

## THE SUCCESSFUL HEADS OF MISSION CHECKLIST

SDSR10 flagged the need to “**improve coordination of all UK work overseas under the leadership of the Head of Mission representing the UK Government as a whole**” and that HoMs should lead “**in-country coordination to maximise our overseas presence and enhance joint working**”. In their 2013 joint statement, PUSs committed to “work together with a collective purpose.” The One HMG MoU states that the “HoM represents the UK Government as a whole, and leads and coordinates HMG’s activity in-country”.

HoMs’ roles differ significantly, from leading a small post to heading up a major multilateral post like New York or Brussels. But all HoMs have demanding roles and we should be deploying our best talent into them. In essence, we need HoMs to have the necessary presence, drive and natural authority to “fill the screen” and show “grip”.

There are core skills each HoM should have:

**Leadership:** Leadership styles differ. The effectiveness of the mission depends heavily on the leadership of the HoM and s/he should set an example, both personally and professionally. By ***setting the tone, culture and vision of the team*** s/he fashions the environment in which everyone works even if they may not do much of the day to day management of the mission. This leading by example plays a central role in building morale and determining whether the team in the mission are enablers or disablers for delivering HMG objectives. The HoM should foster an inclusive working environment, promoting diversity and tackling BHD effectively if and when it arises. They should also champion L&D in support of delivering business objectives. The HoM should ensure a proper handover for their successor. Being clear and decisive on the things that really matter is vital.

**Communication:** Effective communications with their hosts, the public and their own team is at the heart of a HoM’s work. As subsets of communication, ***media, social media and language skills*** are building blocks of what help a HoM become a skilled communicator to different audiences.

**Influencing:** Similar to communications, but significantly different is how a HoM can use his or her unique position to ***build networks, gain access and form trusted relationships*** to promote UK interests for all One HMG Partners. Integrity and insight are particularly valuable commodities here.

**Political and strategic judgement:** As the person involved in all of the key calls related to the country they cover, a HoM needs excellent political judgement to ***be able to identify strategic opportunities and risks in the relationship*** and make the right judgement on policy issues, including when working with desks in London on

policy development. Getting the right balance between competing interests is often required.

**Programme Management:** the HoM does not need to be a programme or project management expert. But he/she needs to understand the key concepts and be able to provide strategic leadership, ensuring programme spend is integrated fully into policy work at post and helps deliver clearly identified policy objectives in support of wider cross-government country plans/NSC strategies. HoMs have formal financial delegated responsibility for the programmes they manage. He/she should chair the implementation board that should oversee all programme work at post.

**Corporate Oversight:** a HoM needs to ensure that post resources are managed effectively, deliver VFM and that proper controls are in place. Day-to-day work will fall to CSMs, supported by DHMs. But the HoM needs to show leadership on corporate issues, reassuring London that, as Post SAO, they have grip of vfm and taxpayers money. In line with this, the HoM should personally ensure that the Annual Consolidated Certificate of Assurance is an accurate reflection of practices at post.

**Managing London:** The profile of a post, the resources it can draw on and the support it receives across Government depend to a great deal on the HoM's ability to ***project the post successfully in London and to manage Partners Across Government's interests and activities*** in post to ensure a truly One Team approach.

**Commercial Awareness:** Almost all posts have some commercial element to their work and the HoM is the person who business identify as most able to support their activities. A ***sound understanding of the commercial environment and opportunities for UK business*** is essential for a HoM's credibility.

**Crisis Management:** Along with commercial work, consular crisis work is where the mission interacts with the UK public most directly. Getting this wrong can be devastating to a HoM's credibility. In addition to having the right structures and staff in place, ***speed of thought and an ability to prioritise*** the most important issues make the difference here.

## **Making One HMG work at post – Best Practice**

Ensuring that the mission is delivered across departmental boundaries on HMG's collective priorities is a critically important role for Heads of Mission (HoMs).

We want our HoMs to be seen by all PAGs as authoritative, adding value and ultimately responsible for the success of the whole post. HoMs need to "fill the screen" in country and with UK-based stakeholders.

How you do this will depend on your own style and the size of your post. But the following best practice, drawn from the advice of existing HoMs, may provide useful pointers:

**Be visible across the whole Embassy**, finding time to get to know staff in all sections to ensure a good understanding of their (and your) issues and concerns;

**Help PAGs achieve their objectives** - Make sure you are briefed on their issues and use your high-level meetings to forward the work of all PAGs at post. Include PAG issues and actions in your reporting. You may also need to support PAG teams in their dealings with their host department in London. When back in the UK, time spent getting to know senior PAG officials will be time well-spent. Ensure PAG Heads also represent cross HMG objectives in all their meetings;

**Involve representatives from all PAGs on policy and post management issues**— all PAGs should be represented on your Post Policy and Management Committees (or similar) to help ensure post runs smoothly;

**Other post-wide committees** will help provide a framework for ensuring efforts at post are coordinated and synergies between teams maximised. For example, an Implementation Committee should oversee all programme work at post, integrating programme spend fully into policy work and helping deliver clearly identified policy objectives in support of wider cross-government country plans/NSC strategies. Make sure you are sufficiently engaged in thinking about programme funds, which may dwarf the post budget;

**Ensure that PAGs are fully integrated into strategy and business planning.** If you do not have a formal NSC strategy, you should still have one cross Post strategy and supporting business plan which reflects shared HMG objectives and aligns the totality of resources at Post (people and programme) to shared HMG objectives. (This may be in addition to your post Country Business Plan.)

The **process of putting together the strategy and business plan** is as critical as the plan itself and it needs to reflect the totality of work at Post and be supported by joint monitoring mechanisms and an integrated risk framework. Kenya, Pakistan and Zimbabwe are some of the Posts that have piloted these approaches and are happy to share their experience and tools. Developing and evaluating your post plans collaboratively with PAGs is a key tool for establishing buy-in to a One HMG approach and establishing your role as convenor/leader;

**Consider establishing joint teams to deliver shared HMG objectives** and make clear that cross-mission teams (e.g. Press & Public Affairs) are there to support all teams;

**Plan/conduct joint visits by FCO officials and their PAG counterparts** – such visits can demonstrate visibly the FCO working hand in glove with PAGs and help identify new or reinforce existing joint initiatives and projects plus ensure clear consistent messages to hosts. Visiting Ministers and senior officials from whatever department should be invited to speak to all staff;

**Lots of smaller PAGs have very small teams, operating regionally. So invite them to come to post** and meet you and the wider Embassy team, so they feel part of your team too;

**Involve all PAGs in crisis management planning** in line with the “one team” approach. Assign formal roles to PAGS in the crisis plan;

**Invite PAG officials to post events** on an equal footing with FCO officers. Have shared social events and Away Days. Make the Residence available to all PAGs;

**Use other innovations to develop a sense of one team and one culture**, such as a cross Post Rewards and Recognition Scheme which rewards the attitudes, behaviours and cultures which senior leadership wants to incentivise.