

Government Response to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee Report of Session 2010-12 HC 1618 on the Departmental Annual Report 2010-11

Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
by Command of Her Majesty
June 2012

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GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORT OF SESSION 2010-12 HC 1618 ON THE DEPARTMENTAL ANNUAL REPORT 2010-11

The Government welcomes the Foreign Affairs Committee's Inquiry into the FCO's Departmental Annual Report for 2010-11, published on 13 April 2012: the issues contained in the report merit full scrutiny. We welcome the detailed work the Committee has undertaken and comment on the main points of the Inquiry.

This Command Paper sets out our response to each of the Committee's conclusions and recommendations. The Committee's text is in bold and the Government's response is in plain text. Paragraph numbers refer to the Committee's report.

The Committee should note that combined answers have been given for paragraphs: 13 and 14; 44 and 45; 51 and 52; and 62 and 63.

Our Embassies and High Commissions are the essential infrastructure of our country's influence overseas and of our economic recovery. They provide an early warning system for threats to our security and to wider peace, and assist British nationals in times of crisis. They support our economy and help British businesses access markets abroad. They promote our values of democracy and political freedom across the world and help craft vital international agreements from nuclear proliferation to climate change.

The Spending Review settlement for the FCO requires a 10% real reduction in the budget. In response, we aim to make £100 million per year of administrative savings by 2014/15. We will achieve this by reshaping our workforce and restructuring our estate and corporate services. These changes are being implemented carefully and monitored closely. They will allow us to live within the necessary financial constraints and to provide the diplomatic network we need for the future.

The maintenance, extension and strengthening of our global diplomatic network is a central objective of this government and will be a priority for the use of FCO funds over the coming years. The FCO is deploying more staff to the emerging powers and fastest growing regions, upgrading existing posts and opening new ones. The strengthening of the network involves opening up to eleven new Sovereign Posts and up to seven new Consulates and British Trade Offices. The cost of this network shift will be offset partly by the savings the FCO will make as our diplomatic footprint in Iraq and Afghanistan reduces, and partly by the restructuring of the FCO's subordinate post network and the delivery of efficiencies from the largest sovereign posts in Europe. No sovereign posts will be closed for financial reasons during this Spending Round period. While we are working closely with the new European External Action Service and ensuring that talented British candidates enter it, there is not and will never be any substitute for a strong British Diplomatic Service that advances the interests of the United Kingdom.

This development of our network should be seen as a key part of the FCO's Diplomatic Excellence initiative, which places greater emphasis on helping staff to develop their skills in negotiation, analysis, difficult languages, economics and policy-making. The initiative applies to all our staff working within the FCO in the UK and at all our posts overseas.

- 1. Despite the impressive performance of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in representing the UK's interests across the globe with what is, in Governmental terms, a particularly small budget, we believe that the FCO is under-funded. This situation has been exacerbated by the Spending Review 2010. In this context, we conclude that the lack of detail provided by the FCO and the BBC World Service as to exactly how the spending reductions target set by SR2010 will be met is disappointing. While there is no doubt that meeting the targets set by the Spending Review will be challenging and will require much planning and forethought, it is equally disappointing that the FCO has not yet planned how a reduction of £40 million, or over one-third, of its programme spending will be achieved. (Paragraph 13)
- 2. Given the lack of detailed plans available for scrutiny we do not at this time pass further comment on the overall strategy pursued by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the BBC World Service in meeting its budget reductions, except to reiterate our earlier conclusion that SR2010 may turn out to have had a very damaging effect on the Department's ability to promote and safeguard UK interests overseas. We would expect information on how the FCO and the BBC World Service plans to reduce its spending throughout the Spending Review including information on which services or programmes are to be curtailed to be made available to us in response to this Report. We further recommend that both bodies continue their current welcome practice of writing to us in advance of major announcements and changes to their respective organisations. (Paragraph 14)

Whilst the Government agrees with the Committee that the Spending Review settlement will be challenging for the FCO, it does not believe that it will have a damaging effect on the FCO's ability to promote and safeguard UK interests overseas. The Foreign Secretary regards the settlement as tough but fair, and is confident that it will allow the Government to deliver an effective foreign policy.

The Government agrees with the Committee that careful planning will be required if the FCO is to maintain its front line diplomatic activities and live within its settlement. That is why the FCO has drawn up a programme to reduce its administration costs by £100m per year from 2014-15. The FCO will reshape its workforce (including by reducing the number of junior staff being posted overseas), restructure its estate (by reducing the costs of office and residential accommodation) and restructure its corporate services (by consolidating finance, HR and purchasing functions into country or regional hubs and replacing UK-based staff with local staff where it is cost-effective to do so). One year in, the FCO is on target to deliver these planned savings by the end of the SR period. In addition, the FCO's IT costs will fall over this period and it will not have to pay the costs associated with work, such as the administration of passport services overseas, that it will no longer be carrying out. The FCO has also drawn up plans to increase asset sales in

response to the halving of its capital allocation to £100m per annum. The objective of all these changes is to equip the FCO to deliver first class foreign policy and diplomacy for the UK in the years ahead, and to achieve the highest possible performance with our resources and modernised working practices.

The FCO believes that, to live within its SR10 settlement, it may also be necessary to reduce spending on its Strategic Programmes. At present it allocates around £140m per annum to these Programmes. The Foreign Secretary has announced that although spending may have to fall over the course of the SR10 period, it will remain above £100m. The FCO will continue to seek efficiencies elsewhere to minimise the extent of these reductions. At this early stage the FCO wants to avoid making firm plans to make cuts that, in the event, may not prove necessary. But we are actively considering the options, including through a horizontal review of all eleven Programmes to inform decisions on future allocations. The FCO will inform the Committee as soon as decisions are taken.

The FCO will continue its practice of providing information to the Committee on management issues on a quarterly basis. This will cover progress made in delivering the FCO's programme of efficiency savings and its plans regarding Programme work.

The BBC World Service has operational, managerial and editorial independence. It is therefore for the World Service to provide their detailed plans of how they will find the savings necessary to meet their new budget.

3. The "Network Shift" represents a substantial change in the FCO's global footprint. The recalibration of FCO posts towards growing regional powers and expanding economies is a welcome move, but we regret that this change comes at the expense of, rather than being supplementary to, posts elsewhere. We note that the FCO intends the Network Shift to be resource neutral and that it should not impact on the Department's financial performance in this, or future, years. (Paragraph 20)

The Government welcomes the Committee's support for an expansion of our diplomatic presence, with a particular focus on the rapidly growing economies. We can assure the Committee that this will not impact negatively on our diplomatic activities elsewhere.

To exploit new opportunities, the FCO is deploying more staff to the fastest growing regions, upgrading existing posts and opening new ones. The strengthening of the network involves opening up to eleven new Sovereign Posts (including embassies in South Sudan, Cote d'Ivoire, Kyrgyzstan, El Salvador, Somalia, Madagascar, Liberia and Laos and a British Interests Office in Naypyitaw, Burma), up to seven new Consulates and British Trade Offices and two new Deputy High Commissions in India in Hyderabad and Chandigarh. By 2015 the FCO will have deployed up to 300 extra staff in more than 20 countries.

The Government can assure the Committee that no sovereign posts will be closed for financial reasons during this Spending Round period and that the strengthening of the FCO's diplomatic network is a central objective. The cost of this network shift will be

offset partly by the savings the FCO will make in our diplomatic footprint in Iraq and Afghanistan, where security costs are considerable, and partly by the restructuring of the FCO's subordinate post network and the delivery of efficiencies from the largest sovereign posts in Europe. The FCO is improving its consular delivery model and no longer needs large established Consulate offices in, for example, Florence and Venice, where the bulk of routine consular services are now being delivered by consular hubs in Rome and Milan. Additional new hubs have also been created around Paris, Madrid and for the Nordic / Baltic Network. The net budgetary impact of this network shift by the end of this Spending Round period will be neutral.

4. We conclude that the FCO's internal target of achieving £60 million of assets sales per year, and reinvesting this sum back into the overseas network, must be considered extremely optimistic; for this target to be reached, the FCO will need to sell, every year of the spending review period, properties with a total value three times the total value of those properties sold in 2009-10. We believe that the FCO will not be able to reach this target without inflicting serious damage on its overseas network. We will monitor developments in this area closely and we therefore recommend that the FCO henceforth provide regular updates of progress towards meeting the Department's internal sales and reinvestment target. (Paragraph 26)

The Government accepts that the sale of £240m of assets over four years is challenging but believes this is realistic and can be achieved without inflicting serious damage on our overseas network.

As the Committee notes, asset sales have historically been lower than £60 million per annum. In 2011/12, the FCO sold just over £26 million, which proved sufficient to allow it to fund its capital expenditure plans that year. Over the remaining three years of the SR period the FCO will continue to seek to match asset sales to the needs of its capital investment programme.

The FCO's Operations Committee oversees monthly progress on estates management, including asset recycling. The FCO has also set up a governance board, comprising property specialists from the FCO's Estates teams together with representatives of geographical Directorates, to provide oversight of the asset recycling and capital investment programme, ensuring that we have a flexible estate that is able to deliver the Government's objectives overseas. The FCO will continue to provide an annex to its quarterly letter to the Committee detailing actual asset sales, and would be happy to provide a narrative on progress.

5. We further conclude that recently introduced Treasury rules mean that the FCO clearly has incentives to sell property early in the financial year and invest it straight afterwards regardless of market conditions, in order to get "the money out of the door" rather than having to return funds to the Treasury. We do not believe that it will be possible for the FCO to ensure value for money for the taxpayer under such conditions, and there must be a strong case for greater flexibility in the application of

these rules. We recommend that the Government change the Treasury's rules in this instance and allow the FCO to carry forward proceeds from asset sales from one year to the next within the Spending Review period giving the FCO more time to reinvest the proceeds in new assets. (Paragraph 27)

The Government does not believe the current rules need to be changed. The current rules already give the FCO, as with all other Departments, considerable flexibility over the retention of income from asset sales. In any one year the FCO may retain up to £100 million in receipts from asset disposals. Departments also have some flexibility to carry forward that income from one year to the next. Through Budget Exchange, the FCO can carry forward 4% of its Capital Expenditure and, in certain circumstances, up to £30m per annum of its Total Departmental Expenditure Limit. These limits are necessary to ensure that the Government can achieve its fiscal consolidation plans, which remains the Government's top priority.

6. We have long believed that, if we are adequately to scrutinise the FCO's performance in managing its overseas properties, we need to be told in advance of the Department's plans. The agreement of the FCO to inform us of properties which it plans to sell, rather than just those that have been sold, on a quarterly basis is welcome. However, our conclusion in last year's Report that the FCO's internal sales target "may create an unwelcome incentive to sell historic or prestigious buildings" has been substantiated by the refusal of FCO officials to rule out unequivocally the sale of iconic or nationally important overseas posts in the life of this Parliament to finance new capital investment. We recommend that, in its response to this report, the FCO rule out the sale of any iconic or nationally important property in the lifetime of this Parliament. Alternatively, if the FCO does intend to sell such buildings in the life of this Parliament, we recommend that the FCO highlights any iconic or nationally important properties when it fulfils its commitment to provide the Committee with a list of properties it plans to sell. (Paragraph 32)

As the Committee has noted, the FCO has already agreed to send it information on potential future estate sales. At present the FCO has no plans in place to sell iconic or nationally important assets. The Foreign Secretary has indicated that he favours retention of such buildings. He would consider strong business cases for such sales but his starting point is that, individually and collectively, these buildings are an essential element of our reach and influence overseas. The FCO will inform the Committee of any future plans to sell such assets. The Government's overall aim is an overseas estate which is secure and supports the FCO's 21st century front line priorities, and which represents good value for money for the taxpayer. We have no intention to sell iconic or historical buildings which are suited to our needs and work well for the UK.

7. The "Diplomatic Excellence" programme, and the consequent emphasis on increased skills for UK diplomats, is welcome. However, we question whether it will be able to reverse the long-term trend for the FCO to emphasise "management" over "traditional" diplomatic skills. We recommend that the FCO view the "Diplomatic

Excellence" programme as the start of a process which will ultimately lead to a reprioritisation of diplomatic skills within the FCO; such a process may eventually require a change in promotion criteria. (Paragraph 37)

The Government partly agrees with the Committee's recommendation. The Government believes that core diplomatic skills, which have been the focus of recent investment through "Diplomatic Excellence", need to go hand-in-hand with the management and leadership skills needed to run the FCO as an effective organisation, and to achieve high performance with reduced resources. These skills include high standards of management and leadership; programme management; analytical and delivery skills; and other fundamental skills such as finance and IT. The investment in, for example, hard languages, economics skills and regional expertise require a fully professional organisation for maximum impact.

The Government agrees that "Diplomatic Excellence" needs to be a long-term process, leading to a permanent strengthening of diplomatic capability. Current FCO promotion competitions are designed to test the ability of staff to perform in a wide range of roles in the next grade. Pass rates within certain specialist cadres also differ to ensure that the FCO can continue to promote the right officers with specific skills within their own area of expertise. In line with Diplomatic Excellence, the FCO also launched a Talent and Performance Management Review in May 2012. This review will be looking more closely at how we can ensure that necessary considerations on skills and expertise are factored into overall appointments, performance management and promotion processes.

8. We acknowledge the Foreign Secretary's commitment that the EEAS will not be a substitute for UK delegations overseas. However, the EEAS will impact on the FCO's capacity to promote and safeguard the UK's interests overseas. A recruitment freeze on the FCO throughout the Spending Review period will see a reduction in FCO headcount; at the same time the FCO aims to ensure that UK diplomats are working within the EEAS. The establishment of the EEAS will therefore place further strain on the FCO's resources. We recommend that, in response to this Report, the FCO sets out the number of UK-based staff it hopes will enter the EEAS and how this cohort of talented UK staff based in the EEAS will impact on the FCO's ability to conduct foreign policy. We further recommend that in its response to this Report, the FCO provides an assessment as to whether to date the establishing of the EEAS has been a help or a hindrance to the FCO in promoting and safeguarding the UK's interests. (Paragraph 40)

The Government notes the Committee's concerns about the impact of the EEAS on the FCO's resources and its ability to conduct foreign policy as well as on its wider foreign policy impact.

UK nationals are under-represented in the EU institutions. We have 12.3% of the EU population but only 4.3% of Commission staff. The EEAS has inherited that imbalance as staff have transferred into it from the Commission and Council Secretariat. The Government wants British officials to be represented in all EU institutions – including the

EEAS – in accordance with the size of the UK's population. The EEAS target is for one third of jobs to be filled by national diplomats from Member States on secondment. There are currently 11 FCO staff working in the EEAS (in addition to other British nationals working in the institutions). This is rising and we have emphasised the need to increase this further. We are working at home to promote the EEAS as a career option for talented UK officials, so we can ensure that the UK participates fully both in Brussels and in the work of delegations abroad.

When staff return to the FCO from secondment, they will bring back new skills and experience they have developed in the EEAS. The FCO is working to ensure that EEAS secondments can be appropriately accommodated within the framework of its Strategic Workforce Plan. Seconding FCO staff to the EEAS will continue to have implications for FCO staff resources, but we consider this investment worthwhile in terms of both FCO corporate expertise and our policy interest in the EEAS being better able to deliver on UK security and prosperity.

To complement our national diplomacy, the Government believes that the Member States of the EU should pursue common interests by making the best use of their collective weight in the world in areas where we agree to act together. For example, by ensuring EU-wide levers of influence, such as aid instruments, trade access and sanctions are made to reflect the foreign policy agreements reached by consensus in the Foreign Affairs Council. The EEAS is a new organisation, and has its faults but in the past year we have seen it perform well in the following areas:

<u>Iran</u>, where the EU recently agreed the most far-reaching sanctions ever imposed on any country, with the EEAS working closely and efficiently with Member States; the <u>Middle East Peace Process</u>, where the High Representative's role in unblocking the potential stand-off at the UN last September underlined the EU's increasingly important diplomatic role; the <u>Arab Spring</u>, where far-reaching work to revise the European Neighbourhood Policy is now starting to have an impact through structures like the <u>EU/Tunisia Taskforce</u>; the <u>Horn of Africa</u>, where the EU reacted smartly to the creation of <u>South Sudan</u>, including the creation of a new EU Delegation in Juba, and where we are also stepping up our collective response to the challenges posed by <u>Somalia</u>; and the <u>Western Balkans</u>, where the EU-facilitated dialogue between <u>Serbia and Kosovo</u> has played a vital role in bringing both countries closer to peaceful coexistence and EU membership.

But we are clear the EEAS will never be a replacement for national diplomacy, and we will continue to be vigilant about any efforts to expand either its competence or its budget.

9. We conclude that the decision to reduce the number of overseas postings for UK-based FCO staff is an error. We believe that our conclusion last year that the spending reductions demanded by the SR2010 could "have a serious effect in terms of the UK's relations with other countries, out of all proportion to the amounts of money involved" is borne out by this move. This decision, driven by the desire to save the relatively small sum of £30 million per annum, highlights the strain that successive spending reductions have placed on the FCO's operations. (Paragraph 44)

10. Aside from the lost opportunities for junior UK-based staff and the consequent and acknowledged harm to staff morale, we conclude this decision could also reduce the ability of the FCO to react to crises overseas. Events of the past year have shown how vital it is that the FCO can respond quickly to developing crises with a cadre of trained staff with experience of the relevant country and region. That the FCO is voluntarily choosing to reduce this resource is a highly questionable decision; we recommend that the Government find the relatively small sums needed to reintroduce overseas postings for A and B Band staff in order to ensure that the FCO possesses the skills and experience to respond to developing crises overseas. (Paragraph 45)

The Government notes the Committee's concern around the reduction in the number of overseas postings for UK-based FCO staff in Bands A and B. The annual saving which this will deliver by the end of the SR2010 period is significant and will help ensure that the FCO can continue to broaden and strengthen its frontline diplomatic activity, despite the increasing constraints on its budget.

This was a difficult decision, which the FCO Management Board took only after careful consideration. It reflects changes that were already happening as a result of new ways of working in our network, as well as our planning for future workforce needs. The FCO accepts that this policy changes the nature of the career that many officers in these grades had come to know or expect. By using new technology and modernising our working practices the FCO will no longer require UK-based officers in the two most Junior Bands (A and B) in the majority of its overseas posts.

The Committee rightly notes the important role that Band A and B staff have played in responding to crises, particularly throughout 2011. They will continue to form part of the FCO's robust crisis response plans, but these do not depend upon these officers being permanently posted overseas. For example, Band A and B officers are often members of FCO Rapid Deployment Teams.

The FCO is committed to developing knowledge and expertise across its workforce. This forms an integral part of Diplomatic Excellence and, as the Committee has noted, will involve significant additional investment in language training. The FCO does not believe that the reduction in postings at Bands A and B will undermine this.

The Government does, however, share the Committee's concern about the morale of the officers affected and the opportunities now available to them. We value their contribution and are committed to offering interesting and rewarding careers for Band A and B officers. The FCO has therefore established the Diplomatic Skills Foundation Programme (DSFP) to offer professional development tailored to their needs, such as a new Introduction to International Policy Skills course specifically for A and B officers. It has also introduced short-term attachments (STAs) so that A and B officers can gain some overseas experience, with over 120 STAs offered to date in a wide variety of posts. Officers returning from STAs and the overseas posts involved have provided resoundingly positive feedback. We are also working with our Whitehall partners to open a range of opportunities to our staff, for example participating in the UKTI Overseas Attachments Trade Scheme and a commitment to resourcing 40% of UKBA jobs at home and overseas.

This of course needs to be balanced with current workforce pressures; but over time we hope we can do more. In London, the FCO has introduced a range of opportunities for one-year roles so that staff can gain experience from a wider variety of different areas of work earlier in their career. The FCO has increased its promotion targets to Band C, and the support available for officers wishing to seek promotion. The DSFP is also promoting a wide range of other developmental opportunities for A and B staff through tailored events, coaching and mentoring opportunities.

- 11. We have reported already to Parliament on the World Service's plans to adjust to a reduced Government grant-in-aid by reducing services. In response to our Report, the FCO allocated additional funding to the World Service in order to preserve some important services. We do not intend to expand upon our earlier Report conclusions here, except formally to welcome the additional money allocated by the FCO to the World Service in June 2011. (Paragraph 51)
- 12. In our Report earlier this year, we made a firm recommendation that a formal concordat giving the Foreign Secretary the power to stipulate a minimum level of service provision and strengthening BBC World Service representation at the highest levels of BBC governance was necessary if the World Service was to be protected from financial pressures originating elsewhere in the BBC. We are disappointed that the Government rejected our recommendation. However, we have noted Lord Patten's assurances that the more "informal" governance arrangements to be put in place can provide the level of budgetary protection the World Service needs. This places a large responsibility on the performance of the International Trustee and we seek assurances that the support shown by Lord Patten to the World Service is shared by all members of the BBC Trust. (Paragraph 52)

As the Foreign Secretary said in his speech to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the BBC World Service on 1 March, "The World Service's appetite to deliver greater impact and remain the most trusted broadcaster in the world is very impressive. And I have every faith in its ability to continue with its world-leading programming, playing an active role in shaping the way Britain and our values are perceived around the world. It will certainly have the full support of the whole government in that important work."

The Government has welcomed the appointment as International Trustee of Lord Williams, who brings a wealth of experience to the role. The Government has also noted that the first meeting of the International Services Committee of the BBC Trust, hosted by Lord Williams, has taken place. We view the establishment of the Committee as a sign of the importance that the Trust places on the BBC's international newsgathering and output.

The Government and the BBC Trust have agreed the shape of the governance arrangement once the funding of the BBC World Service transfers to the Licence Fee in 2014. This was formalised in the Amendment to the Broadcasting Agreement (Cm 8170). In addition, there will be an exchange of letters between the Foreign Secretary and the Chairman of the BBC Trust which will give more detail of this arrangement. A copy of this exchange of letters will be provided to the Committee.

The World Service Operating Licence will incorporate the objectives, priorities and targets for the World Service as agreed with the Foreign Secretary. Both we and the BBC Trust consider that the Operating Licence will enable the public and Parliament to see the proposed level of service required from, and funding available to, the World Service.

13. We plan for our evidence sessions with the Chairman of the BBC Trust and the International Trustee to become an annual arrangement. The transfer of funding responsibility to the BBC from the FCO will inevitably reduce Parliamentary oversight of the World Service by preventing the tabling of written or oral questions to Government Ministers on the performance of the BBC World Service. In this context, we welcome the assurances from Lords Patten and Williams that the transfer of funding responsibility for the BBC World Service from the FCO should not diminish this Committee's oversight of the operation of the World Service. If from our regular sessions it becomes clear that the governance arrangements are not working adequately, we reserve the right to again recommend that the more formal concordat, as we originally recommended in April 2011, be immediately drawn up and adopted. We further recommend that the Foreign Secretary do not rule out using his influence, as the man who currently holds the purse strings, to insist that Lord Williams' role be amended to give him, *ex officio*, a place on the BBC Executive Board. (Paragraph 53)

We are pleased that the Chairman of the BBC Trust and the International Trustee have agreed that they will continue to give evidence to the Committee.

We note the Committee's recommendation that the Foreign Secretary does not rule out using his influence to insist that the International Trustee should be given an *ex-officio* place on the BBC Executive Board. The Government continues to believe that the proposed World Service Operating Licences, together with the work of the BBC Trust's International Services Committee, will provide the World Service with a firm basis for it to develop and grow stronger in the future.

- 14. In last year's Report we concluded that the SR2010 financial settlement would put the British Council's budget under "great strain" and "may well trigger some fundamental rethinking of the role and work of the Council". One year later, we conclude that this is indeed the case. The planned reductions in the Council's presence in the developed world have been directly attributed to a reduction in the FCO's grant-in-aid and the wider changes announced by the British Council in response to the sharply reduced grant-in particular the much greater emphasis on commercial activity-will lead to the British Council becoming a substantially different organisation by the end of the Spending Review period. (Paragraph 62)
- 15. We stated last year that SR2010 posed a significant challenge to the British Council and we are pleased to see this challenge tackled and a plan put in place to adapt to a change in financial circumstances. However, we remain concerned that such an emphasis on commercial activity will detract from the British Council's

primary purpose to "build engagement and trust for the UK through the exchange of knowledge and ideas between people worldwide". We accept that in many ways commercialisation of the British Council is unavoidable and driven by decisions made by central Government, but nevertheless we remind the British Council that it must place its primary purpose at the core of all its activity, commercial or otherwise, and must not become predominantly an international English language school rather than a promoter of the UK's reputation, culture and influence. (Paragraph 63)

The Foreign Secretary has publicly paid credit to the work of the British Council, which gives Britain an unrivalled platform for the projection of the appeal of our culture and the sharing of our values. We are confident that the British Council maintains a balance between their work in English, Arts, and Education and Society, and that all of their activities contribute to their charitable purposes. We work closely with the British Council on international initiatives such as work around the Olympics and Paralympics, the GREAT campaign, the UK Now in China and the UK/Brasil season. Both the Government and the British Council greatly value the close relationship that we have, whilst respecting the independence which is vital for the Council to be able to fulfil its goals effectively.



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