



House of Commons
Committee of Public Accounts

Consular services to British nationals

**Thirty-ninth Report of
Session 2005–06**

*Report, together with formal minutes,
oral and written evidence*

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The Committee of Public Accounts

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The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at <http://www.parliament.uk/pac>. A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Session is at the back of this volume.

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Summary

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (the Department) provides a wide range of consular services from over 200 Embassies, High Commissions and Consulates (“Posts”) worldwide. In 2004–05 the Department published travel advice for more than 200 countries, issued 465,000 British passports and provided assistance to 84,000 British nationals overseas. The Department also prepares for, and responds to, major overseas crises which involve, or are likely to have involved, British nationals.

To address the challenges faced by a rising demand for consular services, the Department has looked at ways of reducing calls for consular assistance by influencing the behaviour of British Nationals travelling overseas. The take-up of country-specific information and general travel advice has been variable, and changing the behaviour of those groups of travellers who are most at risk while overseas is a major challenge.

The Department recognises that its consular work is a service delivery business, and should be run as such. It has looked at more resource-efficient ways of responding to customer requirements, including securing representation through the use of honorary consuls and partnership arrangements. The Department’s *Consular Guide*, to be published in February 2006, is intended to address the expectation gap that currently exists between the consular services it can provide, and the services the public expects.

In 2001, the Department procured a casework management system at a cost to date of £3.3 million. As yet, this system has not been successfully embedded across the organisation, and so has not yet produced the management information the Department needs to manage its consular business effectively.

The Department’s current arrangements for issuing passports at over 100 Posts are costly to Britons living overseas, and it is difficult for the Department to manage consistent standards of security against fraudulent applications. These difficulties are likely to increase with the move to the next generation of biometric passports unless the Department makes major changes to its passport issuing network.

Responding to crises overseas is a high profile aspect of the Department’s work. The Department has improved its crisis management capabilities since 2001, although there has been slow progress in updating and testing emergency plans at Posts. The Indian Ocean Tsunami presented an extreme challenge for consular services; their call centres were overwhelmed and they were unable to assist British nationals in some affected areas as soon as they would have wished.

On the basis of a Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General,¹ the Committee took evidence from the Department on three main issues: their progress in influencing British nationals travelling overseas; developing consular services as a responsive service; and reacting to consular crises.

1 C&AG’s Report, *The Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Consular Services to British Nationals* (HC 594, Session 2005–06)

Conclusions and recommendations

- 1. The Department has made some significant innovations, such as working with operators like EasyJet and publishing the *Rough Guide to Safer Travel*, to increase its influence on those travelling overseas.** To better assess how effective these innovations are proving and to inform future campaigns, the Department needs to identify those groups who are most often in need of assistance, and assess how effective their publicity has been in targeting these vulnerable groups and in influencing their behaviour.
- 2. Consular staff are increasingly called to help the irresponsible minority whose problems may have been avoided by greater awareness and planning before travelling, or by sensible behaviour once abroad.** The Department used its existing powers to charge for consular services in just 323 out of 84,000 assistance cases. It should make greater use of the call out fee to charge for assistance to those who have been clearly negligent or otherwise at fault. It should also publicise more individual case studies to demonstrate the consequences of irresponsible behaviour overseas.
- 3. The Department is responding to the increasingly diverse needs of customers by tackling important issues such as forced marriages and child abduction.** With static funding levels, it is likely to become increasingly important for the Department to target assistance towards the most vulnerable groups. The new Consular Guide should set out a clear strategic framework to ensure that scarce resources are deployed effectively and that staff have a clear understanding of the levels of assistance they should be expected to provide in individual circumstances.
- 4. Within the Department the perceived status of consular services work is improving, but it is not yet seen as a proven career route to the most senior positions.** Whilst new trainees are given some exposure to consular work early in their careers, there is more to do if this vital service to United Kingdom citizens is to be fully recognised and rewarded at all levels in the Department. As services for the individual citizen become an increasingly significant aspect of the Department's work, it will be important for senior diplomatic staff to have an up to date understanding of the challenges of consular work gained through genuine front-line roles and not just work experience.
- 5. There are wide variations in the frequency of prison and hospital visits by consular services.** The reasons for such discrepancies are unclear. Rightly, the Department wants to give overseas Posts the flexibility to use their local knowledge. But customers need to know the minimum standard of service they can expect, and management requires a firm baseline against which to assess Posts' performance.
- 6. The lack of consistent management information across Posts adds to the difficulty of managing a widely dispersed operation.** To deliver an effective consular service, the Department needs to collect the data required to support decisions on how to direct resources to meet customers' needs and to help identify good practice. For example, recording the amount of time staff at Posts spent on each type of consular case would allow the Department to manage its allocation of staff resources more efficiently.

7. **Thirteen years after the NAO first made the case for a modern case management system for assistance work, the Department is struggling to properly implement one.** Weaknesses in training and in getting staff to use the system in a consistent manner mean there is a risk that much of the £3.3 million investment will be wasted. The Department should increase the proportion of training delivered face-to-face, and focus on areas where the system is not currently being used to its full potential.
8. **The Department is making more use of honorary consuls and locally engaged staff, and is working with a wider range of partners to improve the quality of service it offers.** It should also share representation with other countries, and should take a more quantified and better-evidenced approach to decisions on where to allocate resources, and on where this country needs to have consular representation.
9. **Issuing passports at over 100 Posts is inefficient and exposes the Department to increasing risks from fraudulent applications.** The Department should analyse the costs and benefits of repatriating large elements of passport work to take advantage of the economies of scale and quality assurance arrangements of the United Kingdom Passport Service. Consolidating its passport issuing service in fewer locations would also aid the Department in reducing inconsistencies in security checking, and in dealing with the technical complexities in moving to biometric passports
10. **British nationals who wish to obtain a passport from consular services overseas have to pay passport fees that are 64% above the equivalent service in the United Kingdom.** British nationals living abroad should be able to choose whether to obtain their passports overseas or at a lower cost in the United Kingdom. The Department wants to consider the effect of such a change on its funding, but accepts that the needs of the customer should be given due priority in such a decision.
11. **The Department took over 18 months to roll out emergency plans at all Posts.** Starting with the Posts at most risk, the Department should test existing emergency plans against a wider range of potential scenarios and introduce a quality rating system for the plans. Over time the quality ratings of plans should increase, and senior management should more clearly hold Posts to account for delays in testing and updating plans to reflect good practice learned from successive crises.
12. **Consular staff and volunteers have often worked long hours and in difficult conditions to assist British nationals in distress.** The nine major consular crises which the Department faced in 2005 show how consular staff have displayed great dedication in responding to successive major incidents and natural disasters.

1 Influencing British Citizens abroad

1. The number of overseas visits by British nationals increased by 6% to 65 million in 2004–05, with a further 13 million British nationals living abroad (**Figure 1**). Travel patterns are also changing with more vulnerable groups taking advantage of cheaper air travel, more people travelling independently, and to a wider range of destinations. The Vienna Convention of 1963 provides for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to assist British nationals in difficulty or distress overseas. It does this through its consular service.²

Figure 1: More British nationals are travelling and living abroad

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

Source: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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

2. In 2004–05, the Department dealt with 84,000 new assistance cases. As demands change and expectations rise, it has tried to respond to the needs of an increasingly diverse range of travellers within a constrained financial framework. The Department tries to manage the rising demand for consular services by raising awareness among the travelling public of the risks they face when travelling abroad and promoting adequate preparation before they go. It provides country-specific travel advice for over 200 countries through its website and via a telephone helpline. It also launched the *Know Before You Go* campaign in 2001, which provides advice to British travellers when planning their trip overseas.³

3. In 2004 there were 4.9 million hits to the travel advice pages of the Foreign and Commonwealth’s website, which nevertheless account for only 8% of the total number of trips abroad made by British nationals.⁴ The Department has looked at ways of widening the reach of its travel information to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse traveller population. For example it works through local radio and with partners such as Tesco, who direct their customers to the Departments’ travel advice through their own marketing literature.⁵

² C&AG’s Report, para 1.4 and Figure 5; Q 5

³ C&AG’s Report, para 3.1; Q 22

⁴ C&AG’s Report, para 1.6

⁵ Qq 23, 63, 83

4. Changing the behaviour of those who travel aboard is a significant challenge. Though public awareness of the Department's travel information is improving, the proportion of people who read and act on the advice is still low.⁶ Advertising campaigns targeted at those groups who most need to be influenced, such as stag and hen parties, and the publication of the *Rough Guide to Safer Travel*, aim to reduce the number of assistance cases where better preparation before travelling, or more responsible behaviour once abroad, may have avoided the problem.⁷

5. When consular staff are called to respond to requests for assistance, they have the discretion to levy a call-out charge of £84.50 per hour. This has been charged on only 323 occasions (out of 84,000 assistance cases), and is not applied consistently throughout the world, having been charged 40 times in Prague, yet only twice in Bratislava during 2004–05. The Department recognises that more use could be made of this charge to recover the costs of assisting travellers whose lack of adequate preparation or irresponsible behaviour abroad has contributed to their own predicament. Highlighting the consequences of irresponsible behaviour overseas through the use of individual case studies tends to have more impact in influencing the behaviour of such high risk groups.⁸

6 C&AG's Report, para 1.6; Q 21

7 Qq 22, 76–77, 115

8 Ev 28–29; Qq 77–78, 82

2 Developing a modern service delivery business

6. Consular services are, first and foremost, a customer service business, and staff therefore need training and experience in service delivery. Providing practical help to British nationals overseas has become a more integral part of the Department's business over the last 10 to 15 years. The Department subscribes to the Professionalism in Government agenda and has put in place structures to ensure that all senior Departmental staff will have gained experience in service delivery, policy and corporate operations. New entrants will usually spend the second year of their career in a service delivery role, most of which are consular or visa services placements in London. Overseas postings are increasingly important in providing staff with customer-facing experience.⁹

7. In order to maintain a flexible and responsive customer-orientated service, the Department needs sufficient representation throughout the world. The Department has looked at ways of improving efficiency in its network of Posts, while continuing to meet rising demand for its services. The use of honorary consuls and locally engaged members of staff seems to provide a successful and cost effective way of utilising resources, and there is scope for the Department to look at whether more use could be made of these initiatives. There are also arrangements in place to share consular work with other countries; for example Australia and New Zealand look after British interests in the Pacific. Sharing is usually carried out on a reciprocal basis, without charge. The Department considers that sharing the consular services of another country must be balanced against an expectation among British nationals that they will be able to see a representative of the British Government if they get into difficulty overseas.¹⁰

8. The Department has also responded to changing customer requirements by broadening its portfolio of services and embracing new ways of working. Consular services has added to its in-house expertise by employing legal, police and social-work specialists to take on a facilitating role when responding to more complex cases. Partnerships with other Departments and Non-Governmental Organisations, such as the joint Forced Marriage Unit set up with the Home Office, and work with voluntary agencies on child abduction cases, provide an effective means to share expertise and reduce the burden on Posts. There have, however, been instances where insufficient resources have led to individual Posts not responding, even though there could have been a need for consular intervention.¹¹

9. The Department allows Posts flexibility to operate an assistance service within central guidance. There will always be a degree of difference between operations in different posts because circumstances differ, but it recognises that it must look at how its framework is applied in local circumstances. For example the Department was unable to explain why consular staff visited almost all Britons who were in hospital in Bratislava, but none in hospital in Budapest. The Department has recognised that it needs to more actively

9 Qq 10–16

10 Qq 35–36, 120

11 Qq 37, 112

manage the expectations of its customers, and it intends to publish a *Consular Guide* in February 2006. This will be the first comprehensive statement to users of consular services setting out what services they can and cannot expect from the Department, as well as detailing the rights and obligations of British nationals travelling abroad.¹²

10. It is hard to assess the quality of service, and identify reasons for inconsistencies between Posts, when the Department lacks efficient management information systems. Some 13 years after a National Audit Office report recommended a more systematic approach to recording consular work, there is still some way to go.¹³ In 2001, the Department introduced a casework management system, Compass, at a total estimated cost of £3.3 million, however progress has been slow. Problems have been identified with basic system capabilities, such as cutting and pasting, and training by telephone was regarded as being difficult to follow. It was not sold to staff as a useful tool. As other reports by this Committee have shown,¹⁴ case management systems provide some of the worst examples of government computer projects. The Department aims to address some of these weaknesses by rolling out an upgraded version of Compass and a new management information system, Prism. But Posts still need to understand the purpose, potential benefits and use of the Compass system.¹⁵

11. The Department provides a passport-issuing service for the 13 million people living overseas who are entitled to a British passport, which is equivalent to the United Kingdom Passport Service for those living in the United Kingdom. In 2004–05 the Department issued 453,000 full and 11,000 emergency passports, from 104 out of its 233 overseas Posts. All passport holders, whether served by the Department or the United Kingdom Passport Service, pay a premium of £9.65 included in the price of their passport, which pays for assistance work and includes a provision for responding to major emergencies overseas.¹⁶

12. The Department's charge for a passport obtained overseas is 64% higher than the United Kingdom Passport Service's charge for a standard adult passport. The price is determined by having to recover the full cost of issuing passports at multiple locations around the world, whereas the United Kingdom Passport Service obtains economies of scale by issuing ten times as many passports from just seven locations. The Department believes that issuing passports at over 100 Posts worldwide has helped them provide a more convenient service for customers; issuing at so many locations has been a matter of choice, not necessity. The Department has agreed to consider whether British nationals living abroad should be able to choose to apply for a cheaper passport from the United Kingdom, but has expressed a concern about the possible effect on its own funding.¹⁷

12 Qq 4, 16, 87

13 Qq 2–3

14 44th Report from the Committee of Public Accounts, *New IT Systems for Magistrates Courts: The Libra Project* (HC 434, Session 2002–03); 27th Report from the Committee of Public Accounts, *Improving IT procurement: The impact of the Office of Government Commerce's initiatives on departments and suppliers in the delivery of major IT-enabled projects* (HC 555, Session 2004–05); Q 38

15 Qq 41, 43–44

16 C&AG's Report, para 2.1; Q 20

17 C&AG's Report, para, 2.10; Qq 34, 59

13. Issuing passports in over 100 locations around the world also raises issues of maintaining security. The Comptroller and Auditor General's report noted inconsistent application of security and anti-fraud procedures. Certain posts where the risks appeared at least as significant as in the United Kingdom tended to take anti-fraud steps such as interviewing new applicants very rarely if at all. The Department agrees that the fewer the places in which passports are issued, the lower the risk of fraud. Asked whether it would be better to issue passports from one place and use modern courier services to send them around the world, the Department said it was considering a range of options from doing everything in Britain to the use of fewer hub posts, but would not come to a conclusion until summer 2006.¹⁸

14. The move towards biometric passports offers challenges in adapting to new technology, but also provides an opportunity to review the current passport issuing network. Biometric passports are being introduced in two phases (see **Figure 2**). The Department believes it will meet both the EU deadline of 28 August 2006 for implementing Phase 1 biometrics, and the American visa waiver deadline of 26 October, which means that the four million British nationals who travel to the United States every year will remain exempt from needing a \$100 visa. The Department considers that it has put in place steps to address the risks with Phase 1 biometric passports. The passports have been piloted in Paris and Washington, and passport readers have been tested in American facilities to ensure that the biometric passports are compatible with passport readers at points of entry.¹⁹

15. Phase 2 of the biometric programme involves a step-change in technology whereby passports will contain fingerprint data and iris scans, although the exact requirements and the technical solution to gathering the data are not yet confirmed. The Department has also been in liaison with UK Visas, to learn from their more advanced experience in the practicalities of taking finger scans.²⁰

18 C&AG's Report, para 2.14 ; Qq 59–62

19 Qq 24, 100, 105

20 Qq 99, 19; Ev 29; Q 105

Figure 2: There are two different stages of using biometrics on passport applications

Phase 1 biometric passports	Phase 2 biometric passports
<p>Key features</p> <p><i>Digital photographs on chip 2005–06</i></p> <p>United Kingdom passports will contain the holder's personal details and a digital photograph stored on a secure electronic chip. This provides added security against forgery.</p> <p>Timetable</p> <p><i>Key dates:</i></p> <p>February 2004: Contract signed with 3M for delivery of systems to FCO Posts.</p> <p>September to December 2005: Pilot schemes for issue of biometric passports at its embassies in Paris and Washington.</p> <p>January to April 2006: Roll-out of biometric system to 104 FCO Posts overseas.</p> <p>July 2006: United Kingdom Passport Service to complete conversion to biometric passports.</p>	<p><i>Iris scanning and fingerprinting, from 2008</i></p> <p>United Kingdom passports would contain the holder's personal details and more advanced biometric data such as iris scans and fingerprint data, all stored on a secure electronic chip.</p> <p>This would be a more robust safeguard against identity or passport theft and misuse.</p> <p>To be confirmed, but if in line with European Union passport regulations this would be by January 2009.</p>

Source: National Audit Office

3 Responding to major consular crises

16. In addition to its regular consular services operation, the Department also responds to mass-casualty events abroad which result in potential British casualties or injured British nationals. The Department has dealt with a number of high profile crises since 2001, which have varied in nature and geographical coverage (**Figure 3**).

Figure 3: The FCO has handled several major overseas crises since 2001

Event	Date	Countries afflicted
New York Attacks	September 2001	America
Bali Bombings	October 2002	Indonesia
Indian Ocean Tsunami	December 2004	Thirteen countries including Indonesia, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Thailand
Doha bombings	March 2005	Qatar
Kusadasi bombing	July 2005	Turkey
Bombing in Sharm-el-Sheikh	July 2005	Egypt
Hurricane Katrina	August 2005	Bahamas, Cuba, United States
Hurricane Rita	September 2005	Bahamas, Cuba, Mexico and the United States
Hurricane Wilma	October 2005	Included Mexico, Cuba and the East coast of the United States
South Asia earthquake	October 2005	Pakistan
Bali bombing	October 2005	Indonesia

Source: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

17. In order to respond effectively to a crisis situation, all Posts are required to prepare emergency plans. New guidelines were sent out by the central Crisis Management Team in 2004 asking Posts to revise their emergency plans, although it was January 2006 before all Posts submitted an updated version. Plans should be tested at least annually, but the Department does not record information about which Posts have tested their plan, and only one third of the Posts consulted in a National Audit Office survey had done so. The Department acknowledged that there had been deficiencies in its approach to testing emergency plans. Posts that had responded to the Indian Ocean Tsunami in December 2004 made little use of their emergency plans, which were not fit for the purpose. To help address this problem the Department is recruiting a full time member of staff to ensure that all Posts have an emergency plan, and that these are monitored, tested and updated. The Department has also improved training for consular duties; 3,500 staff have been

trained at regional centres in their first year of operation, and there is compulsory training on crisis management for all heads of mission before they take up overseas postings.²¹

18. The Indian Ocean Tsunami, which struck the coasts of thirteen countries, presented the Department with an exceptional consular challenge. The emergency call handling system failed to cope with the unprecedented demand placed upon it, and some operators were insufficiently trained resulting in inadequate information being collected. Since the tsunami, the Department has put in place Service Level Agreements with the police which will provide access to police call handlers around the country in the event of a crisis. It is also investigating call centre arrangements with private sector companies.²²

19. The Department accepted that there were delays in reaching some of the areas affected by the Tsunami, such as Khao Lak, and consequently some people did not get the treatment and help that they needed. Regional Rapid Deployment Teams are now being set up to enable a faster response to future crises. One based in Hong Kong was successfully deployed following the Bali bombing in October 2005, and was in Thailand on the anniversary of the Tsunami.²³

21 C&AG's Report, para 4.10, 4.12; Qq 14, 64-65, 70

22 Qq 6-7

23 Qq 8-9, 64

Formal minutes

Monday 27 March 2006

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Richard Bacon
Mr Greg Clark
Mr Ian Davidson
Helen Goodman

Mr Sadiq Khan
Mr Austin Mitchell
Mr Alan Williams

A draft Report (Consular services to British nationals), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 19 read and agreed to.

Summary read and agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Thirty-ninth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned until Wednesday 29 March at 3.30 pm.]

Witnesses

Wednesday 11 January 2006

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Sir Michael Jay KCMG, Mr Dickie Stagg CMG, and Mr Paul Sizeland, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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List of written evidence

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Ev 18

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Third Report	Ministry of Defence: Major Projects Report 2004	HC 410 (<i>Cm 6712</i>)
Fourth Report	Fraud and error in benefit expenditure	HC 411 (<i>Cm 6728</i>)
Fifth Report	Inland Revenue: Tax Credits and deleted tax cases	HC 412 (<i>Cm 6689</i>)
Sixth Report	Department of Trade and Industry: Renewable energy	HC 413 (<i>Cm 6689</i>)
Seventh Report	The use of operating theatres in the Northern Ireland Health and Personal Social Services	HC 414 (<i>Cm 6699</i>)
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Ninth Report	Foot and Mouth Disease: applying the lessons	HC 563 (<i>Cm 6728</i>)
Tenth Report	Jobskills	HC 564 (<i>Cm 6724</i>)
Eleventh Report	Local Management of Schools	HC 565 (<i>Cm 6724</i>)
Twelfth Report	Helping those in financial hardship: the running of the Social Fund	HC 601 (<i>Cm 6728</i>)
Thirteenth Report	The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Tackling homelessness	HC 653 (<i>Cm 6743</i>)
Fourteenth Report	Energywatch and Postwatch	HC 654 (<i>Cm 6743</i>)
Fifteenth Report	HM Customs and Excise Standard Report 2003–04	HC 695 (<i>Cm 6743</i>)
Sixteenth Report	Home Office: Reducing vehicle crime	HC 696 (<i>Cm 6743</i>)
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Nineteenth Report	Department of Health: Tackling cancer: improving the patient journey	HC 790 (<i>Cm 6766</i>)
Twentieth Report	The NHS Cancer Plan: a progress report	HC 791 (<i>Cm 6766</i>)
Twenty-first Report	Skills for Life: Improving adult literacy and numeracy	HC 792 (<i>Cm 6766</i>)
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Thirty-fifth Report	The refinancing of the Norfolk and Norwich PFI Hospital	HC 694
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The reference number of the Treasury Minute to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number

Oral evidence

Taken before the Committee of Public Accounts

on Thursday 12 January 2006

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Richard Bacon
Angela Browning
Mr Ian Davidson

Mr Austin Mitchell
Kitty Ussher
Mr Alan Williams

Sir John Bourn KCB, Comptroller and Auditor General, National Audit Office, was in attendance.

Ms Paula Diggle, Treasury Officer of Accounts, HM Treasury, was in attendance.

REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL

CONSULAR SERVICES TO BRITISH NATIONALS (HC 594)

Witnesses: **Sir Michael Jay KCMG**, Permanent Under Secretary and Board Chairman, **Mr Dickie Stagg CMG**, Director General, Corporate Affairs and **Mr Paul Sizeland**, Director of Consular Services, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, gave evidence.

Q1 Chairman: Good afternoon, welcome to the Committee of Public Accounts where today we are looking at the Report *Consular Services to British Nationals*. We are joined by Sir Michael Jay, who is the Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Would you like to introduce your colleagues to us?

Sir Michael Jay: Thank you very much Mr Chairman. On my right is Mr Dickie Stagg who is the Director General of Corporate Affairs and has oversight of our service delivery operations, notably consular and visa work. On my left is Mr Paul Sizeland, who is the Director of our Consular Services.

Q2 Chairman: May we start by looking at page 39 of the Comptroller and Auditor General's Report? It tells us there in paragraph 3.16 that since 2001 the FCO has been implementing a new casework management system. The truth is Sir Michael, is it not, that this is now 13 years after an NAO Report recommended a more systematic approach to recording consular work and you are still rolling out the system 13 years later? Why is that?

Sir Michael Jay: We have put in place a system called Compass which is designed to ensure that there is better knowledge and information around the whole of our network and in London of our consular operations. That is indeed some time after 1992. It is bedding down. It has taken longer to bed down than we should like it to have done, but it is now starting to show real results in ensuring that there is better management information, that what happens in any part of the world is known instantly in London and elsewhere and therefore enables us to share best practice better than we have done in the past. Yes, it has taken time to get there but we are getting there.

Q3 Chairman: Okay, but there is still a long way to go. If you look at page 55 of the Report, paragraph 5.9 you will see that there is scope there to strengthen central monitoring, so how can you assess the quality of your service when there are still these gaps in management information?

Sir Michael Jay: The issue of management information is one which is not peculiar to our consular operations. In the Foreign Office we have not had really effective management information systems yet and that has been put in place through a new Oracle-based management information system Prism, which has now been rolled out to over half our posts, will be rolled out to the rest in the next few months and is improving our management information generally. That plus Compass will lead to a much better system of management information by the summer or the end of the year than we have had up to now.

Q4 Chairman: Let us look at one practical example. If we look at figure 25 which you will find on page 41 which deals with prison and hospital visiting, one thing which strikes me is that there are such wide variations when you look at this map. Why is it that you apparently visit almost all Britons who are in hospital in Bratislava but none in hospital in Budapest? What is the difference between Bratislava and Budapest?

Sir Michael Jay: May I make one general point which lies behind both your last two questions and that is the balance between central control and management in the network, if I might put it that way. What we are aiming to put in place is a system in which we have the necessary flexibility for our managers in all our posts overseas to operate within a centrally determined system, under central guidance. We are moving towards that and it will, as you have said, be easier with better management

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information and with our Compass system, but I think there will always be a degree of difference between operations in different posts because circumstances differ. Paul will talk about Bratislava versus Budapest, but there will be some parts of the European Union, say, where we shall want to be more assiduous in prison visiting or hospital visiting than other parts because conditions and circumstances will differ. So there will always be a degree of inconsistency.

Mr Sizeland: To follow up Sir Michael's point on Compass, we have had difficulties in terms of getting a system that was first of all effective, user friendly and therefore was actually going to accomplish what we wanted. We have tracked this through the last couple of years and we are now mounting an upgrade which will make it a more valuable tool for us, quicker, with information which we will be able to transfer for other purposes. We will have a single version of the truth on every single consular case which can be easily accessible from anywhere in the world. As Sir Michael noted on the issue of prison visiting policy, we are looking at making the best use of our resources and within the EU, Iceland and certain other places where we are reasonably satisfied with prison conditions, our policy is to visit once after sentencing and thereafter only if real need arises. There are occasionally other issues which arise, for example if there are language difficulties, problems of people settling in, welfare issues, health issues and so on, issues relating to the way that the families are handling the detention of one of their members. We try to take a pragmatic approach while setting, as it were, a framework within which we can set out some basic guidelines. One of the things we have worked on, and Compass will help us to track it, is to make sure that we are pursuing our policies ever more consistently across what is a very diverse network, over 200 posts.

Q5 Chairman: Let us just look at funding for a moment. If you look at paragraph 5.4 on page 53, more and more people are travelling abroad and that is going to put a lot more strain on your funding. How are you going to ensure that you are putting the effort where the problems are?

Sir Michael Jay: You are right; the premise is right. There is increasing demand for our services, 65 million visits overseas a year at the moment, more diverse, more vulnerable groups travelling, travelling increasingly on their own and to more and more adventurous places in a world which is increasingly dangerous. I have no doubt that the result is going to be increasing demand for services within a constrained financial framework. What we are trying to do to meet that is to be increasingly innovative and flexible in the way in which we do respond to this demand. We are also committed to learning the lessons from some of the crises that we have handled in the last year or so. We are working much more closely with partners than we have done in the past, which is an important means of sharing the burden, working with and through others. To take some examples: we have been working with the police, the Red Cross, SOS International, much

more than in the past; we are working with other international organisations; to take one example, in preparing for a possible avian flu pandemic; we are working with the FA and with fans in preparing for the World Cup in Germany in 2006; so consultation, partnership, increasing professionalism through better training, making more innovative use of our network, for example honorary consuls.

Q6 Chairman: Let us look at one practical example then shall we of what happened? Let us look at how you dealt with the tsunami shall we? Figure 28 on page 47. Your call system broke down, did it not? Operators were not sufficiently trained, poor information was collected and the whole system broke down, did it not?

Sir Michael Jay: The system was inadequate to cope with utterly unprecedented demand for it.

Q7 Chairman: So if this happens again, you are going to be ready are you?

Sir Michael Jay: I cannot promise that we are going to be ready for something which would be as dramatic as the tsunami. I hope we shall not have to be ready for something as dramatic as the tsunami, but this is one of the lessons we have indeed learned and since then we have call service arrangements now with the police and we are extending those also to look at call centre arrangements with various private sector companies as well. These are ways in which we shall aim to cope with the question of demand.

Q8 Chairman: Why were you so slow in getting to some areas? For instance, if you look further down that figure, you were very slow in reaching the worst affected area which was Khao Lak. What went wrong?

Sir Michael Jay: What happened, first of all, was that this was an unprecedented disaster in Thailand and what our embassy had to do first of all was to be in Bangkok to handle enormous numbers of demands coming to the embassy in Bangkok. It also had to service a new office which was set up in Phuket, because that was where the Thai authorities themselves had set up their emergency office and to where they were repatriating people from the affected areas. We also had to get people to the affected areas along a coastline of over 200 miles.

Q9 Chairman: Could your consular staff not have made it their business to have some idea where the main concentrations of Britons were? The problem was that you thought most of them were at Phuket and that is why you did not get to places like Khao Lak. Is that not the truth?

Sir Michael Jay: No. We went to Phuket because that is where the Thai authorities were setting up the emergency centre and it was clearly important that we should be there to be able to receive the wounded and the distressed who were being sent there from other areas along the coastline. We also sent people on 27 December to Krabi, which was one area to the East of Phuket where we knew there were families in distress, and we sent a small team of three people

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also, which was in fact one third of the total staff then available, to the north of Phuket to the area around Khao Lak and they were there by a quarter to 10 in the morning on 27 December. They alas could not see everybody that they would have wanted to see, nor everybody that they should have seen and the result of that was that some people did not get the treatment and the help that they needed and we wanted to give them.

Q10 Chairman: If you look over the page, at the bottom, this is figure 28 on page 48, the very last entry about emergency plans, it says here “Posts reported making little use of their emergency plans during the crisis”. Sir Michael, what is the point of having emergency plans if they are not fit for purpose and they are not used?

Sir Michael Jay: They were not fit for the purpose of the tsunami, because nobody had envisaged that there would be a tsunami on this scale. It is absolutely essential that all our posts should have emergency plans; they have not all had them, they will all have them very shortly, they will all be fit for purpose and they will all have been tested, which is crucial. What happened in this case was that the particular circumstances and extreme circumstances of the tsunami just turned out to be less relevant to the emergency plan than we had hoped. One of the lessons that we have learned is that there should be proper and appropriate emergency plans, they should be in place and they should be tested.

Q11 Chairman: Would you agree that as far as the public are concerned consular services are increasingly important? The emphasis in the modern world is less on sending dispatches in matchless prose from posts back to ministers and is more about providing practical help to our citizens. Will you ensure that increasingly in the future, those high-flyers who become ambassadors have had real experience in consular work?

Sir Michael Jay: Yes, I agree with the premise and I accept the conclusion and one of the recent things we have done is to ensure that every, high quality, fast stream, new entrant graduate who comes into the Foreign Office spends the second of their two years’ induction in service delivery, either in consular or visas. I have talked to a number of our young people who have done that and they have been very impressed by the difficulty and the importance of the operation. We will indeed make sure that is the case.

Q12 Chairman: Will they have real jobs later in their careers as a consul general, in Marseille or wherever, doing a real job before they end up as ambassadors?

Sir Michael Jay: They certainly will.¹

Q13 Chairman: They will, will they?

Sir Michael Jay: The Foreign Office very much shares the underlying philosophy of the Professionalism in Government agenda which is

aimed to ensure that all senior civil servants, including our own, have the right balance of service delivery, policy and corporate skills. That is hugely important because underlying your question is the truth that almost all our ambassadors, certainly in bilateral posts, have to be able to send not so much the polished dispatch but the trenchant e-mail and they have to be able to manage themselves properly and they have to be able to cope with consular crises. **Chairman:** Thank you Sir Michael for expressing yourself in such matchless prose.

Q14 Mr Mitchell: I should like to take that a little further. It does not emerge so much from the Report as from personal experience in dealing with constituents’ problems relating to the consular service. It has always struck me that there is a class division between the first class brains of the Foreign Office sitting upstairs in rather lavish premises entertaining intelligentsia and MPs and visiting parties, and usually a lean-to shed at the back somewhere where the consular services are provided by a much humbler class of person. This has been a real distinction in my experience.

Sir Michael Jay: That may have been true some 10 or 15 years ago; it is not the case now. I would expect all our ambassadors, no matter how grand, to be really focused on consular work. May I just give you one example? After the terrorist attack in Sharm-el-Sheikh, I was on the phone to Derek Plumblyley, our ambassador to Cairo, at two o’clock in the morning. He was on the phone to me agreeing what the reaction should be in an emergency. That is the kind of response I would expect our ambassadors to have and they do. There is also compulsory training, I should say, on crisis management for all heads of mission before they go and take up their posts; they should all be trained and they will all, I can assure you, from me and the Foreign Secretary, have been told that serving the public, in particular in consular work, is one of the top things they do.

Q15 Mr Mitchell: Training in disasters or whatever is rather different to putting in a work period at the people face, dealing with the actual problems that are coming up. You were saying to the Chairman that in future people, to get on the career and the promotion ladder, people will have to have had experience of the nitty gritty of consular work.

Sir Michael Jay: They will all have had experience of service delivery, either consular work or visa work. I suspect when we did have the discussion around this table about visa work, the same thing was being said then about the importance of getting really good people in our visa operation. They will have experience of visa work or consular work in London and, increasingly, they will have experience overseas as well and our best people will be doing consular work overseas. I should say as well, that of course the vast majority of our posts are not the Paris and Washingtons and Berlins, they are small posts with only two or three or four people and anybody there at number one, number two, number three in the hierarchy is going to be doing consular work as part of his or her ordinary duties.

¹ *Note by witness:* The Committee may want to note that the post of Consul General in Marseille has now been localised, ie, it is filled by a locally-engaged member of staff, thus delivering significant cost savings.

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Q16 Mr Mitchell: There is also in some of them, particularly in African countries but Asia as well, a siege mentality. The training you need for this kind of work is training in a service industry, because it is a service industry essentially and it is there to help people. The ethos of the service industry is that the customer is always right. The ethos of the consular officers always seems to me to be that the customer is quite probably wrong and we shall try to find ways of telling him that.

Sir Michael Jay: I hope if you come across that occasion Mr Mitchell, you will tell me, because I should come down very hard on somebody who gave that impression to a Member of Parliament or indeed a member of the public. That is not what our consular staff are for. The consular staff are there to help and one way in which I hope we shall get this message across is by the consular guide that we shall be publishing probably next month. We have had our own guide internally about how we expect people to conduct themselves in carrying out consular business. We think it very important that that should be public. We have consulted about that, which was a manifesto commitment of the Government at the last election, over the last few months and next month we shall be issuing a guide which will set out very clearly what we can do, what we cannot do and it has a very clear statement of what our values are and how we expect our consular staff to behave themselves. If they do not, then I would expect there to be complaints and they would be held to account.

Q17 Mr Mitchell: I am glad to hear that, but it is also a question of how you treat people. One of the things which emerges clearly is that we are now getting a different kind of visitor overseas. It is not just the literary classes going on a grand tour as they did in the 18th century, it is football fans. I see you have made special arrangements for rugby fans, but the arrangements for football fans do not seem to be exactly the same; they seem to be viewed with an element of distaste. Here we are letting loose a posse of hooligans around the world and easyJet customers and other people travelling on the cheap. It seems to me that there is an element of distaste there; you are stretching yourselves to have to deal with these people.

Sir Michael Jay: I would not put it that way. I was ambassador in Paris during the 1998 World Cup; we had the English and Scottish teams around the country for several weeks. It was a challenging few weeks to be honest and we have honed our skills a lot since then and we have, I believe and hope, a really professional operation which we are putting in place now for the World Cup. Not that it is anything to do with the fans, the nature of the fans, but because we know what we are likely to have to face. We are also working with easyJet on one of their exercises this month.

Q18 Mr Mitchell: You must bear in mind that some of these fans actually come from Grimsby, not that Grimsby Town travels overseas all that much. May I just ask about the charging system? You seem to be

making an exorbitant profit on passports in some areas. Is that the case, that your charges are excessive for passports? Secondly, what is going to happen when we get this new system of biometrics? If you are going to have to go round with a charabanc and pick up people in doorways, the homeless and cart them off to some centre where they are going to be fingerprinted, eye-tested, face photographed, you are not going to be able to issue passports in embassies in remote places.

Sir Michael Jay: Not in the same way as we do now. No, we do not make a huge profit on our passport operation. The passport operation is, in principle, self-funding and the fees for the passports that we issue overseas—

Q19 Mr Mitchell: So you charge the actual local costs of providing that passport?

Sir Michael Jay: Yes. The £69 that we charge for full passports which are issued overseas, that price is determined by what we believe is the price necessary to cover the operation of issuing passports around the globe.² You are right that biometrics is going to be a really big challenge for us. We are moving to phase one of the biometrics' system at the moment with passports which just have a chip like that, which is a facial recognition. We shall, before too long, be moving to phase two in which there will be finger or iris scans on them as well and it is not going to be possible to maintain the present passport issuing network given the technology of issuing biometric passports. We are going to have to move to more of a hub and spoke operation when we have fewer passport issuing places and find some way of ensuring that the necessary documentation gets to the hub. I am reaching the limit of my detailed knowledge on biometrics and maybe Mr Sizeland could say one or two more words about that.

Q20 Mr Mitchell: Before he does, will you be issuing identity cards at the same time? The operations are now going to run together, are they not?

Sir Michael Jay: That is taking things one stage further. If we move to a stage where we also have, let us say, identity cards and it becomes the rule for British citizens to travel within the European Union on an identity card rather than a passport, that would clearly affect the way in which we fund our entire consular operation. We would then have to discuss with the Treasury other means of ensuring that we could fund our operation, but we are not there yet.

Mr Sizeland: May I just say something on the football side as well? We put in place some quite elaborate arrangements for Euro 2004, including working very closely with the Football Supporters' Federation. We try to get as close as possible to the fans to offer advice and so on and we shall be putting in place similar plans in Germany later this year, working very closely not only with ministries here, Home Office, police and so on, but also the German authorities, the Football Association and the

² *Note by witness:* A full table of consular fees can be found on the FCO website at: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/Consular%20Fees%20Dec%2005%20A4.0.pdf>

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Football Supporters' Federation and other groups. That campaign will ratchet up as we get closer to the event, offering advice to fans, what to do if they do not have tickets and so on and so forth. On biometrics, we shall be rolling out the phase one with the chip which has the photo on it from March to June this year overseas. I have some copies here if Members of the Committee would like to see them. This is relatively straightforward. When we get on to the issue of finger scans and iris scans, there are issues over how you enrol those. We are working through those technical solutions now with others who are also working in that area, for example, UK Visas and the identity cards' programme.

Sir Michael Jay: At one point I said that the £69 which is the cost of the passports we issue overseas is designed to cover the passport issuing operation. It also includes the £9.65 consular premium that is the element in the cost of each passport which is then paid for our consular work overseas. I should have made that clear.

Q21 Mr Mitchell: Just one last question on the Know Before You Go campaign and the kind of information you provide for travellers. The comment is that the take-up is disappointing. Having looked at it on some occasions before going abroad, is that because it is too stilted and dry as dust and too cautious?

Sir Michael Jay: I hope not.

Q22 Mr Mitchell: But it is all those things.

Sir Michael Jay: If it is all those things, we need to look at it again because it is hugely important that we do raise the awareness among the travelling public of some of the dangers and difficulties they face and the real importance, for example, of knowing where they are going, of understanding the risks and of taking out travel insurance. This is a marketing operation and if we are not getting through to the people who are our customers, we need to think more about how we do that. Now there are things like *The Rough Guide to Safer Travel*.

Q23 Mr Mitchell: That was a success, was it not?

Sir Michael Jay: That is good. We have also, for example, a Tesco's travel insurance leaflet which has on the back of it a plug for our travel advice. We are trying to market ourselves in maybe a more effective way than we have done in the past because of the need to get our services across. Do you want to talk about student ambassadors?

Mr Sizeland: Yes. We are conscious that we have to get the messages out to all travellers' groups and we have recently appointed student ambassadors in 15 universities who promote the travel safety messages such as in *The Rough Guide to Safer Travel*. Because they are talking to fellow students, they are having much more impact. We also have quite an exciting TV filler on the perils of not having the right insurance, which is being shown around university TV networks, probably targeting 1.6 million students in this country at various times.

Q24 Chairman: The reference to biometrics is in figure 16 on page 27. We see at the bottom it is going to cost us £22 more for each passport than we pay at the moment. However, we know all about technical glitches in this Committee and failed IT projects. Can you assure me that none of our citizens are going to be denied entry because of a technical glitch on a biometric passport? It is down to you.

Mr Sizeland: It certainly is. We have tried to learn the lessons from other experiences; the GenIE passport programme is mentioned in the Report. We have involved users at post much more in the development of the system. We have also piloted the passport so far in Paris and Washington; we shall be doing that again in Washington later this month. In terms of managing the risks, we believe we have done as much as we possibly can in terms of testing the product. We are also, and it is also a value-for-money measure, upgrading our current passport arrangements rather than bringing in totally new kit. In other words, the cost in terms of the new equipment they are going to be working on is minimised and therefore the training needs can be much more specific.

Q25 Mr Williams: That is a long way of saying no.

Mr Sizeland: I was rather hoping it would be offering some reassurance.

Q26 Kitty Ussher: I wanted just to pick up on the point of passports, then talk generally about value for money and then, if the Chairman will indulge me, I have a local piece of casework which I should like to raise with you. First of all on passports. It is true, is it not, that if you live in the UK and apply for a passport in the UK through the UK passport service, the fee that you pay includes a small fee for consular service? Is that correct?

Sir Michael Jay: It includes £9.65 which in itself includes a small element for emergency work overseas. Yes, it does.

Q27 Kitty Ussher: However, if you are a UK citizen with exactly the same residency rights and happen to be living abroad and you use those consular services by applying for your passport through a British embassy abroad, the Report in paragraph 2.10 says you pay a 64% higher fee.

Sir Michael Jay: If you apply for and get your passport from an embassy or a high commission overseas, you pay more than if you apply through the UK passport service here. That is because the fees are designed to meet the costs of the passport issuing overseas.

Q28 Kitty Ussher: Even though we are all paying already for the cost of consular services, regardless of where we live?

Sir Michael Jay: Every passport, wherever it is issued, includes the premium for consular work. So, if you buy a passport here you are paying an extra £9.65 to help fund those of us who travel overseas and need help, or our relatives do. That is true wherever you get the passport. The difference in the price of the passport is because the passports issued

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overseas are priced, the consular premium apart, in order to cover the costs of the overseas issuing network in our embassies and high commissions and that is the agreement that we reached with the Treasury as to how our passport issuing should be funded.

Q29 Kitty Ussher: Would you not agree though, that those who apply abroad are therefore paying for consular services twice, once in the £9.65 and once in the additional fee they have to pay because they happen to live abroad and apply for their passport through a high commission or embassy?

Mr Stagg: There may be a misunderstanding. There is a distinction between the passport work and the consular work. The passport work is self-funding and the consular work is funded from the premium people pay whether they buy passports in the UK or overseas. So the bit of extra that people pay overseas for a passport is to cover purely passport activities, not consular, as we would define them.

Q30 Kitty Ussher: So passports are not included in your definition of consular for these purposes.

Mr Stagg: No.

Q31 Kitty Ussher: Thank you for that clarification. Obviously none of us represents overseas British nationals by definition, but do you not think it is slightly unfair that they should have to pay more than a British citizen living in the UK?

Sir Michael Jay: You could argue that: you could also argue that there are 13 million Britons who live overseas permanently. There is a very interesting question as to how far they do or should rely on consular services, for example let us take people who are in Spain, have been living there a long time, as they get older. You can argue that people living overseas may, during the course of 20 or 30 years living overseas, make more use of our consular services because they are living overseas, than those who are visiting. You can argue that both ways.

Q32 Kitty Ussher: But you have just said the definition of the passport services and the consular services are separate. The passport price is not included in your definition of consular services, so surely that answer contradicts your previous answer.

Sir Michael Jay: I do not think so.

Q33 Kitty Ussher: You just said that you pay £9.65 for consular services wherever you are, you pay more for your passport abroad because it costs more to produce a passport abroad. However in your last answer, you just said that people living abroad require consular services more and that is why the passport price is greater.

Sir Michael Jay: May do. I did not say why. You are asking whether it is unfair. The question I was trying to address was whether I think that you would use our consular services more if you were living overseas or if you were visiting.

Q34 Kitty Ussher: That was not my question. My question was: is it unfair that the price of a passport is greater if you happen to be a British national living abroad than if you live in Britain? Should they not have the choice of where they can apply for their passport from? Do you not have diplomatic bags which are able to courier passports effectively?

Sir Michael Jay: I am not sure about that, but there is a recommendation in the NAO Report that we should be more flexible about this and we shall look into that point. It is partly a question which we need to talk to the Treasury about because it relates to funding; if for example you are living in Calais paying £69 as opposed to living in Dover and paying less, it obviously makes sense for people to be able to pay less. We shall look into that.

Q35 Kitty Ussher: Thank you very much indeed. Separately, the Report highlights the increasing use of honorary consuls and sharing consular arrangements with other countries. In this Committee we are obviously primarily concerned with value for money for the UK taxpayer. Have you done a cost benefit analysis of the effect to the UK taxpayer of a greater use of such arrangements?

Sir Michael Jay: There are two separate issues there. One is the use of honorary consuls as opposed to full-time diplomatic staff or full-time embassy or consular staff, because we pay honorary consuls an honorarium and they do, in my view, a fantastic service for us around the globe. That is clearly very good value for money. What we do need to do is to look a little bit more flexibly about how we do staff our consular operations. What we are doing increasingly now, for example, is having an honorary consul with a locally engaged member of consular staff working with them, so we get more flexibility. There is clear value for money in having honorary consuls and we need to look more flexibly at how we use them. I think the other part of your question was whether we should be working more closely with other countries in order to share consular work. We do a certain amount of that already and the trend in the longer term will be moving towards something more of a kind of consular space in which we share consular services with other countries. There is quite an important issue here because my guess is that most British citizens will still expect to be looked after if they get into difficulty by a representative of the British Government. That is a factor that we would need to take into account in deciding on the pros and cons of working more closely with others, but I do think we should be doing so, particularly within Europe. In the Pacific, Australia and New Zealand look after our interests. We look after the interests of a number of other countries in some parts of the world, so a certain amount of this goes on.

Q36 Kitty Ussher: What is the cost per piece of casework for a sharing arrangement, compared with when it is directly funded entirely through our structure?

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Mr Sizeland: We are not charged by Australians or EU Member States for consular services provided to our citizens. There is no mechanism, as it were, for charging, although in a case where UK citizens were not involved, there was a claim by one EU member against another EU Member State for the cost of chartering an aircraft or something like that. By and large, these are done just on a reciprocal basis without charge.

Q37 Kitty Ussher: My time is coming to an end, so I just want briefly to raise my constituency point. I shall not mention any names for obvious reasons, but a family of five children were abducted by their father away from their mother and taken to Pakistan against several court injunctions internationally and locally and the solicitor representing the mother, who had her entire family removed illegally, advised me that if a meeting could be arranged and facilitated by the British embassy abroad in the appropriate conditions, she thought the actions of the children in that environment would be such that it would be quite clear that they needed to be with their mother. The lawyer had significant experience of this type of arrangement. It seemed reasonable to me. I asked whether it could be done. I was told by the high commissioner in Pakistan that insufficient resources were available. I would ask, please, whether you could write to me again following on from the ministerial letter that I have already received to say whether you would be prepared to look at this again in the interests of my constituent.

Sir Michael Jay: I would certainly be prepared to write again, but do you want to say anything more at this stage about that Paul?

Mr Sizeland: Pakistan is one place which accounts for quite a high percentage of our child abduction cases and in fact we do have a protocol now with the Pakistani judiciary on these issues which is starting to have some impact. One reason for having the protocol was to reduce the administrative burden on the mission of individual cases. We should be very happy to have another look at the case and see whether it would work under the protocol.

Kitty Ussher: Can we find a way? Thank you.

Q38 Mr Bacon: Sir Michael, if you had sat on this Committee for the last four or five years, the phrase “case management system” would probably make your blood run cold, because one of the worst cases we ever saw of a computer management project was a case management system for the magistrates’ courts. Could you tell me about COMPASS? It was purchased in 2001, despite a recommendation by the NAO that you should be doing something more up to date in 1992. Was it primarily due to lack of resources that you remained manual for nine years? Why did you not adopt a computerised case management system sooner after the recommendation 13 years ago?

Sir Michael Jay: I do not know the answer to that question.

Mr Sizeland: I do not know the answer to that. I do not know whether it—

Q39 Mr Bacon: Mr Stagg? By the way, I should just like to check. From where I am sitting it looks like Mr Stag GCMG, but actually it is Mr Stagg CMG, is that right?

Mr Stagg: Sadly you are right I am afraid. Part of the answer, but only part, is that we only introduced our new global IT infrastructure in the very late 1990s and until then, we did not have a system on which we would have been confident to place complex new applications. Since we introduced the new system which was in 1998–1999 effectively, we have had a system, in which we have had reasonable confidence, working effectively for us.

Q40 Mr Bacon: Then in 2001 you purchased Compass.

Mr Stagg: On the basis of the experience of the Canadians who gave us a very good account of their experience.

Q41 Mr Bacon: I am looking at paragraph 3.16 onwards. How is it then that members of your own staff have not had this experience? In 3.17, it says “There is not yet a consistent understanding between posts of the purpose, potential benefits and use of the system”? How can that be?

Mr Sizeland: When we were rolling out COMPASS, the training could have been better. We did a lot of telephone training and although we have quite a high success rate on evaluation, that could have been better.

Q42 Mr Bacon: When you say “a high success rate on evaluation”, referring to the training it says “. . . and widely regarded by users to have been difficult to follow and the outcomes poor”. How can that be consistent with a high rating?

Mr Sizeland: The training got a high rating of 70% on the telephone training. Where we have had difficulty—

Q43 Mr Bacon: That is not what it says. It says the opposite. “. . . training on the system has usually been given by telephone rather than on site and is widely regarded by users to have been difficult to follow and the outcomes poor”. This is paragraph 3.17, bottom of page 39, last paragraph before figure 24.

Mr Sizeland: I have some other information here which may possibly contradict but which may come later, and I shall happily go into that. We have been conscious that we have not got COMPASS right; we have not sold COMPASS as a useful tool.

Q44 Mr Bacon: May I ask you about cutting and pasting? The next page, page 40, says “Some Posts do not find the system to be user-friendly. Key problems include an inability to freely cut and paste”. Obviously I shall not hold you responsible for the split infinitive, but can you explain why the Canadians did not find the inability to freely cut and paste to be a problem?

Mr Sizeland: There are two issues. One, we are trying to do some things which others, for example the Canadians, are not doing and there is the

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question of the number of cases and so on. We have identified this as a problem, which is why we have now upgraded COMPASS and we are piloting it now.

Q45 Mr Bacon: What evaluation went on before you bought it? Frankly, to cut and paste is pretty basic, is it not? What evaluation went on in 2001? Was any of this subject to the OGC Gateway Review? Was that available at that point?

Sir Michael Jay: It preceded it.

Q46 Mr Bacon: What evaluation did go on? Any?

Mr Sizeland: On the original decision?

Q47 Mr Bacon: Yes, on the decision to buy Compass.

Sir Michael Jay: The short answer is that we agree with the Report and what it says about this. The introduction of COMPASS did not go as well as it should have done, training was not brilliant and clearly there were aspects of the system which were not sufficiently piloted or tried or whatever. I have no quarrel at all with the analysis or the recommendations in the Report. We are all very conscious, because there have been problems in IT systems other than this, of how much more professional . . .

Q48 Mr Bacon: You did not want to be out of line with the rest of government? May I invite you to write to the Committee with a detailed note on COMPASS and in particular the total expenditure, I mean everything, since you first started talking to the Canadians on COMPASS, including the costs each year since 2001, if that is possible?

Sir Michael Jay: Yes.³

Q49 Mr Bacon: May I move on to paragraph 2.8 on Firecrest? Firecrest is a Hewlett Packard package which you have agreed with them over seven years. The Report states that it has a value of £180 million, but towards the end of that paragraph it says “The total cost of introducing Future Firecrest is budgeted to be £320 million”. What is the £140 million extra going on and to whom?

Mr Stagg: There are two costs really: one is the contract with Hewlett Packard which is £180 million; the rest is the internal cost, because quite a large amount of the support is being covered by our own staff. We have our own internal service business which is going to be covering quite a large chunk of these costs, so we try to make sure that all the costs of the whole programme, over the time, are visible.

Q50 Mr Bacon: You do not know that you are making my blood run cold, but that is exactly what happened with Libra; there were huge internal costs which shot up. It was supposed to be £10 million and it ended up being more like £80 million. You are saying now that it is £140 million?

Mr Stagg: I can go into some detail, but we are going to have to build a new server farm to house the new servers for this which is going to cost between £25 and £30 million.

Q51 Mr Bacon: Who is building that? Are you saying that is being done internally, not by Hewlett Packard? That is separate from the £180 million, is it?

Mr Stagg: Yes.

Q52 Mr Bacon: Are you doing that?

Mr Stagg: We are contracting somebody to do it.

Q53 Mr Bacon: Who?

Mr Stagg: The contract is out for tender at the moment.

Q54 Mr Bacon: So it is just a guess that it will be roughly £140 million in total.

Mr Stagg: We have obviously made calculations of what we expect it to be and on the case of the building, for example, that is between £25 and £30 million. Clearly, if these costs turn out to be—

Q55 Mr Bacon: That still leaves another £110 million before you get to £320 million. What is the £110 million going on?

Mr Stagg: Well it involves the network of system administrators around the world who keep up the system. It involves the help desk. It involves the staff maintaining the system around the clock.

Q56 Mr Bacon: Is it possible you could send a note with the breakdown of your anticipated costs? That would be very, very helpful.

Mr Stagg: Absolutely.⁴

Q57 Mr Bacon: Could you say how much GenIE and Omnibase cost in total?

Mr Sizeland: The GenIE costs were £4.5 million capital costs including the various upgrades. We actually access Omnibase for free. I would have to find out the detail of the arrangements, because it was actually owned by UK Passport Service and we have a facility to access it. I do not have the details immediately to hand.

Q58 Mr Bacon: If you could write to the Committee I should be very grateful.

Mr Sizeland: Certainly.⁵

Q59 Mr Bacon: Over the page, paragraph 2.10 onwards, it relates to something Kitty Ussher was saying earlier. How essential is it for consular operations to be able to issue passports in many, many different places? As the Report makes clear, you are printing passports at over 100 posts. Purely from a security and anti-fraud point of view, that would seem an extremely dangerous thing to be doing. If your staff have inconsistent ideas of how you should use something like Compass in 104 different locations, the idea that there will not be

³ Ev 18–19

⁴ Ev 19–27

⁵ Ev 27

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inconsistent application of security and anti-fraud procedures in 100 different places is unlikely. The Report refers to the fact, for example in paragraph 2.14, that certain posts the NAO visited "... where the risks appeared lower but still at least as significant as in the United Kingdom, tended to take such steps very rarely, if at all", anti-fraud steps that is. Is it essential to issue passports in 100 different places?

Sir Michael Jay: It is not essential; it is a matter of choice. It provides a better service for those who want passports, if you can have them quite close by. As we were saying earlier on in response to another question, the movement towards biometrics is in any case going to mean that we should be issuing passports overseas in fewer hub posts than we are now and we shall also be considering the extent to which we can repatriate some of that business to London. So the nature of the passport issuing operation over the next few years will change.

Q60 Mr Bacon: You are talking about better service, but in paragraph 2.6 it says that the problems of dealing with "... Omnibase or the underlying infrastructure had resulted in delays in issuing passports and wasted staff time, to varying extents. This ranged from a complete loss of service for several days, through shorter spells of unavailability, to system slowness". That is plainly not good service. Caterpillar, the engineering company, can get a part, an engineering part, to any of its clients anywhere in the world in 48 hours using modern courier services and presumably the same could be true for passports. Have you considered issuing passports all from one place and then simply couriering them all around the world, not least on grounds of efficiency and economy of scale, but also on grounds of security?

Sir Michael Jay: As a result of the need through biometrics to change the profile of our passport issuing, we are now considering a range of options, which range from doing everything in Britain to issuing passports in a series of hubs and we have not come to a conclusion as to how best to do that.

Q61 Mr Bacon: What is the timescale for coming to that conclusion?

Sir Michael Jay: By the summer, but in doing that we shall need to be balancing security, service to the public and value for money. It is not a straightforward proposal.

Q62 Chairman: So having a local system of issuing passports will not lead to increased risks of fraud will it Sir Michael? That is what you are telling us. Having a local system of issuing passports will not lead to more risks of fraud.

Sir Michael Jay: There is clearly a risk of fraud now. My guess is that the fewer the places in which you are issuing the passports, the lower the risk of fraud.

Q63 Angela Browning: Sir Michael, I just wanted to make an observation and that is that if Mr Mitchell's constituency is sending abroad a lot of football hooligans, increasingly my constituency in Devon is

probably sending abroad a lot more elderly people who are travelling more and spending the kids' inheritance. I was looking at the figures. I see it is a remarkably low figure for the number of people who die or become ill abroad who seek your assistance, but as more elderly people are travelling and as they find it more difficult to get insurance, I wonder whether you have picked this up as a trend and whether you have considered how to deal with these people who do die abroad or are very ill and do not have insurance.

Sir Michael Jay: We have picked that up, both in relation to travellers overseas and also British citizens living overseas who are getting older and inevitably getting towards the end of their life. We have started working with Age Concern. We have a first workshop later this month with Age Concern to try to see whether we can work together to address some of these issues.

Mr Sizeland: It is a problem now in that a section of the population, which by and large pays less for insurance of various descriptions, house, car, whatever, as they get older finally ends up paying more for travel insurance. We are working very closely with the travel industry as well, Saga and other companies, in terms of training their staff and ensuring some basic standards.

Q64 Angela Browning: It is quite difficult to get it over 75 at all, never mind paying more for it. May I just bring you onto something else? I am very keen to hear more, given the comments on page 50 of the Report, paragraphs 4.10 to 4.12, which I actually think are quite damning in terms of your preparedness and your approach to the question of dealing with problems of disasters and I know that several people have focused on the tsunami. If I look at paragraph 4.12 for example and the fact that you do not record information about testing plans, this preparedness for your staff all seems terribly *laissez-faire*. If they do not have an incentive or an imperative to take these matters seriously, I just wonder how you are going to improve their game. How are they going to know, if something like the tsunami, or even something on a smaller scale but just as horrendous, happened that they are going to be able to deal with that?

Sir Michael Jay: There are several ways of ensuring that they become more professional and better able to deal with a crisis like the tsunami or a lesser crisis. One answer is through the increase in the number of rapid deployment teams and also the better training and skills sets within each rapid deployment team. That is one of the things on which we are now focusing and one of the lessons we learned from the tsunami. For example, there is a rapid deployment team based in Hong Kong, properly trained, fully trained, fully exercised, which deployed on the first day of operation to Bali and was in Thailand for the anniversary to help the families there. We are also, as we said earlier on, increasing better training for our consular staff overseas and our staff here who go to do consular work overseas. We have regional training centres which were set up just over a year ago to improve the training for all our overseas staff;

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3,500 staff have been trained in the first year of operation. This is all part of a much broader move towards a more professional diplomatic service than we have had in the past and consular work is an increasingly important part of that. We are also recruiting a full-time member of staff whose duty will be solely to monitor and test the emergency plans that we have overseas. I cannot give you an absolute assurance that everybody is going to respond exactly as they should. I do believe that our staff are becoming increasingly professional over time, better trained, more conscious of the duties which will fall on them in an emergency, working more closely with headquarters in London to ensure a consistent response. I believe that the consular guide that I mentioned earlier on will help with that.

Q65 Angela Browning: In paragraph 4.12 it tells me “The FCO does not systematically record information about which Posts have to date tested their plans”, so the training is good but actually running them through the dry exercise of this . . . “but our survey indicated that so far only one third of the Posts we consulted had tested their plans”. That seems terribly laid back. Why is there no imperative? Why is no directive set for this and no timetable?

Sir Michael Jay: There is. It is clearly unacceptable to have that low level. That is why we are now recruiting somebody whose full-time job will be to ensure that all plans are tested and are in place and are tested. We clearly need to get that figure up as near as we can to 100%.

Q66 Angela Browning: Are you referring to the end of the paragraph 4.12 where it says “The Crisis Management team intends to recruit someone to focus on testing, and Posts commented to us that greater involvement would be welcome”? Is that what you mean by somebody who is going to be put in post?

Sir Michael Jay: That is what I mean, yes.

Q67 Angela Browning: When is that person going to be recruited?

Sir Michael Jay: We are in the process of appointing somebody now.

Q68 Angela Browning: Have you advertised?

Mr Sizeland: It is going through our internal appointment system.

Q69 Angela Browning: How long will that take?

Mr Sizeland: I shall have to get back on the detail. We are trying to fill it as soon as possible.

Q70 Angela Browning: I am delighted to hear that, because of course I should have thought that, having had that flagged up in an NAO Report, it would be something right at the top of your list. This whole page, paragraphs 4.10 to 4.12—I am not going to read it out because everybody has a copy and everybody has read it—this laid back approach to this, really is an indictment on the service, is it not?

Sir Michael Jay: As I said, we need to get that figure up from one third to as near as we can to 100%. The fact that we have not had a member of staff full time on this up to now does not mean to say that we have not been upping our game since the Report was written. We have and we have been instructing posts to ensure that their plans are in place and are tested. So it is not a question of doing nothing until this person is in post, it is doing a lot already and doing even more when the person is in post. I entirely accept that the paragraph shows that there is a deficiency which needs to be put right.⁶

Q71 Angela Browning: At the beginning we mentioned the tsunami and you said, Sir Michael, that it was somewhat unprecedented in its scale and so unexpected, but you also touched in your earlier remarks on the question of avian flu. Whether that becomes a reality or not, none of us can tell; we all hope not. Presumably, in your contingency planning, that is a very real possibility, so can you just explain to the Committee, in the light of having taken on board the criticisms on page 50, how you have addressed the preparedness for avian flu?

Sir Michael Jay: The first thing I did when it became even a remote likelihood was to ask Mr Stagg to take charge of it. So perhaps I could ask him to say what our contingency planning now looks like?

Mr Stagg: We set up a programme in July last year to look at all the various strands which affect us which are effectively around three things: one is the consular side, the support we give to British people overseas; the second is the duty of care to our own staff overseas; the third is business continuity. In terms of each of these, we have tried to come up with a coherent plan and to get advice to posts, particularly to those in the most affected areas. In South East Asia we have a fairly well developed plan. Posts have actually exercised their plans, they have had meetings with other affected countries in the region and they have had EU/US/Australian coordination meetings. It is quite a good set of plans in terms of what services we can provide and how we shall try to do it. Obviously, nobody knows quite when it will happen or how it will happen and we shall have a difficult balance to strike between ensuring that those of our staff who are at risk are given the support they need and expecting them to continue delivering a proper service to the British public. We hope we have quite a good balance there and we are trying to ensure we provide all the support we can to our staff in terms of both medicines and medical advice to ensure they feel comfortable staying on even after the situation becomes difficult. In terms of the business continuity

⁶ *Note by witness:* Since the Spring of 2005, Consular Directorate has made use of temporary staff to prioritise and provide feedback to posts on their updated emergency plans. As of 11 January, 100% of posts have updated emergency plans and are required to test them at least once a year. While the NAO Report was being drafted, we recruited a new member of staff to focus on training and exercising. That member of staff is now in place. We are now recruiting an additional member of staff to help further updating and testing. The temporary staff will remain in place until that person is appointed.

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area, we have a programme which we hope will deliver by the end of March, a new Extranet de-linked from our main IT network, which will allow us to have people working at home linked up together coherently and thus help us both in the global network, but also in the UK if there is a pandemic here. It is quite a good set of measures, but, if I am very honest with you, it is a very uncertain scene and nobody quite knows when it will happen or how it will affect us.

Q72 Angela Browning: May I just question you on a broader point? In those rather unusual parts of the world where we have no embassy representation, for whatever reason, for example if it is deemed unsafe even to have an embassy in places like Chechnya, what contingency arrangements do you have for those rather wilder parts of the world?

Sir Michael Jay: There are two different kinds of issues here. There is one where we do not have people because ministers have judged that our interests are not sufficiently great to require an embassy or a consulate. There we would normally, even so, have an honorary consul; we would have an honorary consul there looking after our affairs. Chechnya of course is not a sovereign state, but where we have nobody at all, people would be advised not to go there and if they do go there, they must recognise that they are running a very, very considerable risk and there is very limited help we would be able to give them, if any.

Q73 Angela Browning: May I just conclude by saying that, having spent Christmas reading *DC Confidential*, I thought Christopher Meyer's assessment of the work of the New York consulate after 9/11 was quite moving. I hope it was an accurate portrayal, because I think they deserve a lot of appreciation for the work that they did.

Sir Michael Jay: Thank you very much Mrs Browning. It was an accurate portrayal and they did do an extraordinarily good job. If I may just say at this point, since you raised that issue, I do have immense respect for the commitment and professionalism of very many of our consular staff, many of whom are volunteers, and on Boxing Day they gave up everything for the tsunami, to fly out and help others in distress and continued to do that, despite not always getting the support that I think they deserve. So I am very glad to hear what you said about our team in New York.

Q74 Mr Davidson: On that point about New York, is there any significance in the fact that none of you has red socks?

Sir Michael Jay: I have not yet started drafting my memoirs.

Q75 Mr Davidson: We look forward to that. In terms of the burden of work and the numbers of cases and also the amount of time it takes, what sort of percentage of your consular work could be accounted for by, what I would describe though you might not, drunks and half-wits?

Sir Michael Jay: That is a question for the Director of Consular Services.

Mr Sizeland: What we are aiming to do is to enable people to avoid as many problems as they might.

Q76 Mr Davidson: I understand that. Alcohol obviously plays a considerable part in a number of the incidents that will come to your attention, as will a neglect of basic precautions. Give me a feel for the alcohol and stupidity scale of things.

Mr Sizeland: About 70% of all hen and stag parties nowadays actually take place outside the UK and what tends to happen is a group gets together and one person is nominated the leader; they do everything, they make all the arrangements. If a member of that group gets separated from the leader, from the fellow staggers, or whatever you call them, then often they do not know where they are staying, they have no information at all, they may not have their documentation. In places like Bratislava people usually know who they are but they do not know where they are supposed to be going and we do spend a lot of time on that. Through our Know Before You Go campaign we do run specific advice campaigns for different groups and the hen and stag party groups got a fair amount of publicity back in September. There is another group which tends not to take many precautions and that is people who may be visiting friends and relatives overseas and are perhaps lulled into a sense of false security, that it is not really like going away because they are going to be staying with an uncle, aunt or whatever. We are running a campaign on that later in the year. We try to get those messages across, but, at the end of the day, we have to reunite the individuals with their—

Q77 Mr Davidson: Is this a “don't-know” then? I am asking quite a genuine question, because I am uncertain what sort of percentage of your work involves issues which have arisen from an abuse of alcohol or people just simply neglecting what we would consider basic and simple straightforward precautions. I am in a state of some anxiety about the list of items that has been produced for us on page 17, where people have been making mistakes, what are described as common causes of avoidable assistance cases and there is a list of these. I am therefore wondering to what extent Know Before You Go campaigns ought to be the subject of much, much greater expenditure. If, on the one hand, drunks and half-wits are only half a percent of your workload, then perhaps spending money on that is not worthwhile. If, on the other hand, it is 95%, then it would certainly change my perspective about the way in which we ought to approach these questions. So I should be grateful if you could give me a feel for the balance.

Mr Sizeland: I do not have precise statistics for the overall picture. What I can say is that the sort of growing areas like hen and stag parties are an increasing problem. What we have tried to do on the Know Before You Go campaign which you mentioned is to take a new approach. We have actually split the contract we had, so we now have a

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specialist PR company and a specialist partnership marketing company working with people like Tesco's and Sir Michael showed you their leaflet. That has also driven out some value for money savings. We need to try to get more messages across because the individual case studies tend to have more impact. For reasons of consular confidentiality, we cannot use a lot of them, but a lot of them do come through in the media and they do have an impact on behaviour. We are trying to target our resources on the preparedness and the awareness side much, much more.

Q78 Mr Davidson: Right; okay. I take it that is a "won't-say" rather than a "can't-say". I am wondering about the extent to which almost deliberate misbehaviour by travellers which incurs expense for the consular service ought to be the subject of cost recovery. Is this something that has been considered? On the example you gave of stag nights in Bratislava and somebody then ends up having to get the consular service called out to look after them, should they not then be charged for that? It would not be worthwhile, if it were only one every five years, but if it were 35 every weekend, then perhaps it is something that ought to be considered. Can you tell me whether or not you have any indication of the balance, even in particular locations, of your work and whether or not cost recovery has been considered?

Mr Sizeland: I am afraid I cannot give a full picture, although I am very happy to try to look into it and get some more detail on it.⁷ In terms of individual posts, then certainly in Bratislava the hen and stag parties are becoming a problem. In Barcelona, which was very popular for those activities, the problem seems to be diminishing.

Q79 Mr Davidson: May I just clarify? It "seems to be diminishing"? Is that because people who are going to Barcelona are more aware, or is it because fewer people are going to Barcelona?

Mr Sizeland: The short answer is that we do not know. We are getting fewer demands on our assistance, but it may be because people are better prepared, people are getting more familiar with locations. If our staff are called out, there is a call-out charge; there is a series of fees which we can levy and we do have undertakings to repay. If small loans are made, then they have to be repaid.

Q80 Mr Davidson: I was not conscious that there was a call-out charge; perhaps I missed that. Can you just clarify that for me? What is the call-out charge for, say, a stag party in Bratislava?

Mr Sizeland: It is a standard fee worldwide and someone very kindly gave me a fee schedule a few minutes ago, but I have mislaid it.

Q81 Mr Davidson: This would seem to suggest that it is not used all that often, would it not?

Mr Sizeland: It is just the problem that I am based in the UK now.

Q82 Mr Davidson: None of your assistants behind are leaning forward.

Sir Michael Jay: I think the general point you make, which is whether we should not be trying to recover costs or in a sense charging people who behave wholly irresponsibly and therefore use the taxpayers' money, is a very good one which we should look into.

Q83 Mr Davidson: May I just follow up that in terms of explaining before people go abroad? I suspect that some of my constituents will misbehave when they are abroad. Very few of my constituents will have access to websites. What other routes are you using to make sure that people in areas like mine are aware that abroad is different?

Mr Sizeland: For example, on the World Cup campaign preparations—

Q84 Mr Davidson: Scotland is not in the World Cup. Leaving that aside then. That is not of immediate interest to us.

Mr Sizeland: We do work through local radio, our PR agency will aim to place material nationwide on the travel safety messages and of course many of our partnership marketing members, Tesco's, Halifax, Sainsbury's and so on have themselves got nationwide coverage, so those messages will be going out as part of their own material.

Q85 Mr Davidson: Is there any evidence that it is working?

Mr Sizeland: I have just received a note that an out-of-hours call-out fee is £84.50 per hour. That is the standard fee worldwide.

Q86 Mr Davidson: How often has that been charged?

Mr Sizeland: I would need to get back to you.

Mr Davidson: Maybe you could drop a note to the Committee.⁸ Maybe you could let us know how many times it has been charged in Bratislava in particular. The fact that it was not immediately at your fingertips would tend to indicate that it has perhaps fallen into disrepute. It would certainly concentrate the minds of people in stag parties if they thought they were going to be charged £84.50 for getting lost and having to be rescued by the consulate.

Chairman: You have now answered the question as to why you always visit people in hospital in Bratislava but not Budapest.

Q87 Mr Davidson: May I just turn to another point and that is the question of expectations? It is interesting in the Report that there is a growth in public expectations. Have you examined there the question of whether or not you could operate some sort of facilitating role, if necessary with charging mechanisms? I noticed in particular the question of providing translation services for coroners' courts or the equivalent. I can see all of that might very well be something that the consulate ought to help people

⁷ Ev 28

⁸ Ev 29

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with, but without necessarily paying for via the taxpayer, though that did not seem to be an option that was being considered. Can you just clarify that for me?

Mr Sizeland: Certainly the first thing we have to do is make it clear to people what services we can offer and the consular guide which we will putting out next month once it has gone through the Plain English Campaign will be a start. We shall publicise that and that will be the first comprehensive statement really to users of consular services as to what we can and cannot do. In terms of expectation management generally, a point that Sir Michael made right at the beginning was that we have a framework and we have to look at how some of that will apply in local circumstances. We need to make sure that in delivering a service we do give posts discretion within that framework to deliver what someone needs rather than necessarily what someone wants.

Q88 Mr Davidson: Would it be possible, rather than, say, providing services yourselves, to have an arrangement whereby you could facilitate them obtaining translators for coroners' courts at their own expense, when somebody arriving there would not be able to achieve that themselves? I wanted to clarify whether or not you actually did that at the moment.

Mr Sizeland: We do. I cannot think of a case on the interpreting side, but if we look at something like forced marriage, we do work with an NGO, for example in Pakistan, which will provide a lot of the services which otherwise we should have to provide. We work with other NGOs here on child abduction issues and therefore we signpost people to them to get that expert help.

Sir Michael Jay: We cannot ourselves give legal advice, but we can give people lists of lawyers who will give them the legal advice they want and we do do that; that is one of the services we provide.

Mr Sizeland: What we have done in the directorate in terms of increasing professionalism is to have our own in-house lawyer, a policeman who helps us handle police matters, both home and overseas, a social work adviser, particularly to facilitate some of the trickier cases, psychiatric cases and other cases, from overseas back here. So we are using that network as well.

Q89 Mr Davidson: The final point, if I may, is the question of accessibility to the facilities. I was struck in paragraph 3.6 on page 30 about the way in which half of the posts visited were open for less than the recommended 25 hours and the posts, it mentions in particular Cyprus, two hours away from most tourist resorts only open from 8 am to 12 noon. Now this smacks a bit to me of these German restaurants which used to close for lunch, in the sense of the service not actually being run for the customers, but for the convenience of the people who are providing it and ties in with the points that Mr Mitchell was making about, to some extent, a class divide. What

confidence can you give us that you are actually gearing up more actively to provide services to those that need it most?

Sir Michael Jay: I think we need to look at this. I was surprised by these figures as well. One thing I shall say is that the fact that the office is not open does not mean to say that people are not doing consular work. The office will not be open for a few hours every day because the consular staff will be issuing the passports or following up the paperwork or telephoning people's relatives at home.

Q90 Mr Davidson: I was not suggesting that they were all asleep, but if it is not open, then it cannot presumably be accessed by members of the public.

Sir Michael Jay: There is a 24/7 service for emergencies around the world, so that will not stop emergency services being provided. We do need to look at the hours and I have already asked people to do that. We also need to look at this question of whether we can have some flexibility in having some kind of service where the tourists actually are, rather than expecting them to come a very long way and then find that it is not open long enough. This ties in with the question about greater flexibility, honorary consuls, local staff. We need to think a little bit more flexibly about how we ensure the services are available where and when people need them. It is one of the things which comes out of this Report.

Q91 Mr Davidson: I am very pleased to hear you say this, but would you have been saying these things if the NAO had not produced the Report and the PAC had not been having a hearing on it? Does that not really make Mr Mitchell's point again, that this whole area of work is a pretty low priority?

Sir Michael Jay: No, I do not think it does. We asked the NAO to do this Report, because we wanted their advice on precisely this kind of issue. We can do a certain amount ourselves, we know a certain amount of what we do need to know, but having the NAO's professionalism in looking at these issues with us does come up in this and other areas with recommendations and lessons which we positively welcome. I see this as a sign that the system is working, not that it is not.

Mr Sizeland: May I just add to that? It builds very much on the work of our first consular strategy. *In Partnership*, which highlighted the challenges and which really we saw as the starting point when we invited the National Audit Office to come in to help us address some of the challenges which are identified in here and come up with some of the options. In terms of opening hours and other administrative issues, they are also included in the framework for our review teams which go out and look at how posts are operating, spreading best practice, how the opening hours are affected, what the reasons are for it. They have reviewed 35 posts in this financial year and they have plans to carry on with that rolling programme. We have a central team which is on the go all the time pretty well, to see how posts are doing so that we can meet one of our objectives, which is to operate as consistently as possible across the globe.

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Q92 Mr Williams: When we go to book our summer holidays, we are warned at the travel agent's that you have to be careful because some countries will not let you in if your passport has fewer than six months to run. How commonplace is that? The advice is commonplace but how commonplace is the reality?

Mr Sizeland: In terms of an individual country's requirements, I should have to go back and check on that. Most countries would want to make sure that there was a period of validity remaining on the passport to make sure that someone was returnable to the country of the nationality of the passport.

Q93 Mr Williams: We do the same.

Mr Sizeland: We do the same.

Q94 Mr Williams: What is our limit?

Mr Sizeland: Usually on the visa side it is six months, if someone is coming in.

Q95 Mr Williams: So we have six months as well.

Mr Sizeland: Yes.⁹

Q96 Mr Williams: So we cannot blame the others because we are doing it. My passport runs out in July and I am working out when I need to get a new one. You have clarified the situation for me amply. Biometric passports: we are told these, like identity cards, are going to be much, much more secure. The first thing is that the technology is relatively primitive at this stage, is it not, and there are no agreed international standards, are there?

Mr Sizeland: We have made some progress, partly through the UK's and others' prompting, through the International Civil Aviation Organisation. We have a technical framework which we have contributed to.

Q97 Mr Williams: Is that really the most effective arena in which to have this discussed and considered?

Mr Sizeland: We shall see, is probably the honest answer. We are now implementing our biometric passport regimes; many countries in Europe are, because there is an EU regulation to introduce the first generation.

Q98 Mr Williams: The US has its own.

Mr Sizeland: The US is part of this group.

Q99 Mr Williams: They are working with us.

Mr Sizeland: They are working with us; there is a lot of collaboration. People to some extent are moving at different rates, but we shall meet both the EU deadline of 28 August this year and the American visa waiver deadline of 26 October, which is important because we have nearly four million British citizens going to the US every year under the visa waiver programme.

Q100 Mr Williams: Then the other technical problem is the reading mechanism. A very senior congressman was complaining the other day that even on internal US flights they just do not have the technical capability to read accurately and quickly to deal with the flood of people. Look at how dependent the Americans are on flying, not just externally. Are we anywhere near developing the computer end, the reading end? It is not just a matter of reading, it is a matter then of the comparison. How far are we on that?

Mr Sizeland: We are working with the Americans. We actually have a reader, which has been developed by our business partner for our passport, which is being tested in the American facilities. We are pretty confident that if the particular reader itself is not selected, something that will be compatible with that will be selected. We have also put in something called basic access control on the chip to prevent skimming and, again, provide a more secure environment for storing all the data. So we are pretty well advanced. A lot of this is still in the pilot phase; for example, they are testing the readers at one airport in the States at the moment. We are obviously doing our own testing here with UK Passport Service and others, but what struck me over the last two years is the way that business has risen to the challenge presented by this, essentially an international and government driven programme. We shall see, when it is fully deployed.

Q101 Mr Williams: I know there has been some considerable frustration when quite senior and publicly known congressmen have not been allowed to board aircraft. If it happens to them, one worries about what happens to people like me when we turn up at American immigration desks. How confident are you that your timetable is achievable at a technical level, rather than just being an aspiration? Is the technology progress matching up to your aspirations at this stage, and if not, where are the shortcomings?

Mr Sizeland: You are absolutely right. In terms of the actual product and having something which can be read, that is going ahead fine. The issue is where the readers are going to be, whether the staff, in whichever port it is, whether in Australia, the US or here, are trained to use them and a capacity issue which we need to work through. The bigger challenge for us comes when we move beyond the current first generation of passports to the finger scans, because you can [currently] send a photo

⁹ *Note by witness:* Entry Clearance Officers (ECOs) overseas ensure that passport validity covers the intended length of stay when issuing a visa. The commonest form of visa is a six-month multiple-entry visit visa valid for any number of entries during the six month period. ECOs would ensure that passports were valid for at least six months for those visas. However, in some cases applicants with passports valid for less than six months may be given a visa for a shorter period corresponding with the validity of the passport—it is possible for example that a musician coming on a work permit for a single concert and who has only 3 months left on their passport would be given a shorter validity for their visa.

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through the post with your application. When you are looking at issues of enrolling finger scans and iris scans, that is going to be a much bigger physical and technical challenge.

Q102 Mr Williams: That is right. At this stage in fact we are aspiring to two characteristics basically, but is it not a fact that two characteristics are nowhere near adequate to be secure? I understand it would need into double figures of characteristics to get security. Is that the case?

Mr Sizeland: It is very important and certainly when we are working on this project—

Q103 Mr Williams: I am asking whether that is the case or not.

Mr Sizeland: Yes; it is and this is part of a risk management programme. When people are travelling with biometric passports, there will still be the other risk management techniques, the interviewing, the questioning, the looking at other information in the passport, which will also help establish that decision as to whether they are the person they say they are and whether they should be allowed entry.

Q104 Mr Williams: Even the fingerprints. As this stage in the state of technology for fingerprints, I understand that really the biometric check will not cover the full fingerprint; it will take a certain percentage of the characteristics and use those to scan the database. You are nodding, which I think means affirmation. If that is the case, that means that in fact there is no security, there is no guarantee. So you could turn up with a perfectly genuine fingerprint but because of the limited reading capability, as well as perhaps the original scanning capability, you are still likely to be . . . Does anyone else want to answer or deal with this? Information is what I am looking for.

Mr Stagg: I deal with our visa operation which in some ways is rather ahead in terms of the practicalities of taking finger scans and I am sure there are problems. I do not want to be Panglossian, but the experience so far in East Africa, where we have the main pilot, has been that it is possible actually to have quite effective matches between the scans you take over there and the scans you can compare them with over here. So there is a genuine potential for matching and this is with two finger scans, not 10, because 10 is clearly a more sophisticated measurement of the fingers. So there is no doubt benefit in having added testing, but it would be wrong to overstate the problems with the current technology where we have had real matches, which has really happened and helped us.

Q105 Mr Williams: There are two separate problems: the problem of convenience for members of the public who are actually travelling thinking they have an absolutely secure identification document and then arriving at the other end and finding they have not; then there is a second one which is now the war-on-terror argument. At the moment people are being led to believe that we are

going to be able to have 100% analysis at our borders, but the reality is that is far, far, far away at this stage, is it not?

Mr Sizeland: We are looking at incremental improvements and certainly we shall be learning from UK Visas' experience on finger scans in developing our next generation. What UK Visas are doing is enrolling the finger scans at one point and checking it on arrival. Here, we are actually planning to put that in the chip, actually in the document itself. We shall have to see how that works through, but we shall be working with all of those who have identity programmes to get as good a product as we can.

Q106 Mr Williams: I do not want to misrepresent you but your nodding led me to believe that you were agreeing when I said that the number of characteristics would be into double figures to get anywhere near a guarantee.

Mr Sizeland: The more characteristics you have, the more certainty you will have, but even just having two will give you a higher level of assurance than perhaps under the older machine-readable ones.

Q107 Mr Williams: That is not my point. Two is very different from double figures and since we are talking of going into an ID system and apparently a universal passport system, at least the EU and our colleagues in the US, it is very important we know exactly how secure we are going to be, even at the end of the process. I ask you a simple question now. To the best of your knowledge how many biometric characteristics would be required for you to be absolutely sure with whom you were dealing? How many would you actually need?

Mr Sizeland: I should have to send that detail to you when we have completed the study. As we are rolling out this first generation, we are now doing the work to evaluate what is going to be possible in terms of the shape of the network and the nature of the information and I should be very happy to keep you informed of those studies.¹⁰

Q108 Mr Williams: I welcome any information. If anybody wants to add anything, I am only searching for information not trying to catch anybody out.

Sir Michael Jay: Mr Sizeland's suggestion that when we are little bit clearer about this ourselves we write with a more considered response to your questions is probably the right way forward. These are clearly very, very important questions indeed.

Q109 Mr Williams: That is fine. Let me have a note. The Committee does on occasion receive further extra information sometimes on a confidential basis, but the Committee does not guarantee that confidentiality. I should prefer anything you give me to be open, so we do not misunderstand each other. Finally, on Kitty Ussher's case of a constituent, how commonplace nowadays is the kidnapping by a father from, say, the Middle East or from the Far East of children born in Britain to a British mother?

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Mr Sizeland: I can give you some statistics. We have a total of 447 cases of child abduction on file; 138 of those are active and we get about 35 new cases each quarter.¹¹ The top five destinations for abducted children are Pakistan, India, the USA intriguingly, Bangladesh and Spain. During 2005 we were involved with 22 cases where children were returned to the UK.

Q110 Mr Williams: From where were they? Were they from America or where were they from?

Mr Sizeland: From all of those countries I have mentioned and some more. Although they are not members of the Hague Convention, we are working with countries, particularly in the Middle East, on arrangements which will be akin to the Hague Convention so that we can strengthen the judicial procedures for the return of children.

Q111 Mr Williams: The reality is that in some of these countries there is virtually no chance of a mother winning a case against a father.

Mr Sizeland: Very difficult.

Q112 Mr Williams: I had a case going back a long time, as you will gather from the age to which I shall refer in a moment. A very young child was taken from my constituency by the father. The next time the mother saw the child he was 17 years' old. Although she had all the court backup she could want from this country, that had absolutely no standing at all. I am not asking anyone to comment, but at that stage I was less than pleased with the degree of support. I seem to remember this involved Saudi Arabia. I was less than pleased with the response of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office who seemed just to shrug their shoulders and go through the motions, but recognised that in reality they just were not going to get anywhere. Is it still much the same? From the numbers you talk about, it sounds as though it is.

Mr Sizeland: We now have a specialist child abduction unit. We have had one for three or four years now and in certain countries, such as the ones I mentioned, it is assuming a higher profile as a consular service.

Q113 Mr Williams: You referred to 30-something cases being returned.

Mr Sizeland: 22 cases in 2005 where children have been returned to the UK. There will have been other returns of which we are not aware, but these were cases where we were working with families.

Q114 Mr Williams: Out of a case load of how many?

Mr Sizeland: Of active cases, 138. On average we get 35. I could send a note, if that would be helpful.¹²

Mr Williams: Yes, please. I would welcome this information, including information relating to countries. It is important we should know so we can give advice also to our constituents on the basis of the information.

The Committee suspended from 5.04pm to 5.20pm for a division in the House

Q115 Mr Bacon: May I just say to start with, because it has just been placed on our desks, that this is brilliant, absolutely superb. Please pass on our compliments to those whose idea it was. It is exactly the sort of thing which would give you the impression that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is up to the minute, on the ball and well into the 21st century. Many congratulations. I have had a little look through it and it is superb.

Sir Michael Jay: May I just read its title into the record? It is *The Rough Guide to Safer Travel*.

Q116 Mr Bacon: I am sorry; I was referring to *The Rough Guide to Safer Travel*, the Know Before You Go campaign. We are of course familiar with *Rough Guides* from commercial publishers and this is really first class. I want to ask you about the Hague Convention. I have a constituency case involving the Hague Convention, a so-called kidnapping, where it is the other way round. The mother was alleged to have done the kidnapping, but these are two British nationals, both British passport holders, British citizens, British born, who happen to live in Spain and have been habitually resident in Spain. The mother fled from what could be termed a catalogue of abuse and violence with her children; returned to England for a holiday but just did not go back in essence. Even though both are British nationals and both are British citizens, the courts, deeming that they are both habitually resident in Spain, are likely to find, I am told, and I have spoken to barristers about this, that she will have to go back to Spain. I am told, in talking to barristers, that however extreme the circumstances, mounting a section 13 defence under the Hague Convention is nearly impossible and, even in cases where women have had broken jaws, the courts in this country have more respect for the judicial process in the other country than they do for the human rights of the individual. My question is this: especially in the light of Sir Christopher Meyer, who was mentioned earlier, and his wife Lady Meyer, despite the intervention of the Prime Minister, the Minister of State for Europe and various very senior people in the US administration, up to and including the White House, we were unable to get an iota of movement from anybody in Germany in relation to that case. What assessment has the Foreign and Commonwealth Office done of the worth of the Hague Convention in terms of benefiting British citizens? You mentioned 22 cases which have been successful. Net, net, net is it worth it?

Mr Sizeland: I would say yes. We need an international framework. Germany is a very good example of what we are trying to do, where there are problems with individual countries. People wonder why there is a problem with Germany: it is the autonomy of the *Länder* and it is making sure that we can get the advocates for our citizens in the right courts in Germany. It is a framework which

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exists, we try to make it work as well as we can and, intriguingly, in terms of extending some of its provisions, for example in some Middle Eastern and other countries, they are reluctant to sign up to the Hague Convention but are willing, in some cases, as with the Pakistan protocol, to have similar provisions which they can work with bilaterally. It gives us an international framework, it is not perfect, but we then pursue it vigorously as demand requires with individual countries, getting advocates for what we want to do, to change things within some of these countries. Germany is quite a good example.

Q117 Mr Bacon: Specifically on Germany, do you have any information on where it is the other way round, where somebody in Germany is trying to get a child back from the UK? How many times has that been sought and how many times successfully?

Mr Sizeland: I am not aware of any, but I shall check on that.¹³

Q118 Mr Bacon: It surely must be the case; Germany is a major European country.

Mr Sizeland: None has come across my desk. I shall certainly check on that and send a note.

Mr Bacon: I should be most grateful.

Q119 Mr Mitchell: I shall just drop a name first, because, as a Labour backbencher I do not get much opportunity for name dropping. I was talking to the Prime Minister last night. She said, for it was the Prime Minister of New Zealand, the only one I get chance to talk to, that the British Government are closing down a number of high commissions in former colonies. I think the instances were Fiji and Kiribati; she gave me three. I found in the Maldives that the high commission had been closed down and it was all being handled from Sri Lanka. In cases like that a high commission is clearly a cost, whereas the consular business is revenue producing, not a profit centre but a revenue producer. Are the two viewed as one when this happens? Certainly when it comes to your mobile team which is going to go around dealing with emergencies, whether it is General Amin or tsunamis, if we have a high commission it would be somewhere for them to base themselves when they go in if there is a problem and it is going to be much easier to deal with that kind of case if we do have high commissions. How far are the two regarded as separate when the consideration is whether to close or not? What handicap does closure of a high commission or an embassy impose in respect of the consular duties as detailed here?

Sir Michael Jay: Mrs Clark is right that we have closed three high commissions in the Pacific, though not Fiji. Indeed what we have done is move to a hub and spoke operation in which operations are centred on Fiji, which has been strengthened in order to provide services to some of the islands where we did not feel there was a sufficient British

interest to justify having a full-time post. In the case of the Maldives, we have never had a high commission there as far as I am aware.

Q120 Mr Mitchell: They told us in the Maldives that there was an embassy, there was an arrangement; now it is being handled from Sri Lanka but we had a base originally in the Maldives.

Sir Michael Jay: When ministers do conclude that we should close a place because there is not sufficient interest to justify the expense, then we do consider how we should carry out the remaining responsibilities. For example, the high commission in the Bahamas was closed as part of the same exercise, but there is an honorary consul who is supported in fact by a local member of staff in Nassau, who is there just to handle consular work. We try to find ways of ensuring that the consular operation, if there were British citizens there, would be handled. In the case of the Pacific, we work very closely indeed with Australia and New Zealand, who indeed handle consular cases on our behalf. It would always be possible for us to send somebody from the high commission in Suva in Fiji or indeed a rapid deployment team if there were a real emergency there and British citizens were in trouble.

Q121 Mr Davidson: I want to raise a point about the forced marriage unit and about cultural difficulties and how you balance that with the need to have propaganda. We clearly take the view that forced marriage is wrong and I wonder to what extent you are making an effort to make sure that girls in particular in this country are aware that is our view and, if they find themselves in that position while abroad, that there are posts to contact and the mechanism by which to go about it. How you manage to balance that with the view undoubtedly of some in the Asian community or Muslim community, who would be unhappy about that position being taken. It seems to me that you are going to offend somebody in all of that, quite rightly in my view. I wonder to what extent you have been willing to back off for fear of offending the traditionalists.

Mr Sizeland: Thank you very much for raising that. The forced marriage issue was a fascinating one on the consular side because it was a case where we were seeing the forced marriage cases overseas, but it reflected partly a problem in the UK of information and awareness. This led last year to the establishment of a joint unit within my team in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with the Home Office so that we feel we can address more effectively issues in the UK and issues overseas. We also have representatives from NGOs working in this area as part of our team. We have drawn up guidelines on forced marriage for people working in education, in social services, we do outreach and so on. As you are aware, a consultation process has been launched on forced marriage under the headline *A wrong not a right*, to make people aware that there is a distinction between forced and arranged

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marriage and to look at the possibility, depending on how the consultation process goes, of actually making it a criminal offence. It has been a new area for us and it is an area where we work very closely with government departments operating in the UK and it is something we do address very, very seriously.

Q122 Chairman: Lastly, you talked about your high profile interventions, is there a risk that fewer people are going to take out insurance, as you advise in the back of your excellent little

booklet, or deal with bonded operators or with travel agents because they know that you are always going to step in and save their skins?

Sir Michael Jay: I guess there is a risk but we have to continue to emphasise and persuade people how important it is to take out insurance.

Chairman: Sir Michael, thank you for that and thank you to your colleagues. May I on behalf of the Committee thank your staff, particularly the voluntary staff and all your consular staff, for the extra time that they put in, particularly in these times of crisis? I know they work all night, all weekend and we are very grateful to them. Thank you very much.

Supplementary memorandum submitted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Question 48 (Mr Richard Bacon): COMPASS

The Committee asked for a breakdown of the costs of COMPASS, the consular casework management system, since the initial procurement decision in 2001. This is as follows:

	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06(*)	TOTAL
Project Management	61,844	348,614	25,339	40,399	£206,000	£126,000	476,195
Project Management Support	—	0	0	0	—	—	—
Travel/Misc Expenses	—	24,312	124	0	—	—	24,437
Misc Studies/Consultancy Surveys	—	0	0	0	—	—	—
Installation	—	0	0	166,712	399,478	—	566,190
Hardware	—	103,393	52,681	—	—	£150,000	156,074
Software	—	580,357	77,405	—	—	—	657,762
Warehousing	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Incidentals	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Maintenance/Support	—	—	33,370	246,073	262,665	£400,000	542,108
Other Misc	—	—	0	—	—	—	—
Total	61,844	1,056,676	188,919	453,184	868,143	676,000	3,304,766

(*): estimated.

The Committee also asked about two aspects of COMPASS on which we can provide further information:

(a) *Inability to cut and paste from other programmes into/out of COMPASS:*

The FCO operates multiple IT security tiers on its network, ensuring staff only see information up to the level of classification for which they are cleared. COMPASS is hosted on the unclassified tier, but many users access it from the higher tiers. To prevent information moving between COMPASS and a classified document at a higher tier, either by cutting and pasting or by attaching documents by accident (or deliberately), COMPASS includes a “lockdown” feature so that documents have to go through a secure file passing routine.

However, this inability to cut and paste has been a key complaint from staff about the usefulness of COMPASS. We therefore made addressing it a priority in the new version of the software, CompassNG, which is now being piloted in eight posts around the world. This new, web-based version of the programme includes a “release manager” similar to that with which staff using the main FCO Windows system are familiar. The user has to declare the classification of the document before the system will allow them to cut and paste or attach a document within the database. A full audit trail of these transactions is kept within the database should a security breach occur, increasing staff accountability when using CompassNG.

(b) Training:

This was not initially a success primarily due to the fact that training for GenIE was prioritised over COMPASS in order to deliver HMG's commitment to electronically issued passports. Telephone training was used to make the most of the scarce training resources; this was not initially popular with posts, but an evaluation exercise carried out in the latter part of 2005 indicated that 70% of trainees rated the training as sufficient or higher. We recognise however that different people respond to different training methods and therefore training on COMPASSNG will comprise a combination of telephone training, regional training events and improved guidance on the FCO's staff Intranet.

Question 56 (Mr Richard Bacon): Firecrest

Background

Firecrest is the FCO's IT infrastructure; it sits on the desks of our staff around the world. Firecrest is a globally-networked desktop system that provides users with a standard suite of Microsoft office products including Outlook email, web browsing, Access databases and Excel spreadsheets. Firecrest was developed in 1997 and in 2003 the FCO completed the roll out of the current generation of the system.

The FCO's in-house supplier, FCO Services, was prime contractor for Firecrest from 1997 to 2005. During this time Firecrest employed around 175 staff and contractors in the UK, plus 150 full and part-time System Administrators and 17 Technical Management Officers at the FCO's posts overseas. This effort was supplemented by private sector capacity through a number of source and supply contracts with IT contractors (about 95 FTEs at the peaks of implementation).

The FCO's dependency on the Firecrest infrastructure grew progressively from 1997 to 2002. The FCO Board therefore decided in 2002 to institute a review of how Firecrest should most effectively be developed and supported in the future. An FCO team was appointed to lead this process, supported by KPMG as consultants. The Project Board reviewed an appraisal of the options in June 2003, and decided that value for money could most effectively be secured by engaging a private sector supplier to work in partnership with FCO Services to build and support Firecrest. The Board reviewed several options, including a complete outsourcing and a complete in-sourcing. However the Board selected the option of a partnership between FCO Services and the private sector. This option permitted the FCO to benefit from FCO Services' overseas rollout and support skills and experience of Firecrest project management while securing the IT service management and technology skills of the private sector. This option offered the best value for money at outline business case stage. This decision was endorsed by the Board and Ministers, and by an independent OGC Gateway Review.

The Procurement

The FCO launched the competitive procurement in July 2003. This process involved a number of innovative features, and was awarded a Green Flag by an independent OGC Gateway review team in December 2004. I am attaching sections from the Future Firecrest Final Business Case which give more detailed information on the background to these decisions and the procurement process we undertook

The Contract

The FCO signed a £183 million contract with Hewlett Packard (HP) in February 2005, and a separate financial memorandum with FCO Services worth some £55 million over seven years. Under the agreement HP is required to support the existing second generation (2G) Firecrest while it progressively replaces this with a third generation system. This process is to be completed within 22 months of service handover. HP is then required to introduce upgrades to the system for the duration of the contract. Under the arrangements agreed with HP the FCO continues to own the 2G Firecrest assets. The 3G hardware assets will be owned by HP but leased to the FCO for periods related to the working life of each asset.

Firecrest Support and Management

The Firecrest system is run by the Joint Services Delivery Team (JSDT). The JSDT is a joint team comprising HP and FCO Services staff under the management of Hewlett Packard. It provides for design, development and testing, the operation of the 24/7 Helpdesk, IT security, catalogue services and asset management, training, and the various data centres required to support the system. When the next generation of Firecrest is rolled out, it will also provide for business continuity and for disaster recovery. The JSDT reports to the Joint Management Team (JMT) comprising senior HP and FCOS managers and is overseen by the Firecrest Operating Committee (FOC) comprising senior FCO, FCOS and HP managers.

The JSDT assumed full responsibility for Firecrest on 1 August 2005. According to the contract, roll out of 3G Firecrest was to have begun in March 2006, however changes to government IT security rules published shortly after contract award led to a requirement to re-design the Firecrest 3G solution. 3G rollout is now scheduled to start in the autumn.

Financial Arrangements

The following table describes the costs associated with Firecrest over the following seven years.

	<i>£m over 7 years</i>
HP Contract	183
FCO Services	55
FCO Costs	82
TOTAL	320

The HP costs relate to the investment in the new 3G design (£78 million) and the support and operational areas of the contract including the Help Desk, Business Continuity and Security (£105 million). HP are paid on a monthly basis for their operational service costs and by milestone payments for the design and deployment of the new system. 10% of the deployment milestone revenue due to HP is retained until the last milestone has been completed and formally accepted.

Levels of service provided under the contract are monitored closely and subject to contractual penalty in the event that service levels drop below agreed minima. In this event HP incur service credits (an agreed cut in the payments they receive for the service). For operational performance above the contracted targets HP can earn bonus credit points. Bonus credit points offset service credit points but do not earn extra revenue.

FCO Services

The bilateral Financial Memorandum between FCO and FCO Services guarantees payment for the number of full time equivalents deployed by FCO Services on the Firecrest project. These staff, whose numbers are set out in the Memorandum, are deployed throughout the Joint Services Delivery Team but predominantly in the overseas roll out, project management and user support areas.

The revenue due to FCO Services by financial year is:

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Price (£m)</i>
2004–05	0.61
2005–06	9.36
2006–07	10.82
2007–08	8.88
2008–09	5.92
2009–10	6.89
2010–11	7.36
2011–12	5.62

FCO Additional Costs

The FCO accepted a number of responsibilities within the contract. These range from the purchase of user software licenses to third party software maintenance contracts and the upgrade of business applications between generations of Firecrest. The attached spreadsheet details these costs. These costs include expenditure on the server accommodation for 3G Firecrest.

New ICT Building at Hanslope Park

The investment the FCO is making in ensuring its technical infrastructure is secure entails a responsibility to ensure this is properly accommodated and protected. The FCO's existing computer accommodation has been upgraded over the years but still falls short of what a modern organisation would require for mission critical equipment. The bulk of the FCO's IT infrastructure is currently housed in a Building in Hanslope Park (Building 38) and we are undertaking some additional work to provide an acceptable working environment for the Future Firecrest system. This work has cost £2.7million from the Future Firecrest budget.

The Committee may be interested to know that FCO decided in February 2004 to construct a new building in Hanslope Park to provide modern, secure and reliable accommodation for our IT systems: not only Future Firecrest, but other systems such as Prism. The Building will also provide modern staff accommodation, bringing most FCO Services IT staff together under one roof. Following a competitive tendering process, we are developing the design and cost plan with Sir Robert McAlpine and expect to award a contract formally for this building in early March 2006. The total budget for the project is currently forecast at £29.4 million, not counting costs associated with moving into the ICT into the building. This expenditure is separate from that set out in the attached spreadsheet detailing the additional costs of the Future Firecrest Project. The building is expected to be complete in August 2007, with staff moving in during the following months.

EXTRACTS FROM THE FUTURE FIRECREST BUSINESS CASE, JANUARY 2005

STRATEGIC FIT

Introduction

This section describes the reasons why the FCO needs the Future Firecrest Project. It sets the Project in its wider strategic context and describes the potential benefits the Project is designed to deliver. It describes how the Project meets a defined business need in the context of the FCO's wider Strategy. It describes how Firecrest is currently managed and supported, and why this needs to change. It sets investment objectives for the Future Firecrest Project. It describes why this Project is right, and why it is right now.

Strategic context and business need

The FCO is critically dependent on its ICT infrastructure. Firecrest is already business critical to the FCO. The challenges of change inherent in the FCO Strategy, the Organisation Project, in implementing the Efficiency Programme, in our aspiration to be the leading global Diplomatic Service, mean that the requirement for an effective, secure and reliable infrastructure will increase significantly over the coming years. The new FCO Strategy foresees a very significant need for improved communications as a key enabler of a more responsive, flexible FCO working in a more demanding world. Central to this will be the reliable, flexible and resilient infrastructure delivered by Future Firecrest.

The FCO Strategy is implemented through the FCO organisational change process under four key themes—focusing resources on priorities, diversity, flexibility and responsiveness and meeting customer needs. Progress against these themes is co-ordinated by the Departmental Change Programme and measured through six key change strategies, including e-Diplomacy.

The e-Diplomacy Strategy was launched in January 2004 to develop the ICT component of the wider FCO Strategy. The e-Diplomacy Strategy seeks to transform the FCO into a single on-line global organisation delivering high quality services to the public and other key stakeholders through a common ICT infrastructure and standard web-based applications accessible through the departmental Intranet.

E-Diplomacy implements the ICT requirements of the FCO Strategy by building a global IT desktop, providing flexible structures that enable remote and mobile working at classified levels, streamlining business processes so people can work faster, more efficiently and more flexibly, and improving the connections between our IT systems and the rest of Whitehall. The delivery machinery for these objectives is the six Programmes in e-Diplomacy; Knowledge, Prism, i-Visas, i-Con, UKTI e-Business and Infrastructure. Future Firecrest is the underpinning architecture for all of these programmes, and in the key component of the FCO's ICT infrastructure. It is central to e-Diplomacy, and therefore to the FCO Strategy.

Existing arrangements for Firecrest provision and support

In August 2003 the FCO completed roll out of the sixth major upgrade to the Firecrest infrastructure since 1997—known as “Confidential Firecrest”. Currently FCO Services is “Prime Contractor” for Firecrest. Firecrest employs around 175 FCON Services FTEs, plus 150 full and part-time System Administrators and 17 FTE Technical Management Officers overseas. This effort has historically been supplemented by additional private sector capacity through a number of individual “source and supply” contracts from IT contractors (about 95 FTEs at the peaks of implementation). These arrangements are described in detail in Annex 1.

IT Strategy Unit (ITSU) is the FCO's ICT “intelligent client” and has the lead client responsibility for defining the FCO's ICT strategy and business requirements and ensuring that these requirements are met. ITSU also draws on the support of FCO Services to fulfil their intelligent customer remit.

There are some 14,600 Firecrest users based in the UK and in 282 overseas sites.

Why do we need to change our Firecrest technology and services, and why now?

There are three reasons why we need to do this now.

The first reason is that the FCO Services Firecrest contract with Computacenter has expired. We are legally required to re-tender it.

The second reason is that the use we can make of our computers is increasingly constrained by our outdated operating system. NT4 is eight years old (and has now been replaced by Windows 2000, XP and Windows 2003). It is increasingly difficult to source replacement equipment to run on our operating system. And NT4 is costing us £1 million a year in extended support costs from Microsoft.

The third reason is that our ageing infrastructure is struggling to provide an acceptable level of performance for new applications such as Prism, UKTI's web-based systems and the electronic delivery of visas and passports. Planned developments, such as the implementation of biometric visas and passports, intranet-based knowledge systems, and full remote-working capabilities cannot be supported without a major upgrade to the infrastructure.

Strategic benefits and investment objectives

Benefits are the strategic justification for any project. Firecrest is an infrastructure project and, as such, delivers its benefits partly through the maintenance of the existing global IT network, and partly through providing the basis against which other programme applications realise their benefits. But there are self-standing benefits associated with the project. The Project Director launched the Future Firecrest Business Review in April 2003. The Review, working with stakeholders from across the FCO and Whitehall, concluded that the Project was justified alone by the requirement to maintain the benefits of the existing secure, global, multi-tier Firecrest. It should also enable a raft of additional benefits, including higher levels of business efficiency from a faster, better IT desktop, improved support services to users, better financial management through contractual control, more flexible forms of working, higher benefits return for the other programme applications resident on Firecrest and better access to new technologies as challenges change over the life of the contract.

Strategic risks

The Future Firecrest Project has managed risks aggressively throughout the life of the procurement. The Project Board has regularly reviewed key risks as part of a risk management strategy. We have built risk mitigations into both Optimism Bias and project affordability assessments. And we have shared registers with the final two bidders. We are comfortable that we have a framework in place to continue that management policy. The key strategic risks defined by the Project Board include affordability, the need for major business change in FCO Services, security constraints, an inability on the part of the project to deliver the benefits the project defined, and complexities in relation to the technical aspects of the project. These risks are currently well managed, and dealt with in greater detail in Section 7.10 and in Annex 1. We have separately required bidders to provide costed proposals as to how they would adapt their designs to reflect changes in HMG Security Policy currently under discussion in Whitehall. We will submit separately an analysis of these proposals that demonstrates that the bidders have technically feasible options meeting new security risk levels at a range of acceptable cost to the FCO.

Main stakeholders

Future Firecrest will have a significant impact on users and business managers across the whole of the FCO, which means all staff, from the most senior to the most junior level. Other Government Department (OGDs) Firecrest user population is approximately 750, 65% of whom are UK based and the rest overseas. They are drawn from at least 22 government departments or agencies, the most significant being Ministry of Defence, UK Trade & Investment, Department for International Development, Home Office and HM Customs & Excise.

Sustained effort has been made to engage with key stakeholders from FCO and OGDs over the life of the project. The Project Board has a standing User Representative. Besides communicating project progress to a wide stakeholder grouping and maintaining senior level sponsorship from all important stakeholders, a number of workshops and presentations have been held to secure input and obtain feedback on service requirements and the proposed solution from stakeholders at different levels within FCO and OGDs. OGDs have attended regular meetings with the Project Director and SRO. Key departments have been represented on the Project Team. And most have contributed to the requirements process. The Project recognises that its success depends crucially on its users, and defining that user need in the context of the project's Strategic Fit has been one of the notable successes of the Project Board.

THE COMMERCIAL CASE

Introduction

This section outlines the procurement process that has been implemented since the OBC was approved, provides key features of the commercial terms included in the BAFO contract and describes details of the proposed sourcing arrangements, in particular the approach to Partnering.

Procurement strategy and process

The Future Firecrest procurement process has taken 18 months following the publication of the Future Firecrest OJEU Notice on 3 July 2003. The procurement has been undertaken in accordance with the European Union's negotiated procedure and has to date involved the following five stages:

Pre-qualification (Long-listing)—this involved selecting a longlist of five companies from nine companies that had completed a Pre-Qualification Questionnaire;

Short-listing (to three companies)—this involved reducing the list of five to a shortlist of three companies based upon an evaluation of their indicative priced responses to a Preliminary Invitation to Negotiate (PITN). The PITN comprised the FCO's detailed and comprehensive Statement of Requirements (SoR);

Three to two down-selection—this involved down-selecting the shortlist from three to two companies based upon an evaluation of their priced responses to an Interim Invitation to Negotiate (IITN). The IITN comprised the FCO's draft contractual Terms and Conditions and the updated SoR;

Pre-Negotiation activities and Negotiations—this involved the conversion of the bidders' updated IITN proposals (solutions and plans) and the FCO SoR into contract schedules and the subsequent negotiation of these and the FCO's Terms and Conditions. This phase was launched with the issue of the Final Invitation to Negotiate (FITN) to the two remaining bidders. The negotiations were undertaken in parallel with both bidders;

Best and Final Offers (BAFOs)—this involved bringing negotiations to a close by inviting bidders to submit their Best and Final Offers (BAFOs). These comprised a marked up version of the full contract (Terms and Conditions and Schedules) together with a number of items of supplementary information to facilitate the BAFO evaluation process. The BAFO evaluation forms a key part of this FBC, the outcome of which is will be the selection of a Preferred Bidder.

The final stage of the process—**Contract Finalisation and Award**—will take place following approval and endorsement of this FBC and any requirement for a short preferred bidder period to finalise contractual issues arising from the BAFO evaluation and approval process. The contract will be awarded on the basis of the most economically advantageous bid. The PUS and Ministers will base this decision upon the submission of this FBC to the FCO's Departmental Investment Strategy Group (DISG), together with subsequent approvals and endorsement.

In addition to the FCO's SoR and Terms and Conditions and the draft contract schedules, the key inputs and activities throughout the process were:

- Continuous clarification meetings and questions, due diligence and discovery activities;
- Regular meetings between the Project's Senior Responsible Owner (SRO), other members of the FCO's senior management and the Bidders' Senior Responsible Executives (SRIEs) at the various stages of the procurement;
- Visits to Bidders' Reference Sites and their Corporate HQs;
- Continuous bidder commercial assessment using the OGC's Supplier Intelligence Service;
- Formal evaluations of bidders' submissions at each stage against pre-determined evaluation criteria and frameworks;
- Approvals and endorsements by the FFEb, other members of the senior FCO management and Ministers.

Although this procurement process has been undertaken broadly in line with the original procurement strategy (June 2003), the strategy has been kept under constant review to secure the best possible outcome for the FCO. This has resulted in a number of revisions to the original strategy to take into account the procurement outcome at each of the stages above. The key changes/additional activities, which were designed to exert greater price pressure and improve the innovation, quality and commercial fit in bidders' proposals, were endorsed by the Project Board and are set out below:

At the IITN stage

- securing bidders' responses to a targeted set of supplementary questions in key areas (to focus bidders' attention on the weaknesses in their PITN bids);
- an expanded and extended period of dialogue, due diligence and discovery with bidders was introduced, allowing the FCO to discuss their bids and help them to improve. This included all three short listed organisations participating in a major overseas due diligence and familiarisation exercise (visits to Singapore and Dhaka), and in the Regional System Administrator conference in Singapore.

At the FITN stage

- giving bidders a further opportunity to improve their bids through an additional pre-negotiation engagement and discovery period with bidders consisting of (for each bidder) further visits to three overseas Posts (Rome, Brussels, Tirana), a three day structured interaction with FCO Services and a three day visit to FCO London sites;

- giving bidders the opportunity to improve their readiness for negotiations by giving them the opportunity to convert their solution and plans, including those elements delivered jointly (such as the partnering and governance arrangements) into contract schedules using detailed FCO product descriptions. These were designed to drive up the quality of bidders' solutions and plans, taking into account the outcome from the IITN stage and to provide for an efficient negotiation and evaluation process.

The high quality of the bidders' BAFOs described elsewhere in this FBC and the successful outcome from the negotiation phase can be attributed in part to these revisions to the procurement strategy.

The Future Firecrest Executive Board (FFEB) has taken all necessary internal project level decisions on procurement during this procurement process. The FFEB is chaired by the head of the IT Strategy Unit, who acts as the Project's SRO. Where appropriate, project recommendations have also been escalated to senior FCO management and Ministers for review and endorsement.

Key features of commercial arrangements

The FCO intends to enter into an Agreement with a SP to:

- provide the future global desktop infrastructure and other functionality to the users and SAs, as required. The new system will be called Future Firecrest;
- provide a set of design, build, operate and related services, to high levels of resilience, performance and security, for the Future Firecrest infrastructure;
- operate and maintain the existing Firecrest infrastructure, on a transitional basis until the new system is implemented;
- provide associated services to other government departments.

The service and technology will be provided by the SP in partnership with FCO Services and the FCO (who will continue to deliver certain services), but the SP will have overall service management responsibility.

The commercial arrangements for Future Firecrest will therefore comprise three key elements as follows:

- The strategic partnering contract between the FCO and the Strategic Partner (SP) for the provision of Firecrest and Future Firecrest services and technology;
- Operating Level Agreements (OLAs) between the SP and FCO/FCO Services governing the operational relationships between these parties for the Firecrest and Future Firecrest services that will continue to be provided by the FCO and FCO Services;
- A Financial Agreement between the FCO and FCO Services governing the basis on which FCO Services will charge the FCO for services rendered on Firecrest and Future Firecrest.

Each of these elements are described below.

The Strategic Partnering Contract

The terms and conditions have been compiled using OGC best practice guidance, a number of OGC standard clauses and other best practice advice. The Agreement will be for an initial term of seven years with possibilities of one-year extensions up to 10 years.

Set out below is a brief description of the pricing mechanism set out in the Agreement. Schedule 5 sets out the basis of payment for each of the Services. There are three broad types of payment:

- milestone payments for (i) Service Handover; (ii) Project Services (the Design, Build and Installation of Future Firecrest); and (iii) Technology Refresh (the renewal and installation of Future Firecrest assets);
- monthly payments for (i) Operational Services; and (ii) Business Continuity Services; and
- ad hoc payments for (i) Catalogue Services; (ii) Future Services (services that are currently unknown but which the FCO may ask the Strategic Partner to deliver at some future date); and (iii) Termination Assistance.

The prices relating to Mobilisation, Design and Build and to the operation of Future Firecrest are all fixed. Other prices may vary but only up to a cap agreed at the outset (the Maximum Price). Incentives have been provided to encourage the Strategic Partner to reduce prices and to earn additional profit from doing so. Trinity has not accepted the principle of Target and Maximum Price, but has submitted a Firm Price bid for all priced payment streams.

Further incentives apply to the delivery of the required Service Levels through the service credit regime. If the Strategic Partner fails to deliver the required Service Levels, price deductions will apply. The scale of deductions is ramped such that the worse the level of performance the more severe (exponentially) the level of deduction. In extreme cases of poor performance the FCO can withhold the relevant Service Charges in full.

A Balanced Scorecard also applies, which incentivises the Strategic Partner to behave in a suitably partnerial manner by rewarding behaviours that the FCO wishes to encourage through a mix of financial and non-financial performance measures. The schedule also gives the FCO the right to scrutinise the Strategic Partner's costs through open book account provisions, and to cap profitability through gainshare provisions.

Operating Level Agreements

The FCO also intends to implement Operating Level Agreements between the SP and FCO/FCO Services. There will be a consolidated Operating Level Agreement (OLA) for the SP/FCO relationship (covering the operational arrangements for overseas SAs) and a consolidated OLA for the SP/FCO Services relationship (covering the operational arrangements for FCO Services staff in the UK and TMOs). These will set out the basis on which the FCO and FCO Services will meet their operational obligations under the Agreement. This will include the level of service and resources to be provided by the FCO and FCO Services for each of the service lines. Further details on the type, number and content of the OLAs are set out at Annex 7.

Financial Agreement between the FCO and FCO Services

The FCO also intends to put in place an overarching financial and resource agreement with FCO Services governing the basis on which FCO Services will meet the terms of the OLA and be paid for the service rendered.

SOURCING ARRANGEMENTS

Introduction

The OBC set out the rationale for delivery of services by a Strategic Partner (SP), with retention of certain services in-house, and proposed a division of responsibilities. Since then considerable work has been undertaken in the development of a partnering approach to the delivery of services through a joint service delivery team of SP and FCOS resources under the overall service management of the SP. This partnership also engages established relationships with other service providers, such as Global Crossing for the FCO Telecommunications Network (FTN). The newly restructured IT Strategy Unit, incorporating the Future Firecrest Intelligent Client (FFIC), has responsibility for management of the operational and contractual relationship with the SP, the internal service providers (including FCOS) and Overseas System Administrators.

The following paragraphs describe:

- The service scope and delivery responsibilities;
- The governance and service delivery model;
- Arrangements to develop a “cultural fit” between the parties to the contract.

Partnering: Services scope and delivery responsibilities

Full details of the services required to provide and support the Firecrest infrastructure are contained in Schedule 2 of the contract. The service delivery model has been developed taking into consideration the FCO's requirement to retain some responsibility for providing services, including:

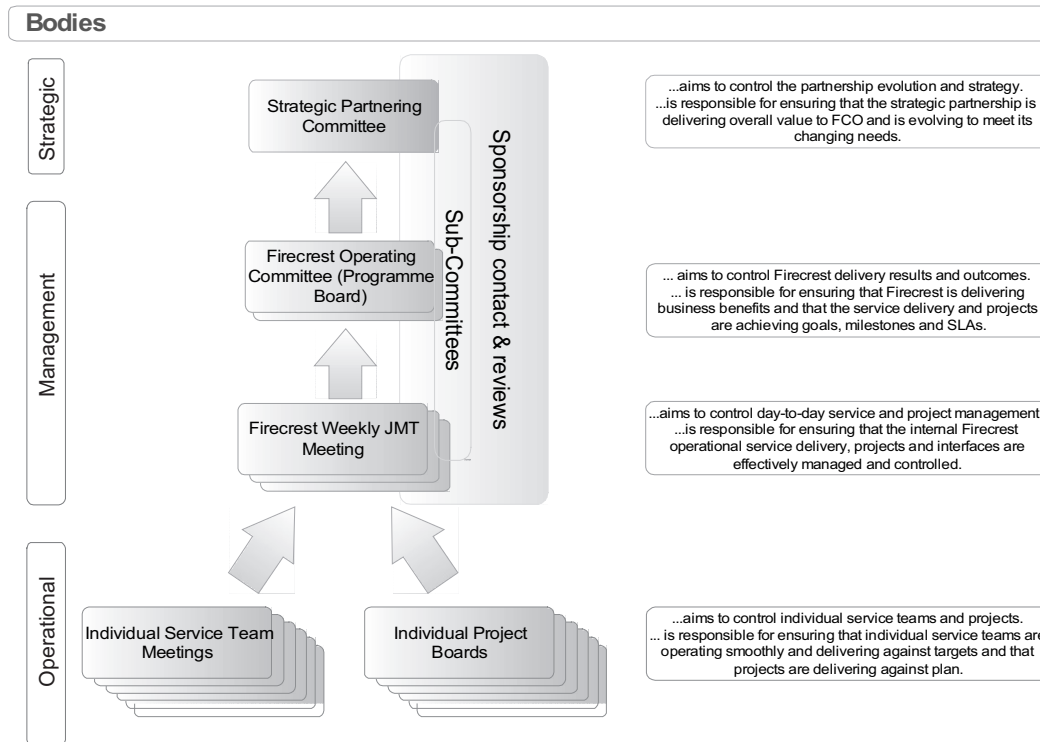
- Security constraints;
- Physical access constraints;
- Fulfilling its client-side responsibilities;
- Specialist knowledge of the FCO environment; and
- Value for money (vfm), including risk allocation.

Services are delivered through joint SP/FCO Services service delivery teams where one of the two organisation takes lead responsibility for delivery of the service, taking into account the resources, capabilities and skills base of the SP and the factors above. The SP will however take overall responsibility for all the front and back office services and performance against the SP's contracted Service Level Agreements and the OLAs to the FFIC.

In line with FCO's requirement to retain appropriate responsibility for service delivery, for both bidders FCO Services will lead on delivery of almost all overseas services through the TMOs, supported by local SAs.

Partnering: Governance and service delivery model

A set of strategic, commercial and operational governance structures and mechanisms have been developed to ensure the Partnering approach works effectively. Governance and service delivery arrangements are set out in Schedule 9 (Partnering and Governance) and Schedule 3.2. The arrangements are summarised in the diagram below.



The role and responsibilities of each of these governance bodies is as follows:

Strategic Partnering Committee

This committee is tasked with developing the broader strategic relationship, ensuring that the partnership is evolving to meet the FCO’s business needs and is delivering overall value and the expected business benefits. It will provide a forum for strategic discussions between the senior executives of both the FCO and the Strategic Partner.

Operating Committee

This body will govern the overall performance and delivery of Firecrest and Future Firecrest services. This committee will comprise the Joint Management Team and representatives from the ITSU Intelligent Client.

Joint Management Team (JMT)

The primary objective of this body is to own and control the overall service and outcomes and it is responsible for ensuring that service delivery and projects are achieving goals, milestones, the obligations set out in OLAs and contracted service levels. Management of the contract and the relationship between the FCO and Strategic Partner will occur at the JMT and executive level. FCO Services plays a leading role in the JMT.

Joint Service Delivery Team (JSDT)

The Joint Service Delivery Team (JSDT) is where the day-to-day service and project management activity takes place. Managers at this level are responsible for ensuring that operational service delivery within each Service Line (see Table above), projects and interfaces are effectively controlled and are being managed in accordance with Service Line and service level requirements. The roles, responsibilities and activities for the JSDTs supporting each service line have been specified in detail in the Schedules 3 and 9 of the contract. FCO Services plays a leading role in the JSDT.

schedule (All)
source (All)

Sum of value in £'000s <i>Cost Description</i>	period (year of contract)								
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Accommodation—preparation and refurbishments	1,250	2,700							3,950
Audit		100			100			100	300
Balanced scorecard		400	400	400	400	400	400	400	2,800
Cabling		100	200	100	400				800
Data Migration		200							200
Data Prep	80								80
FTN		352	340	340	340	340	340	340	2,392
IT DISPOSAL		30	30	30	15	30	30	30	195
IT Maint Contracts		1,400	1,400	1,400	1,400	700	700	700	7,700
MS Licenses		1,250	3,450	3,450	3,450	3,450	3,450	3,450	21,950
Security Accreditors		64							63.6
Security Assurance		40							40
Security Vetting		126	20	20	126	12	19	63	386
Shipping (Despatch Costs)		0	0	0	0	0	375	375	750
Test Environ	120								120
Training Travel/subs		380	380	380	320	320	320	320	2,420
Travel/Subs (For installation)		672	1,717	1,353	364	504	643	364	5,617
User Representative		50							50
Hardware Refresh						0	0	0	0
FCOS Logistics Staff		50	300	300	0	0	300	300	1,250
Intelligent Client	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Additional Hardware		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BC Warehousing		75	75	75	75	75	75	75	525
IT DISPOSAL(Shipping)		90	130	130	50	110	70	50	630
FCOS LOGISTICS			40	40	100	100	40	40	360
Grand Total	1,450	5,378.6	8,482	8,018	7,140	6,041	6,762	6,607	52,578.6
Total Overseas System Admin									29,100
						GT			81,678.6

Question 58 (Mr Richard Bacon): GENIE and OMNIBASE

The Committee asked for clarification of costs for GenIE (passport issuing) and Omnibase (passport database) systems. These are as follows:

	2003-04			2004-05			2005-06(*)		
	Admin £	Int Market £	Capital £	Admin £	Int Market £	Capital £	Admin £	Int Market £	Capital £
GenIE									
WorldWide	0	618,000	2,861,000	532,000	1,015,000	220,000	532,000	750,000	110,000
Omnibase	0	15,000	90,000	0	30,000	0	0	20,000	0
Totals	40,399	799,712	3,197,073	1,338,000	1,445,000	1,303,000	658,000	1,165,000	2,860,000

(*) estimated

Notes:

1. OMNIBASE is owned and operated by the UK Passport Service. Other government departments and agencies (eg DVLA, Met Police) pay a fixed rate to UKPS per user and per search on OMNIBASE, but the FCO is not charged by UKPS for access to the system. The capital costs in the table above are for the initial installation of the system. The internal market costs represent the cost of Help Desk first line support provided by FCO Services.

2. The then Consular Division was restructured into a Directorate in early 2003, to provide a better framework for delivering consular services. As part of this the Resources Group was established with a qualified accountant as its head. Since then, we have been able to put the financial breakdown of costs for projects such as these on a firmer footing. This is why we have provided figures from 2003-04 but have been unable to provide earlier figures in the time available.

Question 78 (Mr Ian Davidson): Cases where the traveller is at fault

The Committee asked for information on the proportion of consular assistance cases where the traveller is at fault, for example through intoxication, insufficient preparation before travelling or ignoring basic safety advice.

Our policy is to provide consular assistance based on need, and takes no account of whether people's behaviour may have contributed to their predicament. Judgements about intoxication, fault or lack of preparation can be difficult to make, and we do not ask staff to record what proportion of the assistance they provide is to people whose personal behaviour at the time may have contributed to their hospitalisation, detention or worse. Equally, neither we nor the insurance industry have exact figures for those who travel overseas without appropriate insurance, but the Association of British Insurers (ABI) estimates that insurance is taken out for only around 50% of overseas trips.

However, despite the difficulties of obtaining precise information, experience does show that lack of adequate insurance, drinking more alcohol than normal or taking drugs frequently exacerbate the difficulties people experience when they run into problems overseas. We have therefore made these issues a focus of our Know Before You Go campaign. Our TV Filler, *Wasted*, highlighted the dangers of drink and drugs abroad: for a total production and marketing cost of £89,830 it received play-time across 57 different channels, including all terrestrial channels (BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5) and others including BBC3, Bravo, British Eurosport, Discovery, ITV2 and Men & Motors. Had we paid for this airtime it would have cost £1,052,713, so the return on investment for this hard-hitting advert was 11.7 to 1 (figures from the Central Office of Information). Our new Filler "Can you afford it?", on the high costs of failing to take out insurance, was launched in December and is already appearing across major TV networks. Other recent activity includes, for example, a full page in the *Sun's* first-ever travel supplement on 20 January—a mixture of editorial/article and an advert—to get across our messages about basic preparations for a safe holiday.

The particular circumstances of our post in Bratislava and hen or stag nights abroad were raised by the Committee. Bratislava report that they have not yet had an arrest for incidents related to hen or stag parties; some of the companies which handle such groups may ensure problems are smoothed out. In contrast, Prague have noticed an increase in their workload: although their management information does not differentiate between types of customer, they estimate that roughly 15% of lost passport cases are for British nationals on stag trips.

On the whole, considering the high numbers of British visitors to the Czech Republic and the popularity of Prague as a Stag destination, the vast majority of Stags do not pose a problem. However, some do get into serious difficulties, and a few into tragic accidents. Many partygoers turn up at the Embassy out-of-hours, drunk, incoherent and lost. They are looked after by the 24-hour Security Guards, who try to glean as much information from them as possible. It has been known for the Guards to phone 40 hotels, to eventually be successful in finding the Stag's hotel and sending them on their way or arranging for accompanying Stags to come and collect their wayward friend. The majority of Stags reported "missing" by their friends usually turn up within the next day or two but this still impacts on the Embassy workload, as they need to take full details, enter details onto their computer and then phone hospitals etc for elimination purposes. Most of the Stags that arrive into consular section are there because they have got drunk and have got separated from friends and have been wondering around the city all night trying to find their party.

Some case studies from our Embassy in Prague are given below:

- *Stag lost in Prague turns up at the Embassy. He's been walking around Prague all night after losing his friends. We eventually make contact with the friends who refuse to come to the embassy because they are having such a good time in the pub but say they will meet him on the Charles Bridge, which in the summer has about 3,000 people on it. It took him five hours to find the embassy.*
- *The embassy got a call from the airport police to say that a distressed British national (DBN) had been detained in the police station. They ask a member of consular staff to come down to the station. When we arrive the DBN was still a little drunk. We asked the police officers why he had been detained, the response was that he was caught wandering around the airport hangars. When we ask the DBN about what had happened he said that he was separated from his party and ended up in a taxi drunk, he then fell a sleep, the taxi driver drove him to the airport, stole all his money and kicked him out. Because he was so drunk he thought that he was going home and tried to get on any plane leaving the airport. Nobody knows how he got into the hangar. After he had sobered up he could not apologise enough.*

The Embassy report that it is very rare to encounter a Hen in trouble.

Question 86 (Mr Ian Davidson): Call-out fees

The Committee asked for information on how often call out fees are charged by consular staff world-wide and specifically in Bratislava.

In the financial year 2004–05, a call-out fee for attendance by consular staff was charged 323 times, including 222 times out of hours (a full table of fees is on the FCO website at: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/Consular%20Fees%20Dec%2005%20A4,0.pdf>)

The out-of-hours fee was charged twice in Bratislava; in contrast, it was charged 40 times in Prague (see separate note on cases where the traveller may be at fault). Consuls have discretion on whether to charge the out-of-hours fee: for example, they would not charge it if called out to deal with an emergency or trauma such as rape or assault, but would be more likely to charge it if asked to issue a replacement passport out

of hours by someone who had, say, left this to the last minute before travelling. In some cases, explaining that a fee will be charged can act as a deterrent in such cases, so that those who can really wait return during the normal working week.

However, we agree with the Committee's implication that the fee is charged far less frequently than it might be, and will be looking at this area in follow-up to the NAO's Report.

Question 107 (Mr Alan Williams): Biometric passports

The Committee asked for further information on the FCO's emerging ideas for dealing with the technical challenges inherent in Phase 2 of biometric passports, including the number of characteristics required for full document security.

The EU requirements for second generation biometrics in passports have not yet been finalised, but it is likely that the UK will mirror these requirements.

The FCO is planning to collect the Facial Image (as per current practice for Phase 1) and all 10 fingerprints. The passport chip will hold both sets of biometrics, together with the data on the bio data page, although it is not yet decided whether this will be restricted to three biometric identifiers (facial and two fingerprints) or whether 10 fingerprints will be stored along with the facial image on the chip. The 10 fingerprints will have additional protection to only allow those authorised (by the UK authorities) to read them. The protection technology will be embedded on the passport chip, and drive the need to update the chip and the encoding process for Biometrics Phase 2.

We expect to change our overseas passport-issuing arrangements for biometrics Phase 2, moving physical production and printing of passports to a few (3–5) regional centres while the remainder of posts enrol the biometric data, enter that data and undertake nationality determination. The current passport issuing system will have to be changed to support the new working practices. Work is well advanced on this; it will now, given the Committee's interest in this issue, include analysis of the relationship between the number of biometric indicators collected and document security.

Question 114 (Mr Alan Williams): Child abduction

1. The Committee raised several matters on child abduction. Sir Michael Jay has written directly to Kitty Ussher MP about a constituency case she raised.

STATISTICS

2. Below are the most recent set of statistics from the Child Abduction Section (CAS) at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) (Fig 1, Ev 30). They reflect figures for the 4th quarter of 2005 received since the evidence session on 11 January. CAS was set up in early 2003, with statistics being collected from the 3rd quarter of 2003. Our statistics are cumulative from that point.

3. At the close of the 4th quarter 2005, we were working on 89 active cases out of 476 cases in total. During 2005, we were made aware of 110 new cases and assisted in the resolution of 34 cases. These statistics are a guide, rather than a definitive assessment of the full scale of child abduction issues, trends, or the number of cases that are resolved. In some cases parents do not contact CAS, or make only brief enquiries. Equally, CAS may not always hear that cases have been resolved.

4. CAS statistics are broken down into cases involving countries contracted to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction (Hague Convention) and those that are not. The Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA) takes the lead on Hague Convention cases, but we may become involved in providing Consular assistance to parents pursuing custody or access outside of the Hague Convention or may assist the DCA in difficult cases.

5. A case is defined as filed if there has been no action for the past six months. This does not mean that the cases have been resolved and therefore the figures for filed cases are not indicative of the number of children that have been returned after abduction. Numbers for actual returns of which we are aware are included in the statistics and absorbed into figures for filed cases. Figures for children returned to the UK are not broken down by country.

6. Statistics on child abduction are also held by the DCA and *reunite*, a charity providing practical advice and information to parents and guardians whose children have been, or might be, abducted overseas.

MIDDLE EAST AND FAR EAST

7. The Committee raised the specific issue of child abduction cases in the Middle East and Far East. In 2005 the CAS was made aware of eight new cases in Middle Eastern countries and 10 new cases in Far Eastern countries. We do not keep statistics on which parent abducted the child(ren). Experience suggests that fathers have abducted children in the majority of cases in the Middle East, but the split between abduction by the mother or father is more balanced for cases in the Far East. Members of Parliament or constituents are encouraged to contact the CAS if they have concerns about potential abductions.

GERMANY

8. The DCA has provided information on child abduction to and from Germany from 2000–05, including the various outcomes possible (Fig 2, Ev 33).

9. The “incoming” cases statistics show how many applications have been made by parents from Germany and how many judicial orders (successful outcomes) for return our courts have made, 32 in all between 2000 and 2005. On three occasions in that same time period the English courts have not made an order for return.

10. As with the CAS statistics, these should not be seen as a definitive assessment of the problem of child abduction, or successful resolution of cases. As shown in the table, there are many possible outcomes in these cases.

11. In the case of Germany, the DCA and FCO take a view that the international framework and co-operation established by the Hague Convention has improved the handling of child abduction cases between the UK and Germany in recent years.

Figure 1

CHILD ABDUCTION SECTION STATISTICS, AS OF 4th QUARTER, 2005

<i>Region</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Hague/Non Hague</i>	<i>Active</i>	<i>Filed</i>	<i>Total since 3rd Quarter, 2003</i>	<i>Change Over Last Quarter</i>
Africa	Angola	Non Hague	0	1	1	
	Botswana	Non Hague	0	1	1	
	Ethiopia	Non Hague	0	1	1	
	Ghana	Non Hague	2	5	7	+1
	Guyana	Non Hague	1	1	2	+1
	Kenya	Non Hague	2	0	2	
	Malawi	Non Hague	1	2	3	
	Nigeria	Non Hague	2	9	11	
	Sierra Leone	Non Hague	0	2	2	
	Somalia	Non Hague	0	6	6	
	South Africa	Hague	0	1	1	
	Tanzania	Non Hague	3	0	3	
	Uganda	Non Hague	0	3	3	
	Zambia	Non Hague	0	1	1	
Zimbabwe	Hague	0	4	4		
Middle East/ Africa	Algeria	Non Hague	0	5	5	
	Egypt	Non Hague	2	4	6	+1
	Iran	Non Hague	1	5	6	
	Iraq	Non Hague	1	1	2	
	Israel	Hague	1	1	2	
	Jordan	Non Hague	0	3	3	
	Kuwait	Non Hague	1	0	1	+1
	Lebanon	Non Hague	1	2	3	
	Libya	Non Hague	0	4	4	
	Morocco	Non Hague	0	5	5	+1
	Oman	Non Hague	0	2	2	
	Palestine	Non Hague	0	1	1	
	Qatar	Non Hague	0	1	1	
	Saudi Arabia	Non Hague	1	2	3	
	Sudan	Non Hague	0	5	5	
Syria	Non Hague	0	2	2		
Tunisia	Non Hague	0	8	8	+1	
UAE	Non Hague	2	2	4		

<i>Region</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Hague/Non Hague</i>	<i>Active</i>	<i>Filed</i>	<i>Total since 3rd Quarter, 2003</i>	<i>Change Over Last Quarter</i>
Europe	Cyprus (South)	Hague	0	6	6	
	Cyprus (North)	Non Hague	4	0	4	+1
	Czech Republic	Hague	0	3	3	
	Denmark	Hague	0	1	1	
	France	Hague	2	9	11	-1
	Germany	Hague	0	5	5	
	Greece	Hague	1	4	5	
	Ireland	Hague	0	1	1	
	Italy	Hague	1	5	6	
	Lithuania	Hague	0	1	1	
	Malta	Hague	0	3	3	+1
	Netherlands	Hague	0	3	3	
	Norway	Hague	1	0	1	
	Poland	Hague	1	2	3	
	Portugal	Hague	6	1	7	+4
	Romania	Hague	0	1	1	
	Slovakia	Hague	1	1	2	
	Spain	Hague	5	13	18	
	Switzerland	Hague	0	1	1	
	Turkey	Hague	1	8	9	
Eastern	Kazakhstan	Non Hague	0	1	1	+1
	Kyrgyz Republic	Non Hague	0	1	1	
	Russia	Non Hague	2	5	7	+2
	Ukraine	Non Hague	0	3	3	
South East Asia	Bangladesh	Non Hague	2	18	20	+1
	India	Non Hague	5	26	31	+1
	Pakistan	Non Hague	13	82	95	+7
	Sri Lanka	Non Hague	1	2	3	
Asia Pacific	Australia	Hague	4	14	18	+3
	Brunei	Non Hague	1	0	1	+1
	Cambodia	Non Hague	0	1	1	
	China	Non Hague	2	1	3	+1
	Hong Kong (SAR)	Hague	0	2	2	
	Indonesia	Non Hague	0	1	1	
	Japan	Non Hague	2	7	9	
	Malaysia	Non Hague	0	3	3	
	New Zealand	Hague	0	1	1	
	Philippines	Non Hague	1	1	2	
	Singapore	Non Hague	1	1	2	
	Taiwan	Non Hague	0	2	2	
	Thailand	Non Hague	1	8	9	+1
Americas	Antigua & Barbuda	Non Hague	1	0	1	
	Bahamas	Hague	0	1	1	+1
	Barbados	Non Hague	0	2	2	
	Brazil	Hague	0	1	1	+1
	British Virgin Islands	Hague	0	1	1	
	Canada	Hague	0	5	5	
	Chile	Hague	0	1	1	
	Ecuador	Hague	1	0	1	
	Honduras	Hague	1	0	1	
	Jamaica	Non Hague	1	4	5	
	Nicaragua	Non Hague	0	1	1	
	Paraguay	Hague	0	1	1	
	Peru	Hague	0	1	1	
	Saint Lucia	Non Hague	0	1	1	
	Saint Vincent & Trinidad & Tobago	Non Hague	0	2	2	
	Tobago	Non Hague	0	2	2	

<i>Region</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Hague/Non Hague</i>	<i>Active</i>	<i>Filed</i>	<i>Total since 3rd Quarter, 2003</i>	<i>Change Over Last Quarter</i>
	United States	Hague	5	26	31	+4
	Venezuela	Hague	1	0	1	
Total			89	387	476	+35
Total Non Hague Cases			316			
Total Hague Cases			160			
Total Active Non Hague Cases			57			
Total Active Hague Cases			32			
Total Filed Non Hague Cases			259			
Total Filed Hague Cases			128			
Resolved	1st qtr	7				
	2nd qtr	8				
	3rd qtr	7				
	4th qtr	12				
Top 5 countries by ACTIVE cases						
<i>Location</i>	<i>Hague/Non Hague</i>	<i>No of cases</i>				
Pakistan	Non Hague	13				
Portugal	Hague	6				
India	Non Hague	5				
United States	Hague	5				
Spain	Hague	5				
Top 10 countries by ALL cases						
<i>Location</i>	<i>Hague/Non Hague</i>	<i>No of cases</i>				
Pakistan	Non Hague	95				
India	Non Hague	31				
United States	Hague	31				
Bangladesh	Non Hague	20				
Spain	Hague	18				
Australia	Hague	18				
Nigeria	Non Hague	11				
France	Hague	11				
Thailand	Non Hague	9				
Turkey	Hague	9				

Figure 2

**CHILD ABDUCTION UNIT, DEPARTMENT FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS STATISTICS
ON ABDUCTIONS TO AND FROM GERMANY, 2000–05**

Incoming abduction cases from Germany

<i>Germany</i>	<i>Number of Active Cases</i>		<i>Cases rejected by Central Authority</i>	<i>Child not traced</i>	<i>Child traced to</i>		<i>Cases withdrawn</i>	<i>Voluntary return</i>	<i>Judicial Order</i>			<i>Average time between receipt of application and judicial decision</i>	<i>Known cases in which Judicial Order for return not put in effect</i>	<i>Cases pending at end of the year</i>
	<i>Pending 01.01.00</i>	<i>New applications</i>			<i>Non Convention Country</i>	<i>Other Convention Country</i>			<i>Return</i>	<i>Refusal</i>	<i>Access</i>			
2000	1	7					1	2	1	1	2	112		1
2001	1	16	1			1	1	1	7	1		34		5
2002	5	4		1			2		5	1				
2003		9					1		4			61		4
2004	4	10		1	1				10			40		2
2005	2	11						1	5			86		7

Outgoing abduction cases to Germany

<i>Germany</i>	<i>Number of active cases</i>		<i>Cases rejected by Central Authority</i>	<i>Child not traced</i>	<i>Child traced to</i>		<i>Cases withdrawn</i>	<i>Voluntary return</i>	<i>Judicial Order</i>			<i>Average time between receipt of application and judicial decision</i>	<i>Known cases in which Judicial Order for return not put in effect</i>	<i>Cases pending at end of the year</i>
	<i>Pending 01.01.00</i>	<i>New Applications</i>			<i>Non Convention Country</i>	<i>Other Convention Country</i>			<i>Return</i>	<i>Refusal</i>	<i>Access</i>			
2000	4	13		1			4	1	3		1	127		7
2001	7	2			1		2	2	4			115		
2002		10	2				2	1	1	1				3
2003	3	8						2	1	1	3	183		4
2004	4	13					4	2		2		155		9
2005	9	4	2		1		2	3	1	1	2			1