13 December 2017

Written evidence from Foreign and Commonwealth Office (EUR0024)

RESPONSE TO FAC QUESTIONS FOLLOWING INQUIRY ORAL HEARING

I would like to thank the FAC for allowing me to contribute to your Inquiry into Britain’s future diplomatic relationship with Europe on 28 November. I undertook to provide you with further details on a number of issues.

1. Language training in the FCO

Foreign language skills are vitally important to the FCO. We have approximately 500 staff in speaker slots globally (those positions in our Posts overseas where the ability of the job-holder to communicate in the language of the host country is considered essential to do the job effectively). The number of such slots can vary over time quite significantly depending on operational needs.

Last year, over 200 staff received full time training for speaker slot positions. In addition, last year we trained around 600 staff in the UK and 100 overseas in part-time developmental study classes (typically during lunchtime).

We are introducing more remote and e-learning opportunities to modernise training, with a focus on the quality of teaching and value for money.

Approximately 70% of Heads of Mission and 60% of other staff have achieved their target level exam, which is up significantly over the last two years following a push to ensure more officers complete their training before going to post.

We plan to introduce a Foreign Language Impact award in 2018 to recognise the contribution of staff who have learned a language and demonstrably used it to achieve HMG objectives. There will be one award for Heads of Mission and one for other staff. The management of the award will be light touch and run alongside other staff awards.

2. Additional funding to support work related to the UK’s exit from the EU

In the 2016 Autumn Statement, the FCO and the Department for International Trade jointly received funding for several new trade policy positions overseas to cover the period 2016-17 to 2019-20. These roles complement our existing network of several hundred FCO staff at home and overseas working on the Prosperity agenda (trade policy, economic growth, energy, climate change, science and innovation) and in support of government objectives. To date, none of the trade policy positions funded in this way are in the UK or EU.

Since the EU referendum we have internally reprioritised to provide the resources to create approximately 50 new UK diplomatic positions in our posts in Europe.

We also continue to work with HM Treasury on the FCO’s EU Exit resource requirements. For 2017-18 we expect to receive additional funding from the Treasury Reserve to allow for an increase of over 100 FCO staff working on EU Exit issues. The expected increase in funding will allow for more staff to work on priority EU Exit areas. This will include bilateral
engagement across the Europe network, work on third country agreements, consular preparedness, sanctions, and Gibraltar. Additional staff will be based both in London and in the Europe network. Confirmation of this funding is to be provided by the Treasury as part of the 2017-18 Supplementary Estimates process.

We will continue to keep FCO resource requirements under review, liaising closely with the Treasury as necessary.

3. Additional FCO UK staff

How many additional UK staff does the FCO plan to deploy in Europe?
Where will the overseas postings be and how many will be deployed in each Post?

How many UK-based staff are posted overseas at each post in Europe currently; and how many are planned to be at each post in 6 months’ time?
In respect of the additional staff referred to in answer to Q3 above: Where have/will they come from?

Will any of these additional staff be based in the UK, and if so how many (and therefore how many will be based overseas)?

What will these additional staff be doing?

The FCO keeps its staff numbers under regular review in response to ministerial priorities.


Since the EU referendum we have created approximately 50 new UK diplomatic positions in our posts in Europe. These additional staff will support our Embassies’ efforts to understand and influence our European partners’ positions on key exit issues, and to help identify and develop new opportunities for bilateral cooperation in preparation for life outside of the EU. These posts have been or will be filled through our usual internal recruitment processes. We will find savings and efficiencies across the global network over the next two years to ensure the overall impact of these new positions is cost-neutral. Savings will be made through changing the ways we work in some locations as well as from some staff savings in Asia Pacific, South Asia and Afghanistan, Americas and Africa. The details will be confirmed in due course. These positions are in the posts listed below.


We are further planning to create over 100 additional new roles in London and our Europe network to support EU Exit work. This will include bilateral engagement across the Europe network, work on third country agreements, consular preparedness, sanctions, and Gibraltar. Additional staff will be based both in London and in the Europe network. Further details will be confirmed in due course.
4. Ireland/Northern Ireland

You also asked about the border on the island of Ireland. Please can I refer you to the ‘Prime Minister’s Commitments to Northern Ireland’ policy paper published on 8 December which sets out six key commitments on Northern Ireland.

Yours,

RT HON SIR ALAN DUNCAN MP