Language Training

At the recent International Development Select Committee in December 2014, I agreed to write to you on language training.

DFID has a language training policy and guidance in place. It provides support for language training where there is a business need. DFID's language offer is available for both current and anticipated duty travel purposes and to improve the level of English capability among local staff appointed in country (SAIC).

The policy is supported by a cross Government language training contract which provides access to language training in the UK and overseas (the FCO lead the contract). The contract is made up of two components: e-learning provided by Rosetta Stone for elementary levels and blended learning (combining: face to face, self-study and e-learning) for middle and upper levels provided by Language Services Direct. The Rosetta Stone e-learning is available at post as well as in the UK. The more advanced training service offers intensive training including immersion where appropriate in 80 languages. Employees also have access to the FCO language learning centre in London for self-study.

There is a cross Government language group with representation from FCO, NCA, GCHQ, MOD and DFID. The group meets quarterly to support the strategic drive for cross government collaboration to improve language capability.

Responsibility for local language training is devolved to country offices and is a matter for Heads of Office to factor into their Learning and Development plans for staff. All offices have local training budgets to support such activity.

DFID’s working language overseas will predominantly be English. For those offices which operate in another language we strongly encourage staff posted from the UK to learn that language – e.g. Portuguese for staff working in Mozambique and French for those in DRC.

Our staff already show a willingness to converse in local languages wherever possible which is widely welcomed and promotes partnership. Our staff appointed in country play an important role in our programme delivery and work closely with our UK home civil servants to ensure understanding and effective dialogue. The number of locally appointed
staff has been increasing in recent years from 769 in 2010 to 972 in September 2014. This represents around 32% of our total workforce and 63% of the overseas workforce.

A survey undertaken in February 2013 identified that 46 different languages are spoken by DFID staff in addition to English.

We will continue to highlight the opportunities and benefits of language acquisition and will work with our overseas offices to ensure that learning local languages, as well as developing an understanding of local culture and customs, continues to feature highly in the induction programme for staff and families moving to a new country location. We are also working to ensure that we have accurate data to assess language skills capability through information gathered in our HR systems.