

Consular Strategy 2013–16: progress during year two



The Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) aims to provide high quality, modern, cost effective and efficient support to British nationals abroad. The [Consular Strategy 2013-16](#) explains how we will do this. Below is a summary of the key achievements during the second year of the Strategy and our priorities for 2015–16. You can also read the [key achievements](#) during the first year of the Strategy.

Helping customers most in need

- > During April 2014–March 2015 our consular staff provided assistance in 16,752 cases involving British nationals in distress or difficulty abroad. This included supporting the families of 3,670 British nationals who had died; 4,816 who had been detained in prison; 3,250 in hospital due to injury or illness; 254 who had been the victim of rape or sexual assault; and 2,888 who needed other help including those with mental health issues.
- > We issued 37,890 emergency travel documents to British nationals who needed to travel urgently but whose passports were unavailable [lost, stolen, damaged, expired or application in process] and did not have sufficient time to apply for a replacement.
- > We improved how we identified British nationals most in need of our help and the quality of service we provided to these vulnerable groups – through new guidance and training for staff managing cases involving children and young people, victims of rape and sexual assault and those affected by mental-health issues.

- > We reviewed our network to ensure we had the most efficient structures to deliver services to British nationals who most need our help. Many of our commitments arising from the review are included in the FCO [Parliamentary Command Paper](#) in response to an inquiry by the House of Commons' Foreign Affairs Committee into the FCO's consular services.

Working with partners to provide customers with more specialised services

- > We broadened the range of specialist support services we provided to British nationals by strengthening existing partnerships with non-governmental organisations. This included Victim Support, Brake, Prisoners Abroad and the Lucie Blackman Trust and support networks at UK airports to help those returning to the UK.

Improving customers' access to our services including through digital means

- > Our consular contact centres – in Malaga, Hong Kong and Ottawa – provided prompt and efficient responses to British nationals' first-time telephone enquiries about our

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services. During April 2014–March 2015 our staff responded to 383,073 enquires. We managed 87% of these enquiries immediately and escalated 13% to frontline consular staff in-country where British nationals needed our help urgently. We provided a 24/7 London-based emergency response telephone service to British nationals in need.

- > Working with Government Digital Service (GDS) we improved the information on GOV.UK about our consular services, to ensure British nationals have access to clear, accurate and timely information. During April 2014–March 2015, 28.9 million unique users accessed [FCO travel advice](#) on GOV.UK – an increase of 21% on the previous year.
- > We increased our use of social media to respond promptly to travel advice and assistance queries from British nationals and to proactively communicate travel advice. We increased the number of our followers on [Twitter](#) to 68,200 and ‘likes’ on [Facebook](#) to 32,900.
- > We introduced a new [online consular appointments booking service](#) to make it simpler and more convenient for British nationals to access our transactional services at the majority of our embassies, high commissions and consulates abroad.

Crisis preparation and helping British nationals affected by crises

- > During April 2014–March 2015 we provided consular support to affected British nationals and their dependents in 15 major crises in a range of countries – Nepal, Philippines, Iraq, Gaza, Libya and Yemen, and Ebola-affected countries in West Africa. We provided extensive consular support to families of the victims of the MH17 air-crash in Ukraine. We worked more closely with key international

Assisting the families of British nationals murdered abroad

Sadly around 70 British nationals are murdered abroad every year. In January 2015 we established a new murder and manslaughter team in London to ensure we provided a specialised and consistent level of support to victims’ families during what can be an unimaginably distressing and confusing time. This followed a [review](#) during which we consulted bereaved families and a range of external organisations and stakeholders. The team is managing cases which are often complex and can be long running, working with our consular staff abroad to provide support to families who have unanswered questions, whether in regards to local police investigations, the judicial process in a foreign jurisdiction or the return of the belongings of a loved-one. Families of victims and partner organisations have been supportive of our improvements in this area.

partners on crisis management, including coordinating evacuations and assisted departures, and sharing best practice.

- > We further developed our crisis IT system, the Crisis Hub, to improve our response and communication with affected British nationals during crises. The Crisis Hub enables our crisis teams around the world to have access to the same real-time information on citizens needing our help and was used during all of our crisis responses during 2014–15.
- > We worked with a range of governmental and industry partners to plan for responding to a major incident affecting British nationals

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attending large-scale international events, including the FIFA World Cup in Brazil, Winter Olympics in Sochi, and the Hajj in Mecca.

Helping British nationals prepare for travelling and living abroad

- > The FCO's [Know Before You Go](#) communications campaign provided advice to British nationals on how to help stay safe when travelling or living abroad, where we worked with an expanding partner network of over 400 organisations such as tour operators, airlines and trade associations.
- > Our campaigns helped to inform British nationals about issues such as local laws and customs, the importance of travel insurance, and preparing for a move abroad. We provided bespoke advice to LGB&T travellers, those travelling with mental health issues, and football fans attending the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. From April 2014 to March 2015 we reached more than 42 million UK adults through our media and partnerships work.
- > Our consular offices abroad communicated our travel safety messages to key audiences already overseas through local and regional campaigns covering issues such as youth tourism, water safety, driving abroad and forced marriage.

Getting a passport overseas

- > During June 2014–April 2015, we supported Her Majesty's Passport Office (HMPO) by [providing additional, temporary services](#) to British nationals abroad during a period of peak demand for passports, including enhanced services for emergency travel documents and a passport extension service. During June 2014–April 2015 we issued 23,282 passport extensions.

Streamlining and simplifying documentary and notarial services

- > We further streamlined and simplified our documentary and notarial services, working with host governments to reduce bureaucracy, including for British nationals getting married abroad. We stopped providing some services where the private sector offered comparable and trusted alternatives. These changes enabled frontline consular staff to spend more time helping those most in need.

Helping British nationals on death row

In line with the UK government's longstanding policy to oppose the death penalty in all circumstances, we lobbied against the execution of British nationals around the world. In 2015 our activity helped to achieve successes in two cases involving British nationals in the USA. In the first, a citizen on death row for over ten years – who had exhausted all previous appeal avenues – had their case returned to trial court. In the second case, more than five years after their original arrest and facing a strong prosecutorial preference to seek the death penalty, we can be confident that a British national is safe from execution. In both cases, our success was due to the effective partnerships we built with the defence counsel and civil society to engage key stakeholders. We were able to use the FCO's strengths in understanding the local political environment, sensitivities around the death penalty, and building relationships with local decision-makers so that our lobbying was targeted and effective.

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- > We established a new central registration unit in the UK to process applications for [birth and death certificates](#) for British nationals abroad, providing customers with a more secure and consistent service.
- > We introduced [Same Sex Marriage services](#) at our consular offices in 24 countries.

Listening to customers and responding to their needs

- > We set an ambitious consular customer satisfaction target of 80%, compared to a central government average of 71.3%. At April 2015, 79% of consular customers interviewed rated their overall satisfaction with the service they received between 8 and 10 out of 10. We are using the evidence from our customer satisfaction surveys as the basis for continuous improvement to our services.
- > We changed the way we communicate and deliver services to specific vulnerable customer groups, including parents affected by child abduction and British nationals with mental health conditions, through our improved understanding of customer expectations and experiences.
- > We worked with the [Parliamentary & Health Services Ombudsman \(PHSO\)](#) to review and strengthen our processes for managing customer complaints and compliments, to ensure we respond to all customer feedback appropriately and consistently. During April 2014–March 2015 we received 1,338 compliments and 252 complaints from customers.

Supporting and developing our staff to deliver excellent customer service

- > In February 2015 the FCO established the [Diplomatic Academy](#), a centre of excellence to help all staff from across government working on international issues to share expertise and learn from one another. The Consular and Crisis Management Faculty now provides staff with access to a structured learning and development programme.

Our priorities for 2015–16

- > We will continue to focus on assisting British nationals most in need of our help or those most at risk.
- > We will implement all of our [commitments following the Foreign Affairs Committee's review](#) of our consular services, including the establishment of improved processes for reporting and acting upon allegations by British nationals of torture and mistreatment.
- > We will continue to improve customers' access to our services including through digital means. We will use the government's [Digital by Default](#) service standard to design new services that are easy for customers to understand and convenient to use. We will introduce online payments for the majority of our transactional services, a new online application form for emergency travel documents and a range of online legalisation services. We will ensure that customers unable to access new digital services are fully supported by our contact centres and other means.