

# Consular Strategy 2013–16: progress after one year

The FCO launched the [Consular Strategy 2013-16](#) in April 2013, outlining our vision for transforming UK consular services over the next three years. Below is a summary of our main achievements so far and our upcoming plans.



## Helping our most vulnerable customers

- > Between April 2013 and March 2014 our consular staff helped British nationals in over 17,000 assistance cases worldwide (including arrests, hospitalisations, deaths, rapes and sexual assaults).
- > We have introduced new tools to empower our frontline staff to focus more on our most vulnerable customers. Consular officers worldwide now offer a more tailored service, based on customer's individual circumstances and local conditions.
- > We have updated our assistance policies for helping vulnerable British nationals, including those with mental health problems, victims of rape and sexual abuse, children and young people and victims of forced marriage.
- > We have updated our policies on financial assistance, so that we can more easily facilitate financial support to British nationals in exceptional circumstances where all other channels of support have been exhausted.

## Working with partners to provide customers with more specialised services

- > We have developed a number of new partnerships to help broaden the range of specialist support services that we can provide to our customers. This includes a new partnership with mental health charity MIND, and increased support networks at UK airports.

We have also strengthened our existing partnerships with Victim Support and Missing Abroad.

## Delivering services differently

- > We have established three new customer contact centres to provide a more immediate and consistent response to our customers' first-time telephone enquiries, wherever they are calling from.
- > Staff in contact centres respond to over 30,000 calls from customers per month, resolving around 80% of queries immediately, whilst escalating urgent or serious cases to specialist consular officers.
- > We continued to provide a 24/7 emergency response telephone service to British nationals in distress.
- > We have been running pilots in selected countries in Europe and the Americas with trusted third parties to explore how to make it easier and quicker for our customers in remote areas to receive emergency travel documents (ETDs).

## Delivering services digitally

- > We have made information on all our consular services available on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk), including the [FCO travel advice](#), ensuring the information we provide is clear, accessible, consistent and accurate.

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- > We are standardising online information on local service providers – such as lawyers, medical facilities, translators/ interpreters and funeral directors – in all countries.
- > We have significantly increased our use of social media, responding to travel advice and assistance queries from customers on Twitter, with over 53,000 followers [@FCOtravel](#).

### Getting a passport overseas

- > In March 2014, we completed the full transfer of all responsibility for passport applications, decisions and document issuance to Her Majesty's Passport Office (HMPO), who now offer an [online passport application service](#) to five million British nationals overseas.
- > HMPO has reduced the cost of replacing or renewing passports for British nationals overseas by 35% (from April 2014) as a result of efficiencies in completing the transition.

### Helping customers prepare for travelling and living overseas

- > We continued our [Know Before You Go](#) campaign to help our customers prepare for travelling and living abroad, working with over 300 industry partners, including travel agents, airlines and insurers.
- > We undertook successful campaigns on issues such as alcohol, insurance, drugs and detentions. During the first six months of 2013-14, our campaigns generated more than 900 editorial media articles and over 60,000 mentions on social media.
- > Our posts overseas have undertaken local and regional activities to support this work. For example, a recent campaign by our posts in Europe, in partnership with Eurotunnel, advised British nationals how to stay safe when driving abroad.

### Crisis preparation and helping customers caught up in crises

- > We successfully deployed the [Crisis Hub](#), the FCO's new crisis IT system, as part of our recent crisis responses, including in Ukraine, South Sudan and the Philippines (Typhoon Haiyan). Our crisis teams around the world had access to the same real-time information on British nationals needing our help.
- > We conducted a series of planned crisis exercises to test our crisis preparedness, including for major sporting events, such as the Winter Olympics in Russia and the FIFA World Cup in Brazil.
- > We have broadened and deepened our engagement with external partners to help improve our crisis preparation and share best practice, focussing on travel industry bodies and organisations that employ large numbers of British nationals in fragile areas, including energy companies.

### Streamlining and simplifying documentary and notarial services

- > We have streamlined and simplified our documentary and notarial services, working with host Governments to reduce bureaucracy, including for British nationals getting married overseas.
- > We have stopped providing some services where the private sector offers comparable and trusted alternatives. These changes are enabling front-line consular officers to spend more time helping customers who need our help the most.

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### Listening to our customers and responding to their needs

- > We have reviewed and changed our processes for managing [customer complaints](#), to ensure we respond to all customer feedback appropriately and consistently.
- > We have launched a new customer online survey on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk), so that customers have an accessible online channel for providing feedback on our transactional services.
- > We conducted a pilot in European countries to gather qualitative customer feedback on the services we provided to British nationals involved in serious assistance cases, including deaths and hospitalisations, resulting in changes to our advice and support.

### Supporting and developing our staff

- > We have invested in staff learning and development as part of our commitment to ensure that our staff have the right skills, opportunities, support and working environment to implement the changes to our services, and continue to deliver high-quality services to our customers.

### Our priorities in 2014–15

- > We will continue to review and update our assistance policies to ensure our frontline staff have the best tools to provide high-quality and tailored services to our most vulnerable customers.
- > We will deliver more services digitally. Customers will soon be able to use online payments for receiving our chargeable services, including birth and death registrations and emergency travel documents. We will continue our innovative use of social media to respond to customer enquiries.
- > We will complete our preparations for the FIFA World Cup in Brazil, ensuring British nationals travelling to Brazil receive our advice for staying safe, and that we have structures in place to support British nationals in the event of a major incident.
- > We will continue to prepare for and manage crisis situations effectively, carrying out a lessons learned process after each crisis with the aim of continuous improvement of our performance and procedures.
- > We will explore to what extent our contact centres can provide a wider range of services in a more efficient, customer-focussed way.
- > We will repatriate birth and death registrations from the overseas network, by establishing a centralised unit in London that will provide a more secure and consistent service for customers.
- > We will conduct a review of our consular network in London and overseas – to ensure we have the right people in the right places across our network, and ensure we are making the most efficient use of our resources.