



Stabilisation Unit Response

2017/18 Annual Qualitative Assessment of the Stabilisation Unit

1. The Stabilisation Unit (SU) welcomes the 2017/18 Annual Qualitative Assessment (AQA) which was carried out by a team from the Overseas Development Institute between August and October 2018. The assessment reviewed performance against the three outcomes in the SU Business Plan: Policy into delivery; Strengthening International Partnerships; and Learning from Experience. The assessment also explored how the SU fits within and engages with Her Majesty's Government (HMG) conflict architecture, how it contributes to wider HMG objectives and international stabilisation activity, and how SU captures progress towards stated objectives. The review also covered aspects of the National School of Government International (NSGI)¹ which sits on the SU platform. We broadly accept the findings and recommendations of the assessment and our formal response to each recommendation is set out below.
2. Overall the findings are positive about the SU's technical expertise, its ability to build relationships and its efforts to bring together Departments and multiple objectives at a senior policy level. Internationally, the SU has been able to demonstrate influence in a number of areas including policy inputs to the development of stabilisation doctrine within the European Union (EU) and through the establishment of working groups with bilateral partners. The SU has provided a powerful and effective platform for the collation, analysis and communication of lessons learnt across HMG. The AQA assessed the quality of NSGI work in Ukraine as outstanding, with its strategic-level governance advice, independence, influence, and knowledge of civil service best practice all very highly valued.
3. The assessment strongly welcomes the SU's model of having dedicated core staff leads (described as focal points in the assessment) for its priority regions, countries and themes. Interviewees recognised the 'significant added value' of this model of engagement, which builds trusted relationships and ensures SU support and services are used in the right way. The assessment recognises that this model is effective at providing the right level of support to HMG counterparts. Crucially it ensures that the SU is effectively joined up and coordinated with policy teams.
4. The assessment also highlighted areas for us to work on. Feedback suggested there was lack of awareness across HMG regarding the SU 'offer'. HMG colleagues that have worked alongside SU were positive in their feedback but those without these experiences are often unaware of SU capabilities or how to engage effectively with SU. The assessment also highlighted that we could do more to maximise the impact of our deployable civilian experts (DCEs) through regular engagement to share analysis, lessons and advice. The assessment also recommended more systematic capture of evidence of our impact and influence.
5. The assessment did not cover the totality of SU's activity and impact in FY 2017/18 and, as the reviewers themselves note, 'it is unlikely that any single, proportional review could do so'.

¹ The NSGI was re-named to Government Partnerships International in December 2018.



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Additionally, the assessment did not examine SU's internal structures and processes, such as how we manage and deploy our civilian stabilisation group (CSG) capability. Crucially, nor did it assess actions and changes that the SU has been making during FY 18/19. Therefore, some of the assessment's recommended actions are already in place as standard practice, or already under review internally. We have made this clear in our response to the recommendations below. The focus on 2017/18 also meant that the findings did not take account of the significant changes made in early 2018 to the wider national security architecture including through the new National Security Strategy Implementation Groups and National Strategy Implementation Groups (herein "NSSIG" for ease of reference). This in turn changed our governance and gave us new opportunities for policy engagement. In our response we have explained how these changes are already addressing some of recommendations. The recommendations below have been abbreviated. Please see the published summary of the assessment for the full text of the recommendations.

Recommendation 1

6. *Implement an SU-wide communications strategy*— SU is already designing a communications strategy. This assessment recommends that the strategy should be formulated around a 'business development' approach, clearly articulating the SU product and benefits, identifying its key audiences and designing the tools and tactics appropriate to reach those audiences.

Accepted and under implementation

7. SU developed and began implementing a refreshed communications strategy in Autumn 2018, while the AQA was being conducted. This was designed to support the SU in conveying its key messages to targeted audiences and to raise awareness of the unit across the wider UK government and other national and international partners. This included establishing a Stabilisation Unit Twitter account. We are currently assessing the impact of this strategy and outlining options of what more could be achieved within existing resources.

Recommendation 2

8. *Utilise existing opportunities and SU tools more effectively*— SU should build on the positive perceptions and engagement that currently exist to further highlight its offer and visibility across HMG.

Accepted and under implementation

9. The SU now agrees and shares six-monthly workplans with the various NSSIGs that it supports. These highlight the SU offer on key priority areas and explicitly link our work to NSSIG objectives. The NSSIG workplans also summarise SU achievements in the previous period. The SU positions itself as a champion of the conflict and stabilisation aspects of the [Fusion Doctrine](#) in support of the National Security Adviser and National Security Secretariat (NSS). Our focal points engage with policy teams early in the policy process and actively promote the SU brand amongst HMG stakeholders. Our communications strategy and our lessons strategy will also enhance the visibility of the SU's wider work. This includes greater use of social media.

Recommendation 3

10. *Empower SU to engage more effectively and consistently across HMG*— As well as the recommendations above regarding activity within SU, wider HMG stakeholders should be active in signposting SU support.



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Accepted and under implementation

11. The SU, along with the NSS and National Security Council (NSC) departments, champion the Chilcot recommendations and principles which are applied through NSC strategies and NSSIG plans. The SU provides an important challenge function based on Chilcot principles and on its understanding of latest lessons and best practice. For example, at the request of the Deputy National Security Adviser the SU is providing challenge through application of its recent [Elite Bargains and Political Deals](#) to NSSIG priority countries. The SU is working with the National Security Secretariat and NSC Departments to establish whether processes need to change further to ensure that SU advice is always sought and taken into account for relevant countries and issues.

Recommendation 4

12. *Position SU thought leadership around Fusion Doctrine*— SU is well-placed to add real value to the emerging Fusion Doctrine at NSSIG and delivery levels. SU should position itself as a ‘champion’ of the Fusion Doctrine, as it has for the Integrated Approach.

Accepted and under implementation

13. The SU champions the Fusion Doctrine and provides strong thought leadership on its conflict and stabilisation aspects, promoting integrated joined up analyses and supporting implementation. The SU’s input to senior level policy making has significantly increased with the advent of the NSSIGs which the SU attends where relevant. The SU Director also attends meetings of the NSC(O) where fragile and conflict affected states are discussed.

Recommendation 5

14. *Expand the use and utility of Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS)*— The JACS methodology and outputs are both recognised within HMG and amongst international partners as useful. The following should be considered:
 - SU liaison to NSSIG SROs should actively encourage the use of JACS at NSSIG level;
 - Where appropriate, JACS should be shared with international partners, multilateral organisations and Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) implementers (as in the case of Iraq); and
 - Gender Sensitivity and Conflict Sensitivity guidance should be integrated into JACS methodology as part of SU’s work on gender mainstreaming across HMG.

Accepted and under implementation

15. SU’s contributions to NSSIG meetings and liaison with NSSIG Senior Responsible Owners (SROs) actively encourages the commissioning, updating and use of JACS. In our training and engagement with posts on JACS we are now encouraging a version of the JACS reports to be issued at “official” level – such as in Libya where the SU drafted the “official version” in late 2018 – so that they can be shared more widely with partners and local staff. An SU working group keeps the [JACS guidance](#) and methodology up to date and reflecting best practice.
16. The SU is currently producing guidance on Integrating Gender into Conflict Analysis which includes a focus on how to integrate gender at different stages of the JACS process. We have also initiated enhanced sessions on conflict and gender sensitivity into our Conflict and Stabilisation training, and this stresses the importance of incorporating them into JACS.

Recommendation 6

17. *Develop a more structured approach to the existing system of focal points*— SU should consolidate examples of best practice and protocol from the regional focal points model. This should include the design of a clear Terms of Reference and ‘ways of working’ for SU staff acting as focal points.



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Accepted and under implementation

18. The SU has developed a more structured approach to its system of focal points, including creating focal points for each of the transnational threats NSSIGs that it works closely with. We have committed to developing detailed terms of reference for our 'focal point' model, drawing on and expanding best practice to ensure consistent engagement with our stakeholders. We also develop workplans with the NSSIGs we support which are agreed based on consistent dialogue with stakeholders. The workplans set out clear ways of working and ensure we are supporting opportunities to bring HMG policy and programming together.

Recommendation 7

19. *Fully exploit the potential of deployed expertise*—Deployable expertise is very well-received and seen as a real value-add of SU. However more could be done to maximise their impact in support of SU objectives. SU should engage regularly with long term Deployable Civilian Experts (DCEs), secondees and deployees more effectively, particularly with regards to lessons work and promoting SU thought leadership on conflict and stabilisation.

Accepted and under implementation

20. We welcome the positive feedback regarding our Civilian Stabilisation Group (CSG) capability. We convene regular induction and learning events for DCEs to share lessons and latest thinking on stabilisation issues.
21. SU DCEs are also integrated into SU lesson learning mechanisms through the deployee briefing process, where lessons and relevant information is shared prior to deployment and captures lessons from deployees when they return. The revised SU Lessons Team strategy aims to further strengthen our lessons learning engagement with DCEs.

Recommendation 8

22. *Dedicate more resources to work on Strengthening International Partnerships and work with other HMG Departments to maximise SU potential under this workstream.*

Partially Accepted

23. The SU does not currently have the resources to dedicate more staff specifically to international engagement. However, the SU is strengthening its international partnerships with existing resources while reassessing the division of labour within SU to offer a more joined up approach to international engagement. The SU has recently created bilateral stabilisation working groups with Germany and France, and are discussing the establishment of a working group with the US. SU advisers and senior managers are encouraged to consider international engagement more strongly as part of their everyday work and are taking opportunities to influence international partners on specific countries and issues.

Recommendation 9

24. *Further develop SU lessons, analysis and thought leadership* – The products developed by the SU Lessons Team have demonstrated reach and use. This could be expanded further with better understanding across HMG, communications and use on current issues.

Accepted and under implementation

25. The SU Lessons Team conducted a review of its role, products and services in 2018 and has developed a revised SU Lessons Strategy. This sets out a clear role for the SU Lessons Team in developing a body of well-managed and up-to-date knowledge on good practice in conflict responses in specific thematic areas (e.g. security and justice). This will be achieved through



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leveraging x-HMG and external knowledge, enabling us to be at the cutting edge of thinking about conflict responses and develop further as a centre of thought leadership. The Lessons Team will develop its communications and learning strategies in coordination with the development of the wider SU communications strategy. We also communicate and encourage use of our lessons work through active engagement with posts, for example through the recent application of our Elite Bargains and Political Deals research to Mali and Libya.

Recommendation 10

26. *Expand the SU training offer*— SU courses are widely respected and sought after and the SU should consider expanding delivery of its courses. This appetite should be acknowledged and exploited. They are key for expanding the SU network as well as educating HMG on delivering better impact.

Partially accepted

27. We welcome the positive feedback on our learning offer and there continues to be high demand for SU courses from NSC Departments and the CSSF network. Many courses are over-subscribed. Courses are well attended by civil servants, serving military and police officers. However, the SU does not have the resources to expand the number of training courses we deliver. The SU is reviewing its current learning offer to ensure that it is as efficient and effective as possible in meeting the evolving demands from HMG and will adjust as needed.

Recommendation 11

28. *Provide continued SU support to Joint Services Command and Staff College (JSCSC)*— SU's consistent support to JSCSC is valued, and this work not only educates but also influences Ministry of Defence (and bilateral partners).

Accepted and implemented

29. The SU will continue to provide thought leadership and practical support to strengthen the way the UK military and civilian government departments operate together to achieve UK strategic objectives. SU will continue to work at JSCSC, and support UK and international military exercises.

Recommendation 12

30. *Further develop robust Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning systems to better capture evidence of SU's contribution to HMG policy and practice*

Accepted and under implementation

31. The SU is actively taking this recommendation forward and has built on the findings of the assessment to develop a straightforward and proportionate approach to capturing evidence of SU impact. This is based on a clear articulation of the type of contribution and impact the SU aims to achieve and builds on the tools helpfully outlined in the assessment. This includes piloting elements of the Political Access and Influence methodology to capture our impact on HMG policy and practice.