



DEPARTMENT FOR CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

**Government Response to
the NAO Review of the Experiences
of UK Nationals affected by
the Indian Ocean Tsunami**

*Presented to Parliament by the
Paymaster General
by Command of Her Majesty
24 July 2007*



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Foreword

The tsunami of 26th December 2004 was unprecedented in its scale and severity; its impact on individuals and communities was devastating.

The Government's response, too, was unprecedented. Public servants and their families, friends, and other volunteers did extraordinary work in the most difficult circumstances to respond to this tragedy, as is recognised in the NAO's report.

The sheer scale of the tsunami meant that no organisation was able to respond as it wanted. We were not able to assist everyone as we would have liked. We are determined to continue to learn from the experiences of victims and their families.

We are grateful to all of those who took part in the study compiled by the Zito Trust and who, in doing so, shared some acutely painful memories. The NAO's report confirms that the steps we have taken to improve our response to major catastrophes are the right ones. Its conclusions and recommendations have helped to focus our work.

We are committed to providing the best possible support and care to British nationals involved in emergencies and terrorist attacks overseas. Sadly, there have been a number of other incidents since 2004, albeit on a smaller scale, which have continued to remind us of the importance of this. We have made real progress in all the areas highlighted by the NAO report. In particular, we now have a protocol in place which outlines the ways the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's Humanitarian Assistance Unit and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office work together. This sets out the roles and responsibilities of each department, and will frame our response to future emergencies involving British nationals overseas. Our teams have a close relationship, born of the work we have engaged in together, which in itself significantly strengthens our capability. In addition, we have strengthened our links with relevant organisations in the UK, including the police, local authorities and the voluntary sector, to make sure people's needs are met both in the immediate aftermath of an emergency and in the longer term.

This response to the NAO report recognises the key messages and lessons highlighted for the Government. We hope this response goes some way towards demonstrating the priority we attach to this work. Whilst future emergencies will bring with them new challenges, we are confident that the Government is now better placed to meet people's needs.



Tessa Jowell
Minister for Humanitarian Assistance



David Miliband
Foreign Secretary

Introduction

On 30 November 2006, the National Audit Office (NAO) published the findings of its review of the Government's response to the tsunami of 26 December 2004. The review focused on the experiences of those directly affected by the disaster and their views of the help offered by the Government. In its report, the NAO made a number of recommendations and asked the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, with its responsibility for humanitarian assistance in major emergencies, to co-ordinate a response after six months outlining the progress made in strengthening the Government's ability to respond to crises abroad.

The Government welcomed the NAO's review as well as this opportunity to provide a formal response to its recommendations. We are confident that work during the past two years has addressed a number of concerns raised about our response to the tsunami. We will continue to develop our capability to respond to emergencies overseas.

This response is structured along the lines of the NAO's report, with four sections entitled:

1. Planning and preparation in advance of disasters;
2. Providing direct support with empathy;
3. Communicating and handling information;
4. Delivering long-term support and aftercare.

Within each section, attention is drawn to four areas:

- a) Ensuring the most effective possible initial response in the affected area;
- b) Getting survivors out of the affected area;
- c) Supporting friends and family not in the affected area;
- d) Supporting all those affected in the longer term.

Recommendations that address similar aspects of the response are grouped together to allow us to offer comprehensive responses.

Further information is contained in the following annexes:

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| Annex 1 | Roles and Responsibilities |
| Annex 2 | Key Events and Actions |
| Annex 3 | Central Government Emergency Response Arrangements |
| Annex 4 | British Red Cross Hardship Fund Evaluation |

Government Response to NAO Recommendations

SECTION 1: Planning and preparation in advance of disaster

Members of the diplomatic service and volunteers – many of whom were relatives and friends – worked extremely hard to provide assistance to the victims of the tsunami. It is recognised, however, that plans in place at the time of the disaster were not comprehensive enough to allow the Government to deal effectively with an emergency of such scale and intensity.

Much work has been done since the tsunami to prepare the UK to respond better to an emergency involving British nationals abroad, including improvements to training the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)'s Rapid Deployment Teams (RDTs) and requirements for UK Embassies, High Commissions, and Consulates to regularly test their emergency plans. Agreements and protocols have also been drawn up between Government Departments and agencies to provide clarity of roles and responsibilities and to ensure we work together effectively during a crisis.

a) Ensuring the most effective possible initial response in the affected area

3.1 At the time of the tsunami, there was not a coherent and co-ordinated plan in place for dealing with a disaster on this unprecedented scale. Key decisions such as providing flights, assistance packages, and deploying voluntary agencies overseas, were improvised as events unfolded. *The UK Agencies must ensure that the principles are in place to enable an effective and flexible response to any major crisis abroad affecting thousands of nationals dispersed over extensive affected areas. The roles and responsibilities of respective agencies must be well understood from the outset.*

3.2 Nationals in the affected area were realistic in that they did not expect to see a visible UK Government response on the ground until the second or third day. *In planning the speed of response to emergencies overseas the FCO and other agencies need to take into account that the public expectations for official deployment will be based on perceived travel time from regional centres and from the UK. Also that people will compare their experiences with the perceived speed of response from other countries.*

3.3 In disasters on such a scale, FCO's own resources in affected areas will rapidly be overwhelmed. *So a key element of emergency planning by FCO Posts should include measures to help those affected help themselves in post-disaster situations. According to circumstances, this may include written guidance to be issued in the event of crises in the most likely scenarios. This could include pre-prepared written guidance on the location of emergency facilities, the roles of key emergency services in country, or a short glossary of key words or phrases in the local language.*

These three recommendations will be addressed together.

We have undertaken significant work to strengthen our readiness and ability to respond to future large-scale emergencies. It is important to remember that for a variety of reasons, including distance from the UK, the location of Consular staff within the affected country, and the particular circumstances of each emergency, each crisis is different and the response provided may differ.

The FCO's RDTs are a crucial part of our response to a major incident affecting British nationals abroad. RDT training is now more professional and effective, with volunteers required to pass an assessed roleplay (with a professional actor playing the role of a distressed British national) before being accepted onto the RDT training course. The RDT course itself includes a 48-hour practice deployment, facilitated by an external company, which allows RDT volunteers to practice their skills in a real-life environment. We have expanded our network of RDTs, with larger numbers of volunteers trained and available in London, and we have set up regional RDT networks in Hong Kong and the United States. Together these regional teams allow us to offer a quicker

response to crises occurring far from London. In London, we now have weekly rosters of 20 volunteers drawn from a pool of 80, more than twice the number trained before the 2004 tsunami, which means we have the capacity to deploy two RDTs of 10 staff each to different locations at the same time. Both the Hong Kong and U.S. RDTs have 30-40 volunteers. The teams have dedicated equipment for deployment. We are also considering how best to provide additional surge capacity to deal with Consular crises.

Since the tsunami, the FCO has worked closely with the Civil Contingencies Secretariat in the Cabinet Office to strengthen arrangements for liaison when a crisis happens so that the central government response arrangements can be activated as appropriate. (A brief summary of these is set out in Annex 3). The FCO and DCMS have an agreement¹ determining exactly how a transfer of responsibility will take place when victims of incidents overseas eventually return to the UK. It sets out the ‘trigger’ mechanism to decide:

- How the relevant home departments will be informed by the FCO that a disaster affecting British nationals has taken place abroad;
- The method by which relevant information relating to victims and their families will be transferred from the FCO to the home departments.

In addition, agreements between the FCO and a number of other partners have been established:

- Police – the FCO has developed a relationship with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and, through ACPO, relationships with all police forces in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, beyond the traditional relationship with the Metropolitan Police. FCO has agreed a memorandum of understanding with ACPO, and an ‘on call rota’ is now in place which identifies a ‘lead police force’ to assist the FCO in dealing with incidents overseas on a monthly basis. The lead force works closely with the FCO in developing a response plan, prior to taking its place on the rota.
- International SOS – medical staff now deploy with FCO RDTs to provide professional advice about the suitability of the medical facilities and treatment available in the area affected by a crisis. International SOS will also assist in contacting an individual’s travel insurance company.
- British Red Cross – have deployed with RDTs on most occasions since the tsunami to provide psycho-social support for survivors and families.
- Met Office – the FCO uses a Met Office consultancy service to track hurricanes, cyclones, and typhoons in order to give as much warning and information as possible in FCO Travel Advice and prepare to respond as necessary to help British nationals who may be affected.

All UK Embassies, High Commissions, and Consulates (referred to as ‘Posts’) are now required to test and update their emergency plans at least once a year, and in some high-risk countries more frequently. These plans include detailed contact information for local hospitals, mortuaries, airports, tour operators, local authorities, and major hotels. In a crisis, Posts use this pre-prepared information to assist relatives of affected British nationals. FCO does not ask Posts to format this information into handouts for families before a crisis, since some of information will not be relevant. However, the FCO does ask staff on the ground during a crisis to produce guidance for families containing relevant information (for example, which hospitals British nationals have been admitted to, which part of the local administration to contact on different issues, etc). If appropriate, a Post may also organise regular briefings for family members to update them on any developments.

¹ The FCO/DCMS agreement is available to download at:
<http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1094234589922>

All Posts exercise their emergency plans annually. The FCO offers guidance and expertise on how to do this effectively. For the highest-risk Posts, the FCO will organise live or tabletop exercises to test their response. The FCO has also organised several live exercises, including in France and Germany before the World Cup; in Barbados before the Cricket World Cup; in Vietnam, to test our preparedness for a human influenza pandemic; in Japan, to test our response to a major natural disaster; and in Spain, to test our response to a crisis incident involving large numbers of British tourists. There is a formal lessons identified process to enable Posts to judge where improvements or changes are needed.

Where relevant, FCO Travel Advice contains a 'Natural Disasters' section providing information about any current disasters, e.g. earthquakes, hurricanes, flooding, volcanic eruptions, and details of when the last major disaster occurred.

The FCO also delivers pro-active information to the public via PR and marketing activity as part of the Consular communications 'Know Before You Go' campaign. This ensures British nationals know what to do and who to contact if a major incident takes place. The Cricket World Cup awareness campaign 'Don't Get Caught Out' is the latest example. The campaign included the production and distribution of 20,000 information cards, a PR launch at the Oval with a member of the England Team, a dedicated website, and a radio day.

In consultation with the Home Office and FCO, ACPO has developed a national Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) strategy² and UK DVI Team to ensure a robust, co-ordinated approach to overseas deployments. Members of this team will also attend additional training at the University of Dundee, the first time that Officers involved in DVI have undergone such a process. The DVI strategy, agreed by all Chief Constables in October 2006, demonstrates their commitment to the UK DVI Team. FCO has a new working agreement with the UK DVI Team, which the FCO supports financially, setting out arrangements for the FCO to call on the Team in the event of a deployment requiring complex DVI support.

b) Getting survivors out of the affected area

3.4 Almost all survivors left the area through their own efforts or with the help of travel companies or airlines. Survey respondents reported difficulties in finding out what official flights were available and which were appropriate for the injured. FCO needs clear guidance to Consular staff on how best, and where, to advertise any evacuations, using a range of media.

We agree that publicising evacuations as widely as possible is a critical element of the immediate response.

The FCO revised its guidance to Posts on evacuation planning (as part of broader civil contingency planning) in January 2007. The new guidance includes information on how to advertise evacuations through a range of media: the FCO's website and Travel Advice pages, warden networks, e-mail, telephone systems, and the press. This guidance has been disseminated throughout the Consular network.

3.5 The FCO needs clear criteria, used to decide which groups of those affected would have first priority on evacuation flights or voyages, with flexibility allowed to officials to apply criteria compassionately.

We acknowledge the importance of this point.

If organising an HMG-assisted evacuation, the FCO advises staff to prioritise the most vulnerable evacuees first. The definition of vulnerable is taken to mean those requiring medical assistance, the elderly, or those with children or special needs. FCO officials on the ground have the ability

² The ACPO National Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) strategy is available at www.acpo.police.uk

to allocate priorities flexibly based on need and operational circumstances. Further detail relevant to this recommendation is contained in response to recommendation 4.8 on non-assisted departure on scheduled commercial transport.

c) Supporting friends and family not in the affected area

3.6 Due to the sheer scale of the disaster, the UK-based missing persons reporting telephone line was overwhelmed. Most survey respondents found it almost impossible to get through during the first few days. Measures have since been taken to expand emergency line capacity, including a new system to enlist capacity for police forces nationwide, but the UK Agencies still need to think about ways to manage overload situations in future crises.

As the NAO recognises, the UK Agencies have undertaken to address this issue in light of learning following the tsunami and other recent emergencies; we are confident that we are now better prepared to manage overload situations in the future.

Since the tsunami, the FCO has taken several important steps to expanding call-handling capacity. It now has an agreement whereby the police can make up to 650 call handlers available to the FCO within four to eight hours of a request being made. These arrangements were used during the evacuation from Lebanon in summer 2006 and worked well. The FCO is expanding the number of trained FCO volunteers who can answer calls in a crisis, and it has upgraded and expanded call-handling facilities in the new Consular Crisis Centre from eight call-handling ports to 32.

The police have also made significant progress in this area over the last two years. The importance of robust Casualty Bureau arrangements was reinforced by the events of 7th July 2005. Since then, the police service has more than doubled the numbers of Casualty Bureau-trained call handlers, and perhaps more importantly, introduced a system known as National Mutual Aid Telephony (NMAT). This will enable most forces in the UK to provide 'joined-up' call-taking facilities, with one telephone number serving each Casualty Bureau that has been opened. This will also include a facility for callers not reporting a missing person to be diverted to a more appropriate resource. In addition, ACPO is working closely with the National Police Improvement Agency (NPIA) and the Home Office on the development of e-mail cancellations of missing persons reports and exploring the potential for e-mail reporting. The operational aspects of e-mail reporting will require careful management and control measures.

ACPO is planning a national Casualty Bureau exercise later in 2007, to review progress to date and identify areas for future improvement. This event is intended to involve all police forces.

3.7 Most families who responded report supportive relationships with the police Family Liaison Officer (FLO). The sheer scale of the tsunami meant that some Officers were deployed in the family liaison role who were not experienced in it or who appeared to have limited aptitude for it. This indicates a need for a wider corps of trained FLOs nationwide to help deal with disaster situations.

ACPO fully recognises the importance of the role of the police Family Liaison Officer (FLO) in the response to a disaster. This is reinforced in both the ACPO Family Liaison Strategy Manual 2002 (currently being revised³) and the ACPO DVI Strategy, mentioned previously. ACPO is currently negotiating with the NPIA to ensure that all police FLOs receive training in the response to a disaster (particularly in relation to DVI processes). This training will ensure that the inconsistencies that families have experienced from FLOs in the past, in relation to their capability and awareness of DVI issues, are not repeated.

d) Supporting all those affected in the longer term

3.8 It is notable that FCO embassy personnel were seen as offering good support when relatives visited the affected areas some time after the tsunami. Being treated sensitively as

³ Once completed, the revised ACPO Family Liaison Strategy Manual will be available at www.acpo.police.uk

an individual was key in all positive feedback about agency contact. Although the personnel involved may have been selected for this role, it is likely that *making the time to plan and think about the people as individuals is a significant factor in good practice.*

3.9 The visits were highly valued and *the good practice shown by staff supporting visits by relatives should be reflected in disaster planning in the future.*

These two recommendations will be addressed together.

We agree that good practice should be identified and provide a basis for future learning. The support which may be provided to British nationals in all types of cases is set out in the FCO's "Support for British Nationals abroad, A Guide", published in March 2006⁴.

The FCO's crisis training programme for key crisis responders encourages staff to consider how different people might be affected by an incident, what types of assistance people might need, and how to best meet those needs. Training includes how to deal with trauma.

Please see recommendations 3.1 and 4.1 to see how we train our RDT members and Consular staff to support visiting families sympathetically and professionally. We would also deploy Red Cross Support Workers as appropriate to support families at anniversary commemorations, as we did following the tsunami.

3.10 The assistance package provided by the FCO and the subsequent hardship fund provided through the British Red Cross were valued but perceived to be badly advertised, and there was uncertainty as to the eligibility criteria for assistance. *The FCO and any other agencies should maintain a framework for assistance package entitlement and benefits that can be modified as appropriate and deployed quickly when judged necessary.*

We regret that people's experiences regarding the assistance provided were in some cases negative, and recognise the importance of quick and clear communication of any exceptional assistance that is being offered to those affected.

Details of the kind of assistance we can provide, and the kind of assistance we typically cannot provide, are available on page 5 of "Support for British Nationals abroad: A Guide". In a major catastrophe, however, the FCO can consider whether to offer exceptional help to directly affected British nationals, as it did following Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

A decision on whether the FCO needs to offer exceptional help and what that help might be is taken by the Foreign Secretary as soon as possible after a major catastrophe involving large numbers of British nationals overseas. The Foreign Secretary considers the circumstances of the catastrophe and the resources available. For example there may have been a breakdown of basic local services and transport, preventing British nationals from getting support directly, or large numbers of British nationals may have lost all forms of identification, travel documents, insurance policies, belongings, etc. as a result of the catastrophe.

If the Foreign Secretary determines an event to be a major catastrophe affecting significant numbers of people we can help, the FCO will:

- consider very early on whether exceptional help should be provided from public funds;
- set up public information lines;
- provide information if available, and if the FCO believes it to be reliable, to people who have been affected and family members with whom we have contact; and
- consider sending appropriate extra staff (i.e. the FCO RDTs) to the country affected.

⁴ "Support for British Nationals abroad, A Guide", FCO, 2006 is available at www.fco.gov.uk.

FCO Consular staff in the affected country can:

- visit those who are sick/injured in hospital;
- provide advice on the quality of medical facilities and treatment, and where appropriate, liaise with insurance companies about medical evacuations, and assist them to get in touch with their families and insurance companies; and
- meet with families who travel to the scene, providing up to date information and contacts.

If circumstances allow, there may be other assistance consular staff can provide. This may include, for example, meeting the families at the airport, assistance with transport and so on.

The British Red Cross has set up a psychosocial support team of 65 trained volunteers, who support British nationals affected by emergencies abroad when requested by the FCO. Members of the teams are now regularly deployed to overseas emergencies involving British nationals as part of the FCO rapid deployment team arrangements. Red Cross and FCO staff now undertake joint training in preparation for this emergency work.

It is recognised by the Red Cross that the tsunami Hardship Fund should have been introduced at an earlier point. Measures were put in place to advertise the Fund as widely as possible through the Tsunami Support Network.

SECTION 2: Providing direct support with empathy

We recognise that while some people received empathetic service, others feel they did not. We regret that some people feel they were not treated sensitively.

It is clear that British nationals expected a visible presence by UK officials in hospitals and on the ground, and that they would like to be able to access information and assistance, including an emergency telephone link back to the UK. Improvements have been made in these areas. RDT telephones are available for survivors to use to contact their families, and it is FCO policy to visit hospitals as quickly as possible following a crisis. The FCO provides staff with appropriate training to ensure that they possess the skills required to provide support with empathy (see response to 4.1 below).

There follows a detailed response to each recommendation.

a) Ensuring the most effective possible initial response in the affected area

4.1 Of those respondents who had direct contact with UK officials, many reported negative experiences about their manner. *FCO should further develop existing training so that all staff likely to be deployed to deal with the public in emergencies have received at least basic training in dealing sympathetically and flexibly with traumatised people, and have been assessed for their aptitude for such work at the completion of training.*

All FCO Officers posted into Consular jobs overseas are trained to deal with all customers sympathetically and flexibly. Since September 2006, they have been assessed (Pass/Fail) to an agreed standard on their ability in dealing with British nationals in distress and on customer care skills.

All FCO and some staff from the Home Office and U.K. Trade and Investment (UKTI) are advised to attend a two-day Duty Officer course before going to Post. This course covers Consular assistance work, crisis management, and customer care. This course is held 10 times a year for 20 participants each time. The FCO has also produced a distance-learning pack for Duty Officers at Posts, including DVDs showing aspects of how to handle difficult cases.

In October 2006, the Consular Training Challenge Fund was launched, which invited Posts to bid for further Consular-related training, such as Duty Officer and/or customer care training. This training had been delivered to 20 Posts as of 31 March 2007, with a continuing programme to cover a further 20 Posts by the end of March 2008. It enables Posts with particularly high exposure to traumatic cases to receive bespoke, focused training in dealing with people suffering trauma and bereavement.

The FCO has a Consular crisis Leadership programme for Heads and Deputy Heads of Mission, and Consular crisis training programmes for Consular staff, RDTs volunteers and Emergency Response Team (ERT) call handlers. This includes training on how to organise the key elements of a crisis response and how to deal effectively with those that have been involved. They are trained to deal sympathetically and flexibly with people in a crisis.

As part of their training, all RDT volunteers participate in an in-depth, three-and-a-half hour session dealing with the skills required to work with bereaved British nationals. They also complete individual role-plays with actors playing the parts of distressed British nationals. These sessions are run by a professional counsellor. Also as a prerequisite for joining the RDT, volunteers have to complete assessed role-plays where they are deemed to have passed or failed in accordance with how well they deal compassionately and flexibly with a distressed British national. These sessions are assessed by a qualified psychiatrist and a trained counsellor.

The FCO has developed training tools for overseas call handlers on how to answer inquiries from the public in a crisis. These tools should enable Posts to fully prepare staff identified for this role.

4.2 It is possible that some negative experiences were with volunteers rather than experienced FCO Consular officials. Ideally, overseas Posts should identify in advance groups of volunteers who would receive relevant training. *The recruitment and management of volunteers should be a feature of FCO Post emergency plans, and tested during regular exercises.*

The FCO now trains Community Liaison Officers at Posts (whose role is to liaise and assist families of staff at Post) to identify potential volunteers in the emergency-planning phase. However, due to local insurance issues, in certain crisis situations it may not always be possible to use these volunteers.

The FCO can now deploy Red Cross Support Workers as part of a Rapid Deployment Team to provide emotional support for survivors and bereaved families, and to provide information about where, and how, they may be able to access further support on their return to the UK.

4.3 There was a clear expectation amongst survivors, many of them destitute, that UK officials would be able to provide telephone contact back home, and it is the FCO's policy to assist this. A high proportion of respondents had not managed to contact home. *Assistance staff should be consistently equipped with mobile phones which should be made available for UK nationals, especially those immobilised in hospital, to establish initial contact with loved ones. Manual 'wind-up' chargers should be provided to help maintain telecoms where local power supply is down.*

It is FCO policy to assist with emergency telephone contacts in a crisis whenever possible.

Where possible (hospital policy allowing), the FCO's RDT phones can be used by survivors to contact their families. RDTs deploy with a supply of emergency batteries with their communications kits – these are small flat units which plug into a mobile phone, giving it an extra 90 minutes talk time or 480 minutes standby time. These are cheaper, smaller, and more efficient than 'wind up' chargers.

4.4 Respondents expected the UK to provide medical help, and came to believe that this did not happen for reasons of cost or inefficiency. There is a clear gap between this expectation and the FCO's position, which has not sought to supplant or duplicate the foreign emergency services responsible for disaster response in affected areas in their countries. *The FCO has defined in its Consular guide that it would not normally provide direct medical or psychological help to UK nationals in disaster areas overseas, and this limitation should be widely advertised, not least so that travellers ensure they are adequately insured.*

We recognise that there was confusion regarding the medical help those affected by the tsunami expected to receive from the UK Agencies, causing distress and contributing to the criticisms of our response. The NAO report summarises our position here accurately. The FCO has engaged in further work to ensure people have access to the information they need before travelling overseas.

FCO Travel Advice states that medical and health insurance is the responsibility of the individual traveller. It stresses that individuals should know what cover their policy provides and recommends that insurance policies should provide 24-hour cover for emergency service and assistance. The Travel Advice also details examples of travellers who have had inadequate insurance policies, and the consequences; and an example of a properly insured traveller who received the benefit of her policy. Taking responsibility for your own actions when travelling abroad, and knowing all about your destination and what you need to do before going there, are key messages delivered through the 'Know Before You Go' campaign. Communication methods include TV fillers, radio advertisements, a wide-ranging PR campaign and partnership network, road shows and spokesperson opportunities, as well as a series of booklets and web content.

4.5 *Those hospitalised should be visited as soon as possible by English speaking officials who should: check on their condition, put in place any necessary arrangements and enable them to register missing loved ones.*

This recommendation reflects existing FCO policy.

It is the FCO's aim to contact all British nationals as soon as possible after being notified of their hospitalisation during a crisis. One of the roles of the International SOS medical team, along with Consular staff, is to visit all the hospitals and speak to all British nationals and their families who are with them. International SOS can assess whether local hospital facilities meet the medical needs of the patients in the specific circumstances of the crisis. Where they do not, International SOS can assist with contacting the patient's insurance company so that the insurance company may arrange further treatment or medical evacuation. International SOS and Consular staff will visit patients regularly where possible. Consular Officers will normally have laptop computers when visiting hospitals to record affected persons information. Where necessary, casualties' medical information and travel details will be passed to the appropriate agencies at Reception points so that arrangements can be made for their arrival.

b) Getting survivors out of the affected areas

4.6 *Those who have severe or life threatening injury, and children in the affected areas whose parents are missing or are known to have died, should be visited as soon as possible by an official, and prioritised for outgoing flights, in line with FCO's stated policy. Assistance should be given to a relative or close friend to fly out and join unaccompanied children.*

This recommendation reflects existing FCO policy.

Please see our response to recommendation 4.5 for information about the role of International SOS and Consular Officers in such situations.

4.7 *Difficulties were reported in gaining flights for mixed nationality families and partnerships. FCO should ensure that its stated policy to assist all members of mixed nationality families is upheld, and that people caught up in disaster situations should be treated as a UK couple, irrespective of whether the UK partner has died, subject to complying with immigration law.*

This recommendation reflects existing FCO policy. As the NAO notes, decisions must be made in line with UK immigration laws, and, in the case of an evacuation to a third country, in line with the immigration laws of that country.

In the case of two nationalities within a family, the individual concerned, or the surviving partner/family members, must decide which nationality they would like the affected person to be treated as. The individual/family must inform Consular staff if they wish to be treated as British; the FCO cannot make that decision for the individual or family member.

4.8 *Airlines need to consider that evacuees may be destitute and in acute need of food, blankets, and an aisle seat if injured.*

Unfortunately, there are limitations to the influence UK Agencies can expect to exert, even during a crisis. The FCO has no control over seat allocation on aircraft, although airlines will, where circumstances allow, endeavour to accommodate people's requests and needs. Travel insurance companies have prime responsibility for determining how and when their customers are evacuated. However, FCO staff are encouraged to establish good relationships with the airlines locally so that in the event of a disaster they can inform them of any specific vulnerable cases.

In the UK, the FCO is working towards establishing good working relationships with the airport authorities, the travel industry, and airlines as strategic partners in the 'Know Before You Go' campaign. Please see our response to recommendation 3.4 on HMG-assisted evacuations.

4.9 *Respondents who experienced the reception process at Heathrow Airport felt that it was well thought-through and well-managed. The arrangements provide a helpful basis for planning the response for future emergencies.*

4.10 However, a third of respondents did not report having received offers of support at all. *There seems to be scope to improve the consistency of arrangements or at least the basic briefing of ground staff at airports where reception teams are not going to be in place.*

We recognise the importance of reception processes at ports of entry to the UK, and are collectively looking to clarify roles and responsibilities in this area. Our work will involve determining how reception arrangements will be co-ordinated in future events and the implications of achieving consistency across a range of diverse airports and ports.

Effective arrangements can be uniquely useful in enabling a range of agencies to identify and make contact with those returning from an emergency overseas. At present, there is likely to be some inconsistency in the response capabilities at different ports around the UK. A number of agencies, including ACPO, the Department for Transport, Communities and Local Government (CLG), DCMS, and the Voluntary Sector are working together to address this issue. We agree that it is important that any specific lessons learnt are disseminated for the information of those ports that may have to deal with large-scale emergency reception arrangements in the future. We are currently reviewing existing guidance in this area, to determine whether learning may be best presented as part of new guidance focused on those Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) with ports in their area.

c) Supporting friends and family not in the affected area

4.11 Respondents reported a good standard of support from their police FLOs but there was inconsistency in how FLOs perceived their role. Some limited themselves to the core role of collecting evidence and informing families on the progress of enquiries. Others did much more. *There is a need for clearer guidance on what more an FLO should do, and legitimately could do, to assist a family in a disaster situation.*

4.12 Victim Identification processes are inevitably distressing, but relatives report that the intrusiveness of questions about the physical characteristics of the missing person came as a shock. *Police Officers and others collecting such data need consistent training and to have demonstrated their ability to convey at the outset the sensitivity of the kind of data they are about to ask for, and the reasons why it is necessary.*

These two recommendations will be addressed together.

These recommendations raise very important issues, which are being addressed by ACPO.

Family Liaison Officers (FLO) perform a crucial role following an emergency. As mentioned in our response to recommendation 3.7, the ACPO Family Liaison Strategy Manual 2002 outlines the role of the police FLO in the response to a disaster. Although this manual is being updated, its content in respect to the role of a FLO is unlikely to change significantly. The role of the FLO is primarily that of an investigator, and in the response to a disaster the FLO will also play a crucial part in the identification process, by collecting ante-mortem evidence and forensic samples to identify those that have died. In addition, the FLO will be the initial point of contact in the UK for families as part of the overall response. ACPO and various Government agencies have worked in partnership over the last few years to bring clarity to this area, particularly in respect of co-ordination and identifying roles and responsibilities⁵.

It should be recognised that it is not the responsibility of the police to offer counselling or other types of social or psychological support; although they may have a key role to play in ‘signposting’ other support that is available, particularly in the early stages when the FLO is likely to be the main point of contact with the family in the UK.

⁵ Further detail about the roles and responsibilities of Government and other agencies in supporting those affected in emergencies is contained in DCMS/ACPO ‘Humanitarian Assistance in Emergencies: Guidance on Establishing Humanitarian Assistance Centres’, published in October 2006, and available at www.acpo.police.uk

A vigorous training programme for police Family Liaison Co-ordinators over the last three years (still ongoing) will significantly increase the level of expert supervision and leadership that police FLOs receive in the response to a disaster. FLOs are trained to communicate with families about the scope of their role, and it is their responsibility to set limitations at the outset to minimise the potential for misunderstandings which can cause additional distress for people at an extremely difficult time.

ACPO, with the close involvement of DCMS, is now developing new national guidance on initial reception centre arrangements. This will help to bring even more clarity to the role of the police FLO.

4.13 A substantial minority of survey respondents flew out to the affected areas to assist in the search for loved ones. Respondents report differing advice on whether to travel, and this needs to be more consistent. Where no support can be offered, this should be communicated.

The FCO strives to provide the British public with timely, accurate travel advice.

In the aftermath of the tsunami, as in all emergencies, the FCO's Travel Advice evolved as understanding of the situation became clearer. For example, in the case of Thailand, from the outset on 26 December 2004, FCO Travel Advice stated: 'if you are intending to visit any of the areas of Thailand affected, you should check carefully with your travel and/or accommodation agents to make sure that it is safe and tenable to proceed. You should be aware that there is extensive damage to buildings and other infrastructure in the areas concerned and that the emergency services are fully stretched'. When the picture became clearer and more information was known, on 30 December 2004 the FCO advised against all but essential travel to resorts and towns along Thailand's west coast, in particular Phuket, Krabi, and Khao Lak. At the same time, the FCO advised 'there has been considerable damage to the underlying health care in affected areas. Flooding, stagnant water, disruption of sewer lines and poor quality sanitation conditions are conducive to development of disease. Those in affected areas are advised to purchase bottled water, as local water sources may be contaminated'. The advice was downgraded on 4 February 2005, but continued to recommend that those intending to visit Thailand check with their travel and accommodation agents to ensure that it was safe and practical to do so.

This was the best advice the FCO was able to give at the time. By advising against all but essential travel, the FCO was saying that it was not advisable for the general public (i.e. tourists) to visit resorts and towns along Thailand's west coast at that time, but that it was recognised that there were families who wished to visit to search for relatives. The FCO offered a package of assistance to help relatives (both in funding and making arrangements for such visits).

4.14 Improvements are needed in standards of support for those who decide to go out to the affected areas. Information could include material to assist in their searches, accommodation and travel, points of contact and the process for updating records of those missing.

The UK Agencies aim to provide helpful, timely information and support. Whilst we did provide advice following the tsunami, we recognise that in some instances, it was not produced in time to assist those who went to the affected areas in the immediate aftermath.

Following the tsunami, for example, from 6 January 2005, specific, detailed guidance titled "Thailand: information for families" was added to the FCO website. This was introduced by: "The FCO has put in place a package of measures designed to help victims of the tsunami or their relatives who need financial and other support". It then had links to sections entitled:

- Where to go for help, advice, and information
- Hospital information
- Websites

- Mortuaries
- Identification procedures in Thailand
- Support for those directly affected
- Travel Advice: Thailand

Police FLOs may well have a role to play in providing information to families in the UK on behalf of the FCO. However, Family Liaison Officers have neither authority nor jurisdiction overseas, and will not usually be deployed overseas. FCO staff will communicate new information directly to families once they inform the FCO of their arrival and whereabouts in the country.

4.15 Repatriation of a loved one's remains is a highly sensitive matter in which individual preferences vary. *Staff need to follow the standard guidance that the wishes of the relatives should prevail wherever possible. For example, possessions should be gathered before caskets are sealed.* And though there are Security and Health and Safety reasons why it is difficult to allow relatives into airside areas of Heathrow and Gatwick airports to receive caskets, the report indicates that this can be an important unmet need. *The police and airport authorities should consider ways that would enable relatives to meet the casket off the plane, as was observed in other countries. If this is not feasible at major airports then depending on the circumstances of each crisis the UK authorities may wish to consider use of alternative points of entry to the UK.*

We fully recognise the sensitivity with which repatriation should be treated. However, there are limitations which apply in this area.

International funeral directors, in association with an individual's insurance company, are responsible for repatriation of the deceased. They will endeavour to meet the wishes of the family if they are made known to them. Where these wishes are made known to the FCO, it will pass families' requests to the funeral director.

d) Supporting all those affected in the longer term

4.16 Respondents report being overwhelmed by the number of administrative tasks associated with the consequences of a sudden death or serious injury abroad. *The FCO should complete and issue the guidance they are developing, making this easily accessible to all those affected and to FLOs.*

The FCO has a series of booklets in the "Know Before You Go" campaign which can be downloaded or ordered free from the FCO website. Later this year it will publish another information booklet, "After a Tragedy": with guidance for victims and families of major incidents overseas (to which the NAO refers). This will be given to victims and bereaved families either by their FLO in the UK or an FCO Consular Officer overseas.

4.17 While the media was recognised for its beneficial role in advertising missing people and giving a voice to peoples' own accounts, the majority of survey comments were negative. *Clear guidance needs to be made available to those affected, and their loved-ones at home, to help in coping with media intrusion where this is unwelcome. This should include their rights under the Press Complaints Commission code of conduct of August 2006.*

We recognise that intense media interest can be both helpful and unwelcome to those who have been caught up in a disaster, and agree that the UK Agencies should help ensure people have the support they require in managing their relationship with the media. After the attacks on 11 September 2001, DCMS worked with bereaved families to produce a leaflet advising people about how to deal with media interest in these circumstances, whether they want to work with the media or they find the interest intrusive. This has since been updated and includes details of peoples' rights under the Press Complaints Commission code of Conduct of August 2006.

The leaflet was distributed at the Tsunami Support Network meetings from May 2005, but we acknowledge that by this time, many people had already experienced difficulties. Recent DCMS/ACPO guidance on humanitarian assistance, produced in close collaboration with the FCO, addresses this issue fully, and includes this leaflet⁶. This guidance has been distributed to all UK responding authorities, and is available to FLOs and Consular staff who are best placed to advise people in the immediate aftermath of an emergency overseas. Once people return home, the DCMS aims to write to families and survivors to make them aware of existing support services that can advise and assist people in a range of matters, including media attention.

4.18 The review has revealed significant negative feedback about banks, financial institutions and utility companies in their treatment of people following bereavement. The best companies recognised in the initial contact that the context was extraordinary and allocated suitably experienced staff to deal with all related matters. *The private sector should learn from those companies which recognised the special needs of people bereaved in the tsunami, by moderating their normal procedures and information requirements.*

We agree with this point. However, we do not have control over the approach taken by private sector companies in this respect, and are unable to comment on their behalf.

4.19 It is clearly very important to the bereaved that those in the affected areas appreciate the importance of loved ones' possessions, and that any possessions found should be kept safe and returned if at all possible. *Where families are required to give personal effects to assist identification, care must be taken to explain that they will be returned, but although all attempts will be made to safeguard the effects, they may be damaged during the process.*

ACPO has noted this recommendation, and this point will be incorporated into FLO training.

⁶ DCMS/ACPO 'Humanitarian Assistance in Emergencies: Guidance on Establishing Humanitarian Assistance Centres', published in October 2006, which includes this leaflet, is available at www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/press_notices/archive_2006/DCMS133_06.html

SECTION 3: Communicating and handling information

The first and most pressing need for those affected in emergencies is for information concerning what has happened; the whereabouts of their loved ones; and the assistance available for them in the immediate aftermath and the longer term.

Information about affected persons is of critical importance in the immediate hours and days following an emergency, and we acknowledge that its communication by UK Agencies to survivors and relatives was not as seamless as it could have been. Since the tsunami, significant advances have been made in this area, enabling more substantial data collection on the ground and by those reporting missing persons. A number of new agreements between agencies should also ensure that in future, we can work together in a planned fashion to ensure individuals get the information they need when they need it, both in the short and longer term.

Another point highlighted in the NAO's report concerns the particular difficulties experienced by agencies in the sharing of data concerning those affected. Similar problems were faced handling personal data during the response to the 7 July 2005 London attacks. Subsequent Cabinet Office guidance on data protection and sharing looks at the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998, and clarifies for emergency responders their responsibilities in emergency situations, and their wider responsibilities for the sharing of data where this is in the interest of individuals concerns, and the public.

There follows a detailed response to each recommendation.

a) Ensuring the most effective possible initial response in the affected area

5.1 Survivors experienced considerable delay and distress in locating and travelling to a single busy central point in the affected area, to provide their details and those of the missing. *The FCO should examine the feasibility of supplementing this centralised method of capturing details of survivors and those missing in affected areas, by enabling data to be captured electronically at the initial point of contact in the field. One solution, taking advantage of the FCO's upgraded crisis management software, could involve equipping mobile officials with handheld computers, regularly downloaded to main systems.*

The FCO has taken a number of steps to implement this recommendation, significantly improving our capacity in this area.

The FCO is setting up a new system called LOCATE consisting of two inter-linked databases, one for affected/missing persons information and one for registration information. LOCATE is an Internet-based system that will allow:

- Call handlers in the FCO in London and call handlers at Posts to enter details of missing persons or those affected by the crisis;
- Consular field teams to enter details via laptops (with Internet access) and to view details of those already entered into the database;
- Consular Officers to extract detailed reports from the database;
- Members of the public, during a crisis, to enter details of missing relatives online;
- Members of the public travelling overseas to register their journeys and longer residence overseas.

The FCO will work with other Government departments to secure flexible Internet access for their teams.

5.2 Survivors in affected areas reported that FCO staff frequently appeared less well informed than them about local conditions. *It is understandable that officials will take time to get up to speed but this will be expedited if exchanges with survivors are two-way. In addition*

to collecting contact details, FCO staff should be trained and equipped to collect and pool 'intelligence' from survivors about conditions in the affected areas.

How to share and communicate important information effectively is an important element of our crisis training.

The FCO provides a training programme for Heads and Deputy Heads of Mission, Consular staff, RDTs, and Emergency Response Team (ERT) call handlers. This includes training on collecting and sharing key operational information in a crisis and on how to deal effectively with affected persons. In addition, the new LOCATE software for recording affected/missing persons information and registrations is expected to improve the management of information during a crisis.

5.3 *A standardised minimum dataset should be common for recording of casualties and missing persons by all agencies. A new database being tested aims to achieve this.*

The focal point for collecting data relating to missing UK citizens is likely to be the FCO Call Centre, or, in larger crises, the police Casualty Bureau. We have significantly improved our capability in this area over the last two years. LOCATE is designed to collect a wide range of data on missing persons, casualties, and their friends and relatives (see our response to recommendation 5.1 above). Members of the public will be able to report someone as missing online using LOCATE. Data will be shared between the FCO and the police by downloading to a standard XML file that meets police information requirements. The police are also examining requirements for remote data collection, and are looking at a number of other potential upgrades for future Casualty Bureau capability. The FCO and ACPO will work closely together in relation to future developments in this field to ensure systems are compatible, and most importantly that developments lead to improvements in the transmission of vital information.

5.4 *The public have an understandable expectation that the agencies involved will share data and not have to collect it on successive occasions for their individual purposes. The tsunami response suffered from overly-cautious interpretation of the Data Protection Act. The agencies involved should agree to apply new guidance from the Ministry of Justice that data can be shared as part of an emergency response unless it is clearly incompatible with that purpose. Resolution of this matter cannot await the next crisis.*

We accept this recommendation, and have addressed this issue.

In January 2007, in response to a number of incidents⁷ the Cabinet Office published "Data Protection and Sharing – Guidance for Emergency Planners and Responders".⁸ Since then its core messages have been disseminated widely amongst those agencies involved in emergency response. This guidance was produced because we are determined to prevent the difficulties which were experienced following the tsunami and the 7 July bombings from being repeated in the future. The guidance contains reference to the situation following the tsunami, and offers simple, clear advice to agencies about their responsibilities under the range of legislation that covers information and data sharing. It clearly states that data can be shared between data-holding agencies if the purposes of each are not incompatible⁹. There is no question that in their response to the tsunami some agencies were overly cautious in their application of the terms of the Act, however well-meaning their intent. We are confident that emergency planners now have access to the tailored guidance they need to prevent such a set of circumstances arising again. ACPO/DCMS guidance on humanitarian assistance¹⁰ also contains guidance on this important issue.

⁷ The Victoria Climbié Inquiry (2003); the Bichard Inquiry (2004); the Asian tsunami (2004); 7 July London attacks (2005); Hurricane Katrina (2005).

⁸ Available at www.ukresilience.gov.uk

⁹ The organisations must also have the legal power to share, and any sharing must be fair to the data subject. Full explanations can be found in the guidance.

¹⁰ DCMS/ACPO 'Humanitarian Assistance in Emergencies: Guidance on Establishing Humanitarian Assistance Centres', published in October 2006, which includes a chapter on data-sharing, is available at www.culture.gov.uk.

5.5 *Where possible, and as quickly as possible, details of survivors and the missing should be placed on a single database and shared with other relevant organisations, while protecting confidentiality. There needs to be greater clarity as to what happens to the information people give, and this should be communicated to those providing the information.*

We recognise that the UK's capability in this area will be of great importance to the effectiveness of our overall response in future.

Our responses to the recommendations above indicate that we have brought some clarity to this area with the publication of bespoke guidance. In addition to this, ACPO is in the process of developing supplementary guidance addressing this issue for the police.

Using LOCATE, a Consular official with a laptop and Internet access will be able to register details of an affected person as soon as they are given them. The XML file referred to in 5.3 above will enable Consular Officers, both at Posts and in the UK, to download data from LOCATE for sharing with other relevant organisations.

b) Getting survivors out of the affected areas

5.6 **The one UK Government flight back to the UK from Thailand returned mostly empty: survey respondents expressed strong disappointment that they had been uninformed about it.**

5.7 *There should be a single point of contact in the affected area for use by survivors and officials on the ground, to provide information on the availability and booking of any UK Government flights out of the area. The single point of contact should aim to give reasonable notice in excess of travel time to the airport. Those in the UK arranging evacuation flights should support this service standard by sending timely advance notice of outgoing flights.*

These recommendations will be addressed together.

All FCO Posts maintain Post Emergency Plans (PEPs). These provide details of a crisis operation room that should be established at the onset of a crisis to act as a conduit for information in country, to London, and with other offices and agencies. Where required, the crisis operations room would also collate local information for use by survivors and officials, and ensure that this information is efficiently disseminated.

5.8 *The Flights Point of Contact in affected areas should use a wide range of local media to publicise flights in sufficient time, and should work through lists of those registered for flights until flights are as full as possible.*

This recommendation concurs with existing FCO policy.

The FCO deploys Press Officers with its RDTs to help co-ordinate the media response. The FCO tries to use local media as appropriate. The FCO is further developing its ability to reach those that wish to leave with LOCATE, which will allow the FCO to e-mail all those that register online. FCO Posts continue to use their warden networks, the local media, the BBC World Service, and the FCO website to disseminate public safety and information messages during a crisis. For example, the FCO used regular email bulletins to registrants in Guinea to alert them to flight availability during a period of instability in the country in February 2007.

5.9 *Arrangements need to be in place to ensure that on departure from the affected area, details are sent to the UK of the medical and other needs of those on flights, to ensure effective and sympathetic reception on arrival in the UK. The travel operators, airlines and other Government agencies have a key role to play in this, in co-operation with FCO staff at the outgoing airport.*

Please refer to our responses to recommendations 3.1 (concerning UK reception arrangements) and 3.5 and 4.5 (concerning evacuations and the identification of medical needs). Plans are now in place to ensure this happens for those who need medical support on arrival in the UK and where possible medical staff are encouraged to communicate by phone regarding the care of more seriously ill casualties.

5.10 An opportunity was lost to collect complete lists of those directly exposed to the disaster at their point of return to the UK. Arrangements need to be in place to capture contact details for returnees at incoming ports or airports, as a basis for subsequent aftercare.

We accept this recommendation.

Improved, co-ordinated planning for reception at ports of entry should enable agencies to capture contact details as a basis for subsequent communication. Future guidance will contain advice concerning how best to ensure people give their contact details to agencies upon their arrival back in the UK.

c) Supporting friends and family not in the affected area

5.11 We recognise that the FCO and police have acted to increase the capacity of the UK contact line to deal better with major crises. The UK contact line now has a filtering facility which provides the opportunity to redirect lower priority calls, such as people seeking travel information, away from the vital missing persons function. Operating this effectively will be important.

The FCO has implemented this recommendation. Significant advances over the past two years mean that the UK Agencies are now confident in our ability to manage call handling on a large scale following a disaster overseas involving British citizens.

When a call from a member of the public is held in a queue (due to the large volume of calls), he/she will hear a recorded message providing the Travel Advice information line phone number in order to filter out any general enquiries that are not about affected/missing persons. This should reduce the number of non-urgent calls and reduce waiting times for those who need to report their relatives as affected/missing. Our responses in 3.6 also address this issue.

5.12 The missing persons' line should be consistently referred to for its specific purpose to reduce the level of misdirected calls. The media have an important role in not describing it as a general 'helpline'.

We are in agreement with this recommendation; UK Agencies are addressing this in a number of ways.

The FCO number given to the public through the media is for registering affected persons, and is never given as a "helpline". The FCO has sought co-operation from the media not to misrepresent the number, particularly TV channels who have in the past used the words "FCO helpline" on their straplines. The FCO will also be working with the Media Emergency Forum at the Cabinet Office to reinforce this message. ACPO acknowledges that early messages given by the police to the media will have a critical role to play.

The FCO's new LOCATE database will also have the facility to enable members of the public to register their relatives as missing/affected online via the FCO website (thereby avoiding queues if call volumes are high).

In the event of an emergency on the scale of the tsunami, and involving significant numbers of UK citizens, a "helpline" to provide practical and emotional support to callers may be set up by the DCMS working with another partner, such as the British Red Cross, as happened following the tsunami.

5.13 *The agencies should examine the feasibility of friends and families of the missing receiving on-line, password protected read-only access to the official missing persons system to help them keep up to date. This should also help reduce pressure on the telephone missing person line.*

We understand the reasoning behind this point, but express strong reservations about this specific recommendation.

UK Agencies have considered this proposal and understand why the idea might have appeal to those who at this stage are in desperate need of regular information; however, we do not agree with this recommendation. Whilst accepting that we must look at ways to speed up communication with families and provide up-to-date information, this must be carefully managed. The primary source of information to those affected in an emergency should come directly from the police FLO in the UK or Consular Officer overseas. We consider that it would be highly inappropriate and insensitive for families to be briefed on significant developments by reading a website.

5.14 *The FCO/Police should evaluate establishment of a parallel internet-based mechanism, separate from the official casualty system, to enable friends and families to register details of missing loved ones. This could also be used by those in affected areas to register that they are safe etc. There is a clear public expectation that such a facility should exist, and it would reduce confusion arising from leaving the public dependent on a range of unofficial sites of unclear status. It would also meet a vital therapeutic need in enabling friends and family to be more active participants in searching and registering.*

We have implemented this recommendation. LOCATE (see 5.1 above) will allow Consular Officers with a laptop and Internet access to register details of the affected person as soon as they receive them. Friends and families will be able to record details of missing persons online via the FCO Website (see 5.3 above).

5.15 *There needs to be an agreed process for updating families where loved ones are still missing (and a time-frame so that families know when to stop expecting any information).*

We agree with this point, and have structures in place to ensure this happens.

Lord Justice Clarke's report into the Marchioness disaster made clear that the provision of honest and as far as possible accurate information, at all times and at every stage, is an important general principle in responding to families. This is reinforced within Police Senior Identification Manager (SIM) Training and will be introduced into improved FLO training as discussed in 3.7 above.

5.16 *In the immediate aftermath of the tsunami relatives found that the UK authorities requested only DNA material. This proved insufficient to establish identity and relatives were re-approached to provide fingerprints and other evidence. The authorities should collect a diverse range of identification data at the outset, and not make the presumption that one identification method will prove to be sufficient by itself.*

We accept this important point.

This issue is covered in the Police SIM training and will also need to be introduced in national FLO training. The matter of collecting identification data is one for the SIM at the time, who, following consultation with the Coroner and the Police Senior Investigating Officer (SIO), will establish an identification strategy in response to the incident.

5.17 *Information was often not given to friends or family who were not the legal next of kin (NOK), when there was uncertainty over relationships between those bereaved or injured. Agencies should go first to the next of kin. But where possible, agencies should work to a wider definition to include those other people important to the victim.*

We accept the importance of this point, and that following the tsunami communication channels were not always sufficiently broad.

The definition of a 'family' is covered in both the ACPO Family Liaison Strategy Manual¹¹ and the DCMS/ACPO Guidance on humanitarian assistance in emergencies¹². Both documents make clear that the family and indeed the primary point of contact for agencies will vary from case to case and be influenced by a number of factors. Indeed the legal 'next of kin' may not be the closest person to the victim. Each case will be managed carefully and this aspect is currently covered in police FLO training.

d) Supporting all those affected in the longer term

5.18 Families and survivors taking part in the survey and interviews displayed high levels of symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression, although only half had obtained professional help. Use should be made of the contact details taken from all those affected (either at home or caught up in the disaster) to ensure that all those affected receive information to help recognise the symptoms of traumatic stress, anxiety and depression, and how to access support if needed.

We are implementing this recommendation.

Evidence shows that, following major emergencies, a number of those directly affected will be likely to suffer psychological distress. Anyone in this position is entitled to treatment under the National Health Service (NHS).

The tsunami and other recent emergencies, including the bombings in London on 7 July 2005, have highlighted the need for the UK Agencies to adopt a co-ordinated approach to ensure that information campaigns target those who are at risk, and inform people of how to recognise and understand common reactions to trauma.

The Department of Health is preparing material, aimed at both family doctors and the public, to ensure that targeted information can be made available in any future incident of this nature.

The need for responding agencies to provide information to those affected is covered in the ACPO/DCMS Humanitarian Assistance guidance, mentioned previously.

5.19 Knowing how to access trauma services will not be sufficient if the service is not primed. The experiences reported indicate that improved availability of such NHS services is required, and it must be recognised that many people who were not in the affected areas may also need help.

We are looking to address this recommendation.

Everyone is entitled to effective mental health treatment via the NHS, but we accept that some people experienced difficulties in accessing appropriate care. This was partly due to a lack of information for family doctors and the public (see 5.18) and partly due to pressures on appropriately skilled individuals.

There have been significant increases in the numbers of such staff over the past decade, thanks to considerable Government investment in health services, and the intention now is to develop regional networks of specialists who could respond to specific incidents. This should be in place during 2007.

5.20 Lessons can be learned from the way that the authorities provided support following the July bombings in London. For example, a leaflet was prepared to advise victims and families how best to cope with traumatic stress and providing contact details for support organisations. This is being further developed for use after any disaster.

¹¹ The ACPO Family Liaison Strategy Manual is currently being revised and will be available at www.acpo.police.uk

¹² DCMS/ACPO 'Humanitarian Assistance in Emergencies: Guidance on Establishing Humanitarian Assistance Centres', published in October 2006, is available at www.culture.gov.uk.

Our response to this recommendation is contained within our response to recommendation 6.5.

5.21 The memorial events were valued by respondents. *The main area for improvement is in the collection of a complete list of contact details and eligibility to attend, (also addressed earlier).*

We believe that we will be better placed to manage this in the future.

We are glad to learn that the memorial event was well received by a number of those affected, and acknowledge that for many people, this was the first time since the tsunami when they had been brought into contact with those who may have had similar experiences. The FCO and DCMS Agreement¹³ outlines that the FCO will pass the details of those they know to have been involved in an overseas event to the DCMS, which has a role in assisting the co-ordination of aftercare for British people affected in major emergencies, and which might also be involved in the organisation of memorial events in future. The police will also work closely with the DCMS given their likely involvement in the future, both in terms of supplying information about those who may be considered for invitation and in operational policing and security at events.

5.22 *In the case of relatives of the dead or seriously injured, FLOs (or the DCMS HAU) should interpret the term ‘family group’ in its broadest sense, collecting details of key points of contact within each family, to ensure that all relevant people are kept informed.*

We recognise the importance of this recommendation, which reinforces existing procedures.

Whilst mindful of the need to deploy limited resources effectively, our intention is always to give very careful consideration to the needs of families (we use this term in its broadest sense to include those close to the person who has died), who have suffered a tragic loss. Wherever possible and appropriate the police and DCMS Humanitarian Assistance Unit will seek to establish one primary point of contact within each family as this can often represent the most efficient and safest way of collecting and passing on information. However, where necessary and appropriate, agencies will not hesitate to communicate with more than one point of contact for each family. This may be appropriate where family groups are geographically dispersed, where the person who died had a close partner not in close contact with other relatives, or where there are circumstances within a family which are not conducive to one point of contact keeping others updated (e.g. family dispute or communication breakdown). Please refer to our response at 5.17 above.

5.23 *Effective supervision needs to be in place for FLOs in particular those working with complex extended families.*

We agree with this point.

There is already clear ACPO policy and guidance in place in this area that will be reinforced through FLO and FLC training (as previously mentioned).

¹³ The FCO/DCMS agreement is available to download at:

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1094234589922>

SECTION 4: Delivering long term support and aftercare

The long-term support and aftercare available to survivors and bereaved relatives following the tsunami was varied. We accept that a more consistent approach is needed in order to best support those affected beyond the immediate days and weeks following a disaster.

In recognition of this, the Humanitarian Assistance Unit (HAU) is now formally established within the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS). The HAU plays a role in signposting people affected in major emergencies to sources of practical advice, assistance, and emotional support. Since 2005, the HAU has developed close relationships with the FCO, Cabinet Office, ACPO, the Association for the Directors of Social Services (now the Association for the Directors of Adult Social Services and the Association for the Directors of Children's Social Services), voluntary sector partners and other agencies. As a result, there is now greater clarity concerning the respective roles and responsibilities of each agency involved in responding to an emergency overseas.

We recognise that this area requires continued priority within Government, and are pursuing a number of projects to build upon the UK's existing capability. One of the Government's priorities is to create a robust evidence base by undertaking research, learning lessons from previous emergencies, and drawing on the experiences of those affected. The NAO and Zito Trust reports are very welcome contributions to this field of knowledge. On the basis of this evidence, the UK Agencies are working in collaboration to produce and disseminate guidance to those involved in delivering a humanitarian response, to ensure planning for the future takes into account lessons from the past, and reflects the demand for longer term care and support.

There follows a detailed response to each recommendation.

a) Getting survivors out of the affected area

6.1 *DCMS should work with other agencies to ensure arrangements are in place to provide basic information explaining access to future support, including the DCMS Humanitarian Assistance Unit as a 'gateway' to aftercare, and written information about common emotional reactions to disasters. This may be most effective when placed at UK entry points (recommendation 5.10 above).*

We accept this recommendation. Future guidance to be developed will contain advice about how best to ensure people give their contact details to agencies upon their arrival back in the UK.

d) Supporting all those affected in the longer term

6.2 *The Tsunami Support Network and phone line are highly valued by respondents, as providing a sympathetic source of support and information, independent of Government. The lead Departments should have plans in place to establish comparable support networks (to be accessible via a variety of means) as quickly as possible following a major disaster.*

6.3 *Regard should be given to the good practice seen in the establishment and development of the Tsunami Support Network, particularly the way in which survivors and families acquire ownership of the Network over time.*

These recommendations will be addressed together.

We accept these recommendations, and are grateful for the feedback people have offered in relation to the Tsunami Support Network (TSN).

Since the development of the TSN, DCMS has worked closely with the British Red Cross and other UK responding agencies to produce guidance about what people's needs are following emergencies, and how these can be met by a co-ordinated and planned response. Elements of the TSN, such as the Tsunami Support Line, the facilitation of support groups, and the provision of co-ordinated information via a website, have informed the response to the bombings in London on 7 July, and will continue to be cited by responding agencies as constituting good practice.

However, the agencies are very aware that there is no one correct way to respond to an emergency and that people's needs and wishes will vary. Therefore, we advocate flexible planning by responding agencies, and the establishment of cross-agency groups chaired by Lead Departments as part of the initial response following an emergency. These should involve experts who can together take informed decisions to determine the best way to facilitate support and assistance to those affected.

6.4 Children, parents and their carers who were affected by the disaster generally reported that meeting with others affected by the disaster was beneficial. *Those organising events or support networks should ensure that provisions are made for children to take part, if they wish to.*

We agree with this recommendation, which reflects existing DCMS policy.

The needs of special groups, including children, should be considered as a priority for those involved in planning and delivering humanitarian assistance. We will continue to recommend that responses to future emergencies consider these needs, and are advised and informed by experts in this field.

6.5 *Individuals with high levels of mental health symptoms should be able to access appropriate treatment in a timely manner.*

We agree with this recommendation.

The actions relating to mental health services are progressing well in line with the implementation of the National Service Framework for Mental Health. Thanks to additional investment amounting to £1bn in real terms since 2001 and significant improvements in the mental health workforce (we now have over 50% more consultant psychiatrists, 70% more clinical psychologists and at least 20% more mental health nurses compared to 1997), we are improving access to effective treatment and care, reducing unfair variation, raising standards, and providing quicker and more convenient services. The Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme has also been established to deliver on the Government's 2005 General Election manifesto commitment to provide access to psychological therapies for those who need them.

Two demonstration sites (Newham and Doncaster) and a national network of local psychological therapy programmes have been established to produce robust evidence to substantiate the case for rolling out increases in psychological therapies services across England. This progress also relates to recommendation 5.19 as far as it concerns mental health services.

The NHS 'Screen and Treat Programme' established following the bombings in London on 7 July was a pilot programme aimed at people who may have required psychological support. An evaluation of this programme is currently being conducted. Its results will inform future development in this important field.

6.6 General Practitioners were sent information on dealing with individuals following the tsunami, and this needs to be done in future comparable events.

We accept this recommendation. Plans are now in place to allow the quick dissemination of information to GPs in the event of future emergencies, where it is considered that this is likely to lead to a better response for those affected. As we mention in our responses to 5.18, 5.19 and 6.5, we are also exploring other ways to address this issue.

6.7 When disasters involving British nationals occur overseas, UK local authorities do not have a specific statutory duty to respond. Respondents to the survey reported very little involvement with local authority services to meet their non-medical needs, and a feeling of isolation. *The DCMS HAU should discuss with local Government ways of strengthening links with local authorities to enhance local support to deal with the non-medical consequences of the disaster such as bereavement services, housing and education issues, social services etc.*

We accept this recommendation, and have undertaken significant work over the past two years to develop the UK's capability in this area.

The Government recognises that there is a need for us to enhance the UK's capability in this field, and is committed to learning from the experiences people have related to us following the tsunami.

DCMS and ACPO worked closely with Communities and Local Government, the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Association for the Directors of Social Services Adult Social Services and the Association for the Directors of Children's Social Services, to develop the Humanitarian Assistance Guidance, which addresses this point. Local arrangements for responding to emergencies are co-ordinated by Local Resilience Forums in England and Wales, and by parallel agencies in the devolved administrations. These were established as part of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, and bring together responding agencies in each area. Many LRFs and Local Authorities are making preparations to provide humanitarian assistance following emergencies, and the needs of those who have been affected by emergencies overseas will form part of their planning. Clearer understanding of data sharing issues also means that in the future, individual cases can be drawn to the attention of the relevant local services. In recognition of this potential gap whilst developments in this field are underway, the 7th July Assistance Centre – established following the 7 July bombings – is now offering support to people who have been involved in other emergencies since that date. It seeks to act as a single point of contact for people who have been affected in emergencies, and to signpost people to appropriate local services. The voluntary agencies are also looking at their role in this field, to determine exactly how best to focus resources in the most efficient way.

DCMS is currently developing a website to provide those affected by an emergency with information about the advice and assistance available to them. DCMS is working with victims groups and a range of agencies to ensure that it is appropriate and meets peoples' needs. This website will be available by the end of 2007.

6.8 The review findings indicate that those without an FLO, the vast majority of people, need someone advocating on their behalf. This is a real opportunity to address this significant gap (that without an FLO, the vast majority of people need someone advocating on their behalf). There is a particular need for agencies or groups to take responsibility for tracking and supporting people who do not have an FLO.

We accept this recommendation, and refer to our response to 6.7 above, which contains information of relevance to this point.

Whilst the role of the FLO is primarily investigative, it is clear that many people affected by the tsunami who did not have this proactive point of contact to the authorities received little follow-up information. The DCMS HAU has a role in overseeing and advising the response to an emergency, and many agencies have the potential to deliver the appropriate support for individuals. To track people requires that contact details are shared with the Lead Responding Agency – in the future, this is likely to be the FCO and ACPO, working with the DCMS HAU and its partner agencies. Our response to recommendation 5.10 and 6.1 are relevant here.

6.9 Bereaved respondents reported being inundated with administrative forms at this particularly difficult time. Hardship Funds, including those administered by the voluntary sector, need straightforward and stable criteria for eligibility if valid applications for assistance are not to be deterred.

The British Red Cross recognises that the Fund should have been established in a shorter timescale. There were a number of challenges for the organisation in what was a new venture, so in aiding its learning and policy development, an external review was carried out, seeking the views of many beneficiaries.

The conclusions reached are summarised at Annex 4.

Annex 1 – roles and responsibilities

Many departments and agencies and other organisations were involved during the response to the tsunami and in its aftermath. Further information about the response of each organisation is available via the websites referenced below.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) provides Consular support to British nationals abroad in normal times and in crisis, and led the UK's response to the tsunami. The FCO has made a number of changes since the tsunami, which are outlined in this report. Further information about the FCO is available at www.fco.gov.uk.

Department of Health

The Department of Health is responsible for the provision of health care services in England, and was responsible for providing services for those affected in the tsunami. Since the tsunami, it has looked further at access to talking therapies, and their value. This work is outlined in this report.

The Association of Chief Police Officers

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) co-ordinated the specialist police resources required to ensure an appropriate UK response. Detail about what ACPO has done since the tsunami is outlined in this report.

The Humanitarian Assistance Unit at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Since 2005, the Humanitarian Assistance Unit's (HAU) role has been to ensure that the needs of British people affected by emergencies are understood and properly considered within Government in building preparedness for and responding to emergencies, and to represent the Government and explain its policies when dealing with victims and their families. More information about the role of the Humanitarian Assistance Unit is available at [www.culture.gov.uk/what we do/humanitarian assistance](http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/humanitarian_assistance).

British Red Cross

The British Red Cross (BRC) helps people in crisis, whoever and wherever they are. Since the tsunami, it has conducted its own learning review, which has led to improved arrangements for deploying staff. Further information about the role of the Red Cross in the response to the tsunami is available at www.redcross.co.uk.

Home Office

The Home Office is responsible for leading cross-Government work on planning for managing the consequences of incidents resulting in mass fatalities. More information about the role of the Home Office is available at: <http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/responding-to-incidents/managing-consequences/dealing-with-fatalities/?version=2>.

Annex 2 – Key events and Actions following the Asian Pacific tsunami of 2004

26 December 2004:

00:58 GMT: An earthquake measuring 9.3 on the Richter scale struck in the Indian Ocean, 150 miles north-west of the Indonesian island of Sumatra.

05:30 GMT: FCO's 24 hour Response Centre staff contacted the Head of Consular Service's Crisis Group at the FCO and other senior officials and Ministers.

The British High Commission in Colombo opened an incident centre. British nationals arriving at the High Commission from the coast were all registered and given consular assistance as required. In addition, teams from the High Commission led in establishing the emergency shelter at the Bandaranaike International Conference Centre and visited Colombo hotels to carry out the registration process and provide consular services.

The British Embassy in Bangkok opened an incident centre and call centre.

08:30 GMT: FCO Emergency Response Team was operational, and an emergency telephone number for those wishing to report relatives and friends missing was advertised nationally.

09:15 GMT: The British Ambassador to Thailand travelled from Bangkok to Phuket with a team of 13 (including Ambassador) consular staff, arriving midnight.

In Bangkok, teams had been established by the evening of 26 December to cover reception of evacuees, phone handling, hospital visiting and research of government and other websites. Staffing of these teams included spouses and volunteers, including 10 provided by Standard Chartered Bank and 2 by Citibank to collate data.

The Embassy had a large presence at Bangkok airport within 3-4 hours, reflecting the need to cover different terminals (the largest presence amongst the diplomatic corps, as well as the first to arrive).

Following reopening of the airport, 3 further staff from Bangkok travelled to Phuket by special government flight, arriving 2300.

During the night of 26/27 December, members of the Phuket team travelled to hospitals, the town hall and Phuket airport.

15:00 GMT: Metropolitan Police Service took over call handling at its casualty bureau in Hendon due to the volume of calls.

1600 GMT: In common with other missions, the Vice Consul set up a reception desk in the Town Hall in Phuket. The main British Embassy office, with computers and telephone call centre was located in emergency offices provided by the Consular Correspondent, on the outskirts of town.

27 December 2004

Through its expanded incident control centre and working with the Thai authorities, the British Embassy in Bangkok organised shelter, clothing, food, medical attention, emergency travel documents and loans for British evacuees arriving back from the tsunami-affected areas. The Embassy also organised regular visits to British nationals in hospital (over 100 British nationals were in hospital in Bangkok) and sent a fleet of 4x4 vehicles provided by the Land Rover company down to Phuket and the surrounding areas. The Embassy call centre remained intensively busy, dealing with many thousands of calls per day, including a large number from the UK. Embassy staff, led by the Airline Liaison Officer, were present at the airport (international, domestic and military terminals) on a 24/7 basis, receiving British survivors and their relatives arriving from the UK.

A team was sent from Phuket to Krabi in the early hours of 27 December, and a three person team was deployed to Phang Nga.

British High Commission in Colombo sent a team by chartered helicopter to the south-western Sri Lankan resort of Galle. They immediately set about evacuating British and other foreign nationals from the area. They operated in an integrated fashion with the incident centre and provided two mobile consular teams for the south coast.

Consular officer from Colombo arrived in Maldives. He was joined there by a Military Intelligence Liaison Officer from MOD, UK on 28 December. They opened a temporary office, visited British nationals in hospital, monitored the evacuation of British nationals by air, and liaised with the local authorities and tour operators. By 30 December, all British nationals who wanted to leave the Maldives had departed.

FCO Rapid Deployment Team arrived in Sri Lanka. They arranged for the evacuation of British and other foreign nationals from Aragam Bay on the east coast and Unawatuna area on the south coast to Colombo.

The High Commission's Airline Liaison Officer spent much of the period 27-30 December at the airport helping British nationals get flights home.

9 FCO staff on standby in the region arrived in Thailand from Hong Kong, Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur and Manila.

13:00 GMT: FCO contacted Metropolitan Police Service at Heathrow who put in place a multi-agency team, including BRC, London Ambulance and CRUSE Bereavement to work with Travel Care.

28 December 2004

Staff were deployed to Phuket airport

FCO team in Phang Nga organised and accompanied one coach through the province to carry survivors to Phuket

5 more volunteers from regional posts (Hong Kong, Manila, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore) arrived in Thailand

First aid post, staffed by volunteer British doctors, was set up at the High Commission in Colombo to treat injured British nationals.

A team from the Colombo High Commission visited the emergency shelter at the Bandaranaike International Conference Centre and Colombo hotels to carry out the registration process and provide consular services.

29 December 2004

FCO deployed fresh teams to Krabi and Phang Nga provinces.

4 more volunteer staff from Hong Kong arrived in Thailand.

30 December 2004

The Family Assistance Package (FAP) was made available to the bereaved families. The details of the FAP were given to the Police for FLOs to discuss with their families. All FCO communication with the families was through the Police Family Liaison Co-ordinators to the FLOs as the single point of contact. The intention was that all families were given the same information at the same time. Details were also published on the FCO and BRC/TSN web-sites.

Where the FCO was aware of people travelling to Thailand or Sri Lanka, arrangements were made for them to be met at the airport (in Thailand, at both Bangkok and Phuket) and taken to their accommodation. The same assistance was offered on their departure.

7 FCO staff from New Delhi and Mumbai arrive in Thailand

FCO-deployed team of police forensic pathologists arrived in Thailand. The DVI process, supported by Embassy staff, continued for over a year.

FCO-deployed team of police forensic pathologists arrived in Sri Lanka. The DVI process, supported by BHC staff, continued for many months.

Colombo High Commission arranged for 48 British survivors to be carried on a Belgian aircraft from Colombo to Brussels. FCO chartered an aircraft to meet them in Brussels and bring them back to Heathrow.

1 January 2005

A plane was chartered to return survivors from Bangkok to London. The flight was advertised on TV – all cable networks carried details of the flight in a continuously played band at the bottom of the screen;

- (ii) on English language radio;
- (iii) in the 'Nation' English language newspaper;
- (iv) on our web-site; and
- (v) by SMS text message to mobile phone subscribers.

Deputy Head of the British Embassy went to the airport for the departure of the flight.

FCO funded the British Red Cross to set up a telephone support line offering advice to callers directly affected by the tsunami.

3 January 2005

A team of BRC volunteers deployed by the FCO flew to Thailand to provide professional emotional support and sign-posting.

24 January 2005

Exceptional arrangements were made for the FCO to register the death overseas and issue a certified copy of the register entry for missing British Nationals where no body has been found. This was announced in the House of Commons by then-FCO Minister Douglas Alexander.

3 March 2005

BRC set up the Tsunami Support Network initially funded by the FCO then by DCMS

Annex 3 – Central Government Emergency Response Arrangements

Background

In some instances the scale or complexity of an emergency is such that some degree of central government support or co-ordination becomes necessary. This section briefly outlines two key features of the arrangements in place at the UK level to provide this support and co-ordination in emergency response and recovery. The arrangements are described in detail in the document *Central Government Arrangements for Responding to an Emergency: Concept of Operations, Cabinet Office, March 2005*¹⁴. Although these focus more on major emergencies in the UK, they are also relevant to the response arrangements in the event of a major emergency overseas which affects UK Nationals.

Lead Government Departments (LGDs)

Where the scale or complexity of an emergency is such that some degree of government co-ordination or support becomes necessary, a designated Lead Government Department (LGD) or, where appropriate, a devolved administration, will be responsible for the overall management of the government response. In the event of a major emergency overseas which affects significant numbers of UK nationals, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is the LGD.

Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBR)

Where the nature of the emergency is such that it affects the business of a number of government departments, a collective response will be required, led by the LGD. Collective decision-making within central government is delivered through the Cabinet committee system and decision-making during emergencies follows the same pattern. But due to the unpredictable nature of emergencies, the Government maintains dedicated crisis management facilities (COBR) and supporting arrangements which are only activated in the event of a major emergency. The Prime Minister, Home Secretary or another senior Minister will normally chair key meetings involving Ministers and officials from relevant departments, as appropriate. Key external stakeholders (e.g. the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO)) may be invited to attend depending on the nature of the emergency. Meetings will cover all the strategic aspects of the response and recovery effort. Officials in COBR will identify options and propose advice on the issues on which Ministers will need to focus.

Key documents relating the Central Government response arrangements are available on the website: www.ukresilience.gov.uk

¹⁴ www.ukresilience.info/publications/conops.pdf

Annex 4 – British Red Cross hardship fund evaluation

‘The British Red Cross’¹⁵ decision to take on the responsibility to provide and distribute hardship grants for the UK tsunami survivors and bereaved was welcomed by all stakeholders. Many stakeholders interviewed as part of our research also commented favourably on the commitment of the staff, senior management and trustees of the British Red Cross in what was a challenging and unprecedented project.

The stakeholder feedback and the consultants’ assessment is that the British Red Cross also did a good job in terms of most of the key functions necessary to deliver the programme. Specifically:

- **liaising with other agencies:** government agencies especially praised the organisation’s effectiveness
- **communicating with external stakeholders:** the organisation communicated effectively and consistently with stakeholders such as the media, government and survivors
- **providing support:** the helpful approach of their case workers was mentioned a number of times, especially by beneficiaries
- **speed of response:** once the fund was set up, the organisation responded in general to applications quickly, as was appropriate for victims
- **behaving flexibly:** the system adapted to accommodate the diversity of applicants needs
- **providing aftercare:** the organisation was committed to address the needs of disaster survivors and bereaved whether through financial assistance or counselling
- **handling complaints and concerns:** where there were complaints and concerns these were handled seriously and effectively

This broadly favourable opinion is, importantly, shared by the majority of beneficiaries who were interviewed or surveyed.

There were, however, weaknesses in the operation:

- There was an **unacceptable delay** in launching the fund. This made it more difficult to deliver fair decisions with confidence some time after the impact of the disaster. Such a delay didn’t fit with British Red Cross principles.
- A gap in the appointment of a **new UK programme director** compounded this delay. This initial delay also highlighted that British Red Cross senior managers are very stretched in terms of work programme.
- The programme was **means tested**. This was intended to ensure equity. But this decision didn’t make the process more equitable. It did cause beneficiary concern and some conflict within the organisation. It led to the risk of reputation damage.
- Means testing raised **customer care issues** including unclear initial eligibility criteria, weak guidance on evidence needed and complicated decision-making. It is also not clear *how* and by *whom* the decision to means test was taken.
- The British Red Cross has **created an expectation** within government and the public that it will in future handle the victims of disasters. It doesn’t currently have the funds or the capacity to do so. It needs to clarify the scale and scope of any future role.

¹⁵ Also referred to as the ‘organisation’.

None of these weaknesses was mission critical. And all were improved over the period of the programme. But the British Red Cross would have been very challenged to deliver high quality service if the numbers impacted had been high.

The British Red Cross is aware that the project has set a precedent and this raises some important implications in terms of four key areas: principles and mandate, partnership working, policy and rights/needs, and operations. Concerns and recommendations on these can be summarised as:

Principles and mandate

- The organisation has a well-established mandate to respond to the needs of those affected by disasters, natural and man-made.
- The provision of financial hardship assistance, in the form of charitable grants to individual UK citizens, challenges the traditional interpretation of the mandate by supporting those who might be perceived as not ‘most vulnerable’.
- Some in British Red Cross thought this interpretation questioned compliance with the Federation’s principles, in particular auxiliary status to government. Their perception was that the fund was *substituting* for the government’s limited action.
- The British Red Cross does need to clarify for itself whether it feels comfortable working within a broader definition of its mandate. Assuming it does, the Trustees need to agree the principle of providing financial hardship assistance as charitable grants to UK victims of overseas natural disasters. It could agree that this is similar to the recent commitment to manage the national disaster fund for terrorist victims.
- If this is agreed the Trustees and senior managers need to develop guidelines on the decision making process for similar undertakings. These guidelines should include the governance implications of trustee roles when working on sub-committees.

The British Red Cross might then also lead the move to develop agreed and revised guidelines within the Federation on the provision of hardship assistance across counties. Recent disasters especially relating to holidaymakers make this pressing.

Partnership working

The British Red Cross undertook the programme because of government-limited action in light of explicitly stated survivors’ needs. It is clear from our interviews with government officials that they increasingly look to the organisation as an implementing partner.

The laudable British Red Cross commitment to action meant the fund was set up with no formal agreement to clarify the relative roles of government and the organisation. If this is not addressed there is indeed the long-term danger of government abdicating its role in providing services to its citizens.

The British Red Cross should establish a formal service agreement with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Humanitarian Assistance Unit for the provision of after care to UK victims of disasters. This should clarify the limit of the organisation’s responsibility including formal delegated responsibilities. This will ensure a co-ordinated response.

The British Red Cross should also agree cooperative arrangements with other expert agencies within the voluntary and private sector such as Disaster Action and Association of British Insurers where there are complementary skills and experience. Disaster Action can provide useful oversight in safeguarding beneficiaries’ interests.

The British Red Cross should identify a list of approved suppliers with appropriate skill areas and such agencies that are benefits specialists. We believe that the organisation should not develop significant in-house expertise, especially in terms of means testing unless it decides to make this the base of the support in future.

The British Red Cross should ensure that the method and approach adopted fits within the values base at the Red Cross. There is a difference, perhaps, between a conventional means tested approach based on application of the criteria once agreed and the British Red Cross responsibility to beneficiaries requiring an ‘open’ and flexible approach based on meeting emerging need.

Policy and rights/needs

The tsunami was a unique natural disaster. Sadly it is unlikely to be a one off. Events such as 9/11 and the Bali bombings have also helped create a public expectation that victims have the ‘right’ to seek financial assistance and/or compensation. These events are not distinguished in the public mind.

Current government and British Red Cross financial planning for future disasters only concerns acts of terrorism. The organisation has set a precedent with the tsunami fund and has raised expectations to provide such services in the future. If it is agreed to provide financial hardship assistance generally, policy guidelines should be prepared and published for internal and external reference and scrutiny.

The British Red Cross is very clear, as is government, that the tsunami fund and other similar funds are not compensation. Providing financial hardship assistance particularly in the form of set payments, however, can easily be misinterpreted as compensation by victims. The organisation must manage expectations of its financial assistance as charitable giving.

The British Red Cross needs policy guidelines to respond to future disasters. Such policy guidelines would include:

- the circumstances when the organisation will provide the assistance and when not
- the limit of the organisation’s responsibilities to victims
- eligibility criteria for applicants
- the levels of funding to be made available
- which funds would be used or how the funds would be raised
- the roles and responsibilities of the organisation’s staff and departments
- the organisation’s commitment to the human resources required to implement the fund
- the communications strategy to be used and how widely it should be published

The British Red Cross needs to consider how it could administer any future fund without the same scale of public donations as experienced during the tsunami or government funding. It would probably be unable to deliver any significant programme from current unrestricted funds that impacted on several hundred victims.

Operations

The Tsunami Hardship Fund was an unprecedented undertaking for the British Red Cross. Particularly challenging was the fact that the organisation managed the whole process – providing and managing the funding, as well as offering direct caseworker support.

Means testing was also tried as a new way of providing support. It was adopted to deal with several possible challenges: possibly not having enough funding to give away; a way of assessing ‘hardship’; limiting the number of grants, and a means of creating a perception of funds stewardship to mitigate complaints by donors as to the use of the funds in this way. It may have been the wrong tool to do so.

Managing a means-tested process properly is a complex task. So it can take time when speed is essential. It can also appear quite bureaucratic and ‘unfair’ to beneficiaries. The operational

aspects of any scheme should be kept as simple as possible. The British Red Cross should avoid carrying out complex assessment processes.

The British Red Cross needs to balance the priorities of a properly managed administrative process with a 'customer-care'/beneficiary-focussed ethos which fits with the organisation's values. To ensure this it should introduce a set of beneficiary care protocols. These would exist to ensure beneficiaries are treated sensitively and not subject to any unnecessary delay, inconvenience or additional trauma. An example of such standards is: "all eligible applicants should receive an immediate non-means tested core payment in the 14 days following a disaster." These standards should be published internally and externally. Failure to meet them should be treated seriously as a performance issue.

The basic eligibility standard for help should simply be those victims who were directly affected. There may be different levels of payment – a tariff – for different levels of loss – a partner, a child, a limb etc. But these are not concerned with eligibility.

There were differing internal opinions about whether the Fund should offer one lower initial sum and subsequent staged payments – possibly means-tested – or a higher one off -not means tested – payment. Staged payments *are* useful if you are not sure about the total money available or if you are unclear about the beneficiaries needs. Neither of these circumstances were the case.

On balance we think payments should not have been means tested since the sums were relatively small. However, recent experience shows that badly-managed set payments such as the compensation for July 7th victims creates beneficiary distress. It also creates the possibility of bad press for the British Red Cross.

A number of issues arose in respect of funding counselling for individuals who had been traumatised as a result of the tsunami. The British Red Cross was faced with the nationwide problem with inequality and the poor capacity of mental health system. The organisation was seen by its staff and trustees to be fast tracking access to services (the value of which was difficult to assess) by providing private practice assistance outside of NHS. In other contexts the British Red Cross focuses on facilitating access to existing services but there was limited time or scope to do this instead of providing additional support to that provided by state systems. The British Red Cross should avoid providing counselling as part of a hardship fund because it is not a hardship issue and was not awarded on the basis of hardship.



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