

# Consular Strategy 2013–16: progress during year three



In 2013 the Foreign & Commonwealth (FCO) launched the [Consular Strategy 2013-16](#) which explained how we would provide a high quality, modern, cost effective and efficient service to British people overseas. Below is a summary of our main achievements during the third, and final, year of the strategy.

## Helping customers most in need

- > Between April 2015 and March 2016 our staff provided assistance to 18,179 new cases involving British nationals<sup>1</sup> and over 51,000 new cases during the three years of this Consular Strategy. This included supporting the families of 3,606 British nationals who had died overseas; 291 British nationals who were raped or sexual assaulted; 3,319 who were in hospital; and 5,122 who were arrested or in prison. Our staff also issued 31,000 Emergency Travel Documents (ETDs) for qualifying applicants.
- > To help our staff record and manage cases we developed a bespoke digital case management system. The system allows us to handle and monitor our cases more effectively and ensures that we are providing the appropriate level of assistance to British nationals in difficulty overseas. We have integrated our case management system with our other online services developed during the course of this strategy to increase the speed and efficiency of our service.
- > During this strategy we have focused on those people who required our support the most. In 2015-16 we looked at how we effectively respond to reports of torture and mistreatment following our commitment to the Foreign Affairs Committee, this included developing, and delivering, a two day workshop to equip our staff in high risk areas with the necessary skills to respond.

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

- > Building on our previous year's engagement with partners when we created relations with MIND, increased support networks at UK airports and strengthened partnerships with existing partners we have continued to work with partners to ensure British nationals had access to specialist support when needed. During 2015-16 we strengthened our relations with partners who we work with during crises including working closer with ABTA to help coordinate airlines and tour operators.

## Improving customers access to our services

- > During the first and second year of this strategy we opened our three Contact Centres based in Hong Kong, Malaga and Ottawa allowing our frontline consular staff more time to concentrate on assisting people most in need of our help. During 2015-16 the Contact Centres handled over 310,892 calls, resolving over 80% of these calls immediately.
- > We have continued to ensure our Contact Centres provide customers with the most appropriate service, most recently through developing a digital call management system which allows our contact centre staff to accurately record calls and respond appropriately.

<sup>1</sup> Excluding Emergency Travel Documents, lost/stolen/recovered passports and advice

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- > During this strategy we continuously promoted our responding to public enquiries on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#). By March 2016 this resulted in increasing the number of Facebook ‘likes’ to 43,873 and Twitter @FCOTravel followers to 76,944.
- > We have continued to work on ensuring that consular content is kept updated building on the work in the first year of the strategy when we moved all consular data to GOV.UK. This includes continually reviewing and updating our travel advice pages so British nationals had access to clear and timely information. Between March 2015 and April 2016 there were 43.6 million unique page views of our travel advice.
- > We expanded the number of services our customers could access digitally. This built upon our first and second year digital improvements which included the launch of our online customer appointment booking service. In 2015-16 we launched our Emergency Travel Document online application system which allows qualifying applicants to complete their application form, book an appointment and pay online. We also developed an electronic service for the legalisation of documents which will ensure that customers have access to a more convenient and efficient service.
- > During the course of this strategy we have worked closely and shared best practise with partners, industry and other government departments to ensure a coordinated response to crises and conducted planned exercises.
- > We continued our investment in the training of our staff so they were able to respond quickly and professionally to a wide range of crisis situations. We also continued to review and develop Crisis Hub, a digital system which was launched during the first year of the strategy to enable our crisis teams to access real-time information on British nationals who required our assistance, to ensure it has met our changing requirements during the course of the strategy.

### **Streamlining and simplifying documentary services**

- > Since 2013 we have committed to streamlining and simplifying documentary and notarial services through working with host governments to reduce bureaucracy and ceasing to offer services when the private sector offered a comparable and trusted alternative. During 2015-16 alone this resulted in a 26% reduction in the number of applications for notarial services, allowing our frontline consular staff more time to spend on assisting British nationals most in need of our help.

### **Crises preparation and helping British nationals affected by crisis**

- > During the course of this strategy we have responded to 36 large scale crises, nine of which took place between April 2015 and March 2016. These nine crises included locating and assisting people after the earthquake in Nepal; assisting 16,500 British travellers to return to the UK during the Sharm-el Sheikh Airport crisis; assisting British nationals and their families after the terrorists attacks in Tunisia; and coordinating a joint government department response to the terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels. After each crisis we reviewed the lessons we had learnt in order to improve our response to future crises.

### **Helping British nationals prepare for travelling and living abroad**

- > In the first and second year of the strategy we provided advice to British nationals to ensure they managed their own safety and wellbeing whilst travelling abroad through our Know Before You Go, our campaigns focused on alcohol, drugs, insurance, local laws and customs, water safety and preparations for major sporting events.
- > In 2015-16 we launched ‘Take Your Pic’ which targeted young people travelling to nine resorts in Spain, Greece, Cyprus and Bulgaria. Following the campaign we saw a 7.4% drop in new cases in these resorts. We also launched

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[‘Be Passport Aware’](#) which illustrated the importance of keeping passports and other valuables safe and the [‘Great Getaway Gamble’](#), highlighting the importance of obtaining travel insurance before travelling overseas. During these and other campaigns we worked with 376 partners.

- > Staff based in our consular offices overseas also ran local awareness-raising campaigns during the course of this strategy. In 2015-16 this included campaigns on the importance of travel insurance, safe keeping of passports and preparations for moving abroad.

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

- > In the second year of this strategy we launched our consular survey to review the service we provide. In 2015-16 we further developed and expanded the range of people we contacted for these surveys. By April 2016 overall 84% of those customers we surveyed advised they were either highly satisfied or satisfied with our service, a 5% increase from March 2015. This exceeded our target of 80% customer satisfaction rate and is above the central government average of 73%.
- > To further improve our crisis response, we surveyed British nationals whom we had assisted specifically during crises from December 2013 to May 2015. 66% of those interviewed said the FCO had met or exceeded their expectations. We have used the results of these surveys to further improve our service including through updating our crisis guidance and training.
- > Between April 2015 and March 2016 we received 1,765 compliments and 318 complaints from our customers. We are using all the feedback we receive to improve the service we provide to British nationals overseas and their families building upon our work in 2013-14 when we reviewed and changed our processes and our work with the Parliamentary Health & Services Ombudsman (PHSO) in 2014-15.

### **Supporting and developing our staff to deliver excellent customer service**

- > In 2015 we created a new digital learning and development system which centrally records the consular and crisis training our staff undertake as well as giving them access to further develop their skills through eLearning and workshops. Throughout the strategy we have continued to develop our training, guidance and support to colleagues on cases where people require our help the most including most recently cases involving hospitalisation and domestic abuse, rape and sexual abuse, forced marriage and mental health.

### **Helping British People Overseas – Consular Services 2016-2020**

- > In April 2016 we launched our new consular vision - [Helping British people overseas – Consular services 2016-2020](#). This builds on our aim to create a modern and efficient consular service. It focuses on providing professional and tailored assistance to British nationals when they are most in need of our help, including during a crisis, reducing the number of preventable incidents where possible, and clearly sets out that we expect British nationals to take responsibility for travelling, living and working overseas safely.