement in a number of crucial areas.

### **Recommendations**

- Based on the FCO's objectives, develop a stakeholder engagement framework and implement it across the organisation.
  - Develop systematic and focused 'customer' satisfaction feedback mechanisms.
  - Appoint staff as accountable and visible points of contact for key clients or groups of clients and give them overall responsibility for the relationship.
  - Improve the FCO's front-line points of contact.
  - Share best practice – celebrate quality and success – and manage out poor practice in casework and information sharing.
- ❖ **Ongoing communication can be made easier for those who do not know the FCO well.**

## 2.6 Culture and image

### **A modern and confident organisation**

Stakeholders' overall view of the FCO is positive and most think that, as an organisation, it should recognise and celebrate its strengths. It is seen as a professional organisation that is respected. A few state that the FCO seems unsure of its role, to have lost confidence in its capability, and sometimes to be embarrassed about its heritage, although others observe that staff take pride in the FCO.

Stakeholders feel that it is important for the FCO to develop a distinctive vision for itself and present a clear and confident image to the world, backed up by excellent delivery. The vision should support values and behaviours that are led from the top and are embedded within the organisation. Such a vision would help to overcome the challenges associated with organisational changes of this nature.

Embedding this vision should help to tackle any remaining outdated behaviour which deviates from the overall direction. It will also ensure that career opportunities in, say, emerging markets or consular services are given comparable status with those in more established centres such as the Paris and Washington embassies. More staff exchanges with business, other government departments and other stakeholders will help to enrich the culture, and introduce new ideas, skills and greater diversity.

### **Physical presence**

Some feel that the FCO's estate of buildings, especially its headquarters, is unhelpful if it fosters the view that it is an old-fashioned organisation. While some feel that some grandeur can be positive, first impressions can be misleading, and some modernisation of the office accommodation would help to improve the image and operational performance. A few make comparisons with the redevelopment of the Treasury building in Whitehall, where they feel that a sensitive modernisation combines the best of the old and the new.

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure that the FCO vision includes cultural and behavioural elements
- Celebrate FCO successes as part of implementing the strategy: A thoroughly modern service that values the past.
- ❖ **An organisation that should be proud of its past and confident of its future.**

### 3 Conclusions and stakeholder engagement

#### Critical success factors

Interviewees are overwhelmingly positive about the FCO and the services it provides. As with any organisation, stakeholders say it can do better and some say that it can do *even* better. This report outlines those broad areas where stakeholders believe there is scope for further improvement and change. From these key themes and issues, four recurring factors that are critical to success become apparent. These are

- clear and shared objectives
- consistency in staff and the services delivered
- skills matched to needs
- supporting communication and engagement with all involved.

#### Stakeholder engagement actions

Section 2 of this report contains recommendations based on the perceptions of stakeholders. A number of them concern the internal systems and process of the FCO and we have no way of knowing the degree to which they are, or are not, valid. Other recommendations, listed below, directly affect stakeholders' relationship with the FCO and, whether valid or not, they reflect what stakeholders think to be the case and we recommend that they should be addressed.

- 1 Improve communication to all stakeholders about implementation of the UK's International Priorities.
- 2 Engage relevant stakeholders in the trade-offs and decisions to be made regarding posts.
- 3 Implement more two-way staff exchanges with the rest of Whitehall, and beyond, especially for providing key professional skills and filling specialist roles.
- 4 Be clearer about what services can and cannot be provided, and at what price.
- 5 Talk to stakeholders to establish the degree to which the problems they have with FCO IT systems are real.
- 6 Where resources are shared, establish with users what would represent value-for-money services and how they might be provided.
- 7 Appoint staff as accountable and visible points of contact for key clients or groups of clients and give them overall responsibility for the relationship.
- 8 Improve the FCO's front-line points of contact.
- 9 Based on the FCO's objectives, develop a stakeholder engagement framework and implement it across the organisation.
- 10 Develop systematic and focused 'customer' satisfaction feedback mechanisms.

Our final recommendation is that wider stakeholder surveys should only be carried out infrequently to measure broad trends in views. In the short-term and in place of carrying out the further general stakeholder surveys the FCO had in mind for 2007 and 2008, we believe the FCO should concentrate its resources on monitoring and reviewing implementation – both internally and externally – of the specific actions in this report to which it has agreed. Progress should be reported to internal and external stakeholders.

## Appendix A: Methodology

The nature of the research required a qualitative approach that would provide a depth of understanding about behavioural, motivational and attitudinal issues that could not to be achieved by quantitative analysis alone.

This survey mainly used a mix of qualitative methodologies, namely face to face and in-depth telephone interviews as follows:

- Face-to-face in-depth interviews with high-level stakeholders in Whitehall and government departments, and some other senior figures;
- In-depth telephone interviews with stakeholders in Whitehall and government, Parliament, business and City, non-governmental organisations, the news media and representatives from faith groups.

The questionnaire followed a semi structured questionnaire to allow for a good combination of qualitative questions and a series of quantitative questions. It was designed in conjunction with the FCO and going through it took approximately 30 minutes. Before embarking on the main phase of interviewing, a short pilot of two telephone interviews was carried out to test the robustness of the questionnaire and the realism of time allocated.

Once the majority of interviews had been undertaken we also conducted one focus group with Whitehall stakeholders to test the emerging messages.

In total, we held 103 interviews (29 face-to-face and 74 by telephone) in May and June with the following groups:

- Whitehall and Government – 35 (including the Prime Minister's Office, Cabinet Office, Defra, DFID, DTI, Home Office, Ministry of Defence, Treasury, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales)
- Parliament – 11 (including MPs, MEPs and Parliamentary Committees)
- Business and City – 22 (Chairmen and Chief Executives of companies)
- NGOs – 16 (such as charities, campaigning groups, think tanks and academics)
- Media – 10 (key journalists from the broadcast and press media)
- Faith groups – 9 (including Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh).

Following agreement with the FCO on the list of potential respondents, they were invited by the FCO to participate by letter or e-mail, using a text drawn up by us and agreed with the FCO. As well as requesting their participation stakeholders were also provided with the background and rationale for the survey, together with an indicative list of questions. Arrangement and confirmation of the appointments were carried out by Accent.

## Appendix B: Questionnaire

### Part 1 International involvement and current dealings with the FCO

- Q1 What is the nature of your dealings with the FCO?
- Q2 Bearing in mind your answer to the previous question, how much impact does the FCO have on your work?
- A great deal
  - Quite a lot
  - A little bit
  - Not very much
- Q3 And how significant is that impact to the success of your work?
- Critical
  - Quite significant
  - A little significant
  - Not that significant
- Q4 How often do you interact with the FCO?
- 3 or more times a week
  - Once or twice a week
  - Once or twice a month
  - Once a quarter
  - Once every 6 months
  - Other (write in)
- Q5 What attributes would you ascribe to the people you deal with at the FCO?

### Part 2 Meeting stakeholder needs

- Q6 I'd now like to ask you about how satisfied you are with the service provided by the FCO and why. Overall, how would you rate the services provided by the FCO?
- Very good
  - Good
  - Neither good nor poor
  - Poor
  - Very poor
- Q7 What are the factors that are important for ensuring that you receive a first class service from the FCO?
- Q8 Why are these factors critical to you?

- Q9 How well does the FCO meet your needs and expectations?
- Needs and expectations exceeded
  - Needs and expectations met
  - Needs and expectations not met
- Q10 Why do you say that?
- Q11 What does the FCO do well?
- Q12 The FCO conducted a similar survey four years ago. How does the service your organisation receives from the FCO now compare with that received in 2002?
- Better
  - The same
  - Worse
  - Don't know If don't know GO TO Q14
- Q13 And why do you say that?
- Q14 What more can be done to improve the service you receive from the FCO? For example, what might it do better?
- Q15 How does the FCO compare with other government departments with which you have dealings in meeting your needs?
- Better
  - About the same
  - Not as good

**Part 3 Stakeholder engagement**

- Q16 I'd now like to ask you about how the FCO engages and communicates with its stakeholders. First of all, how well does the FCO engage with you in determining and delivering its priorities?
- Very well
  - Reasonably well
  - Not very well
  - Not at all well
  - Cannot answer/Don't know
- Q17 Why do you say that?
- Q18 How do you normally communicate with the FCO?
- Q19 Does that work well?
- Q20 How could the FCO engage with you better?

Q21 How well does the FCO engage and communicate with you compared with other government departments with which you deal?

Better

About the same

Not as good

**Part 4 FCO priorities and initiatives**

Q22 Moving onto the wider role of the FCO, are you aware of the Government's 2006 White Paper on its strategic international priorities?

Yes

No GO TO Q25

Q23 How well do the White Paper's priorities reflect your needs and interests?

Q24 What impact do you believe the White Paper's priorities have had on the way the FCO works with you on your agenda?

A lot of impact

Some impact

No impact at all

Q25 Are you aware of any specific initiatives the FCO has carried out that affect your area of activity?

**Part 5 FCO reputation**

Q26 What shapes your image of the FCO?

Q27 What are your reasons for saying that and can you give examples?

Q28 What words best describe your view of the FCO?

**Part 6 Future developments**

Q29 What trends do you see influencing the FCO and the way it carries out its work in the future?

Q30 How do you see the level of your requirements of the FCO changing in the future?

Significantly greater requirements

Somewhat greater requirements

About the same

Somewhat fewer requirements

Significantly fewer requirements

Q31 Why do you say that?

Q32 Will any changes be necessary for those requirements to be met?

**Part 7 Conclusion**

Q33. Are there any other comments you wish to make?