

Good afternoon, everybody and a warm welcome to our session this afternoon on A Day in the Life of an International Civil Servant. My name is Debbie Palmer. I'm a Director in DFID, one of the directors for Africa, and it's my pleasure to welcome you today. We've got a range of lightning and I hope enlightening and talks for you from a wide array of civil servants from across HMG's international departments, which I hope will give you a flavour of what it's like to work internationally as a UK civil servant and a little bit about the context in which HMG operates overseas, but also to get a flavour of how the UK continues to be an influential player on the world stage even as the world is changing around us through the COVID response, and the changing geopolitics that comes with that. So we've got 45 minutes for this session, and it's, I hope, going to be a really action packed opportunity to hear from you. We'll have some QA, later in the session, so please do think about posting your questions. This can be done at the right hand side of your screen, just click on the box to enable the QA and you can pop in your name and your department. But before we begin, I thought it might be great to hear a little bit from you. And so I'd like to invite you to take part in a very quick poll. The question should be coming up for you, you should be able to see it. And the question is on a scale of one to 10. What is your knowledge and understanding of the roles and work of international servants? The work that they carry out? With one, with 10 being 'I'm an expert' and zero being 'tell me more'. It'd be great to hear how you're feeling about your knowledge base on this topic and how we can help you through this, through this short session. While you're all filling out that poll, and as we see the results in a second, I think it's also perhaps helpful to remind you that there's a separate discussion forum that will, that will happen throughout the session, and in fact, will continue after the session. So if you go into the forum tab on the main Civil Service Live website, you'll find the name of this session, and there's an opportunity to continue the session through that process. So I'm keen to see whether any of you have had a chance to press your buttons and see how the polling is looking. And that's great. I can see that hopefully this will be a very useful session to you. The majority of people are at the 'tell me more' end of the spectrum, but we've also got some experts in here so I hope they'll also pepper our questions and our QA and give us some things to work through. So with no further ado, if I may, I'm going to introduce Peter Jones, who's our star speaker for this session. Peter joined the diplomatic service in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1985. He's currently the Chief Operating Officer for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. But he's also had, served in postings in Vienna, in Bonn, in Rome, and also in Accra, as our High Commissioner there. And I know he's also worked as the Director of Migration and the Director of Defence and International Security and I've also heard a rumour he's a big fan of Everton Football Club. So if I may, I'm going to introduce Peter, hand over to you Peter to say a few words about your experience as an international civil servant through your career.

Thanks, Debbie. Thanks very much, including for the reference to my favourite football team. And thanks everybody for having a go the poll, there's gonna be another channel later on, I'm not quite sure where I'd put myself on the one to 10 scale. But anyway, really interesting to get those results. So thanks, everybody for joining this session, thanks for your interest in our international and overseas work. And that's actually a broader range of Civil Service work than you might think. So in addition to perhaps the obvious departments DFID, where Debbie works, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office where I work, and we're about to merge to form the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development office, there's about 30 government departments and agencies who are represented on our overseas platform. So it's quite a wide range, as you can see. And when I talk about the platform, what I mean is all the embassies and high commissions and consulates and all the other offices that we have around

the world. We have about 280 of them, two eight zero, around the world in 178 countries and territories. So you can see that the British Civil Service is present literally around the world, almost in every country around the world. What are we doing? Well, we're doing a range of stuff and in a moment you'll hear some video clips from people who will tell you about the range of activity that they're involved in. It really is quite extensive. But in brief, we're there to represent British interests overseas, to look after British nationals overseas, very importantly the consular work that we do in the FCO, but also to try and be a force for good in the world, a phrase that the Foreign Secretary uses a lot and I think that we will take into the creation of our new joint Foreign, Commonwealth and Development office. So it's a broad range of activities and interests that we try and represent on the global stage. You'll see from the videos that, you know, it's an immense variety of activity, I hope that's one of the attractions of thinking about working in our area. And for myself, I mean, Debbie gave you a potted version of my career, I mean, if you talk to anyone in the Foreign Office or DFID, you'll get a version of that, you know, a mixture of jobs in the UK and overseas. As Debbie said, my last one was in Africa, just an unforgettable experience to be the British High Commissioner in Ghana. And one thing I'd say about our line of work is it does give you experiences and memories for a lifetime, just some amazing things that you get to do, particularly overseas. A couple of things to finish. The focus here is obviously on the UK Civil Service. But I also want to mention our local staff or in DFID terms, staff appointed in country, who we employ overseas. And in fact, most of the people who work in our overseas operation in those embassies and high commissions are locally engaged. So while, you know, we're thinking here about the UK Civil Service, in particular, I want to make a big shout out to those colleagues because they do a terrific amount of work for us, very proud of what they do, and they're a really, really important part of our team. So with that, I'm going to hand back to Debbie, thank you.

Thanks, Peter. That was a great introduction. And it's, I was just thinking, as you spoke that if, if we have more time, we could talk about all the funny things that have happened to us overseas. We've all got so many memories, but perhaps some of this will come out in the video montage that we, you already mentioned. So we're going to hear now from a number of colleagues from across MOD, DIT, DFID and the FCO, and we've asked them basically two questions. What was the biggest challenge you faced? And what do you enjoy about working internationally? So let's hear from them.

Hello from Riyadh. My biggest challenge working here for the MOD was being the first woman appointed into a managerial role on the Saudi Armed Forces project, breaking the norm and challenging assumptions, working to align the business with the Crown Prince's Vision 2030 to transform and diversify Saudi Arabia.

One of the biggest challenges of working in international environments in Turkey is to adapt to the constant change which is introduced every three or four years with changing colleagues, changing friendships, and changing managing style. But also this is the best part of it because change is always good and it brings diversity.

Although I love London, I don't miss the rat race, and being overseas has afforded me the opportunity to travel to so many different countries, places that I would not have ventured to otherwise.

The investment team is responsible for supporting Australian businesses to set up in the UK. We help all types of companies. So everything from a startup to your large conglomerates, and the best part is we are sector agnostic, so which means I can be helping someone from a technology sector to all the way to life sciences and financial services. Events play a very, very big role in our lives. We probably do at least one to two, you know, every couple of weeks. The reason why they are so important is because they bring together the British companies as well as Australian companies onto the same platform, and we get to have a open conversation about doing business in each other's markets.

The Netherlands is probably one of the countries closest to the UK in many respects. Similar policy goal, similar mindsets, same sense of humour, but still there are many differences, and what I like most about my role is to be able to act as a bridge and explain to the other side what is different and in that way help bilateral cooperation move forward. Explaining Brexit to colleagues in the Dutch system has been a challenge. They didn't understand our decision to leave, they disliked the idea very much, felt they'd lost their closest ally in the EU.

We've worked hard to explain to the Dutch why we remain an important partner now that we've left, but it remains a challenge.

What I enjoy most about working overseas is the ability to see your own culture through somebody else's eyes, as Burns would say, 'O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us/To see oursel's as ithers see us!' Just to see that there's more than one way of doing things, that other cultures have different ways of doing things and we can definitely learn from that.

Fantastic, what a great way of starting to hear from all those colleagues and all those voices. Peter, would you like to reflect on anything there? Or did anything particularly strike you or speak to you?

Well, they were fascinating. I mean, I think that the price for best backdrop definitely goes to Sydney Harbour Bridge. But all those testimonies really, really interesting, including when we have difficult messages to convey on Brexit, for example. I mean, that's part of the job too, you know, advancing British interests, even if that's a difficult conversation with your hosts. And then that final clip, I think, for me, and I don't know how you feel about this Debbie, the moment of coming back to the UK when you've lived somewhere else is quite a strange and interesting one that, because you do see our own country through a different perspective and I find that a very enriching thing.

I couldn't agree more. I have to say the moment I walk through customs at one of our airports and come back on to UK soil and you just really, as that commentator said, you really see the the UK through others' eyes and it gives you that really rich perspective on both celebrating and embracing and loving the things that we all love about the UK, but also a little bit more quizzically challenging and thinking about the different ways in which things can be done. So it is, it's very, it certainly opens your mind. So I'm going to move on if I may, I'm going to introduce Dominic Gould, from the FCO, who is one of the Programme and Policy Managers for the Prosperity Fund, and he's working in Mexico. And we've got a bit of a TED talk from him, so we're going to hear from him for about five minutes now.

Hi, I'm Dominic Gould. I am a locally-engaged C4 here at the British Embassy in Mexico City. I'm Country Lead for the Prosperity Fund Global Skills Programme and previously also held that role for the Global Health Programme. And recently I've also been getting up early to support the work of the COVID-19 directorate in London. Why am I here? Why did I move to Mexico? I visited quite a few times before I actually came to live here. It was the first place I visited after graduating, I spent three months here, travelled all over, fell in love, and basically decided that one day I want to live here. In 2014, I'd spent 10 years working for an international NGO based in London. My then partner was Mexican living in Mexico, so I decided it was the right moment to take the risk. I took up a job with <inaudible> council leading the UK guest of honour role in an international cultural festival. And after two years, I then moved across to the embassy to join the team and working in this role. I love living in Mexico. It's a beautiful country, not without its challenges. Four days ago, we had a big earthquake here which sent us all into the street and knocked out the internet. In 2017 an earthquake knocked out the embassy completely and we've all been in rented office space since then.

What does a typical day look like in my role? Well, as I said, I'm Country Lead for the Prosperity Fund Global Skills Programme. I've been working on designing the programme, essentially trying to establish which of all the many things that UK can do in Mexico to reduce poverty and inequality in the country, which are the ones that will do that most effectively, and create inclusive economic growth, which is the prosperity fund's main objective. And on a daily basis, that means meetings with education stakeholders, right from the Ministry of Education, to civil society organisations, schools, universities, young people, and of course employers to understand what it is about, what is the skills gap that you have between leaving university and entering your first job. And that also means that on a regular basis, on a typical basis, I'm travelling around Mexico to different parts of this enormous country to understand what are the differences and similarities and how can we be most effective in those different locations. Sometimes you get the most extraordinary reception. The other day, I was arriving at a school, there was a marching band outside, flags and the full works. It made me remember that actually we're all ambassadors when we are abroad representing the UK, even if it's with a small a. It also on a daily basis, cross Whitehall working, DFID, FCO, DIT are all involved in this programme, DFID's leading. And so continuously working with London to understand all the options and come up with the interventions that will have the biggest impact and then reporting back on those and also contract management once you get to that stage. In May, my typical day changed somewhat. The COVID-19 Task Force asked me to support them, given that I had health experience and also international engagement skills. And with the support of the embassy and the skills team I said, yes, it's the crisis of our time, I have some relevant expertise and I'd be glad to use it. We're six hours behind in Mexico City. So I start my day at 7am, which is 1pm in London, and then I transition across to my prosperity fund role around 11am through to the end of the normal day, and then go back to work on any outstanding topics after supper. And a major part of what I've been doing with the C19 Task Force is to support our international engagement around vaccines, treatments, and tests, working with our embassies across the world to seek their support in communicating what the UK is doing, and also helping us understand what those countries are doing, identifying areas of collaboration, whether that's R&D, manufacturing, or another part of the process, which we need to bring an end to this crisis. That's a typical day. Now, for a specific day, 3rd of June, I was directly involved in the global vaccine summit, which the Prime Minister hosted on the 4th of June, which raised \$8.8 billion to support routine immunisations, and build support for equitable access to a future COVID vaccine. And among other

activities, I've been working with posts including Spain, Argentina, Brazil, and here in Mexico to secure their participation. And participation was either in the form of pledges or prerecorded video messages. And as we got close to the summit it has been quite hard to secure Mexico's attendance because they wanted lots of information about the event and they weren't quite sure whether it was the right step for them. And I've been working hard with the team in London and here at the embassy to get them the information they needed, help persuade them to join the summit. And two nights before, I thought we'd failed. I went to bed thinking we'd failed. The next day, 7am, messages from the London embassy saying that Mexico was considering participation. So cue an enormously intense period of time trying to get them the final bits of information and also keep a space open for them on the summit website for their video. And that day was also a really important one for the Prosperity Fund because I had a meeting with the Ministry of Education to update them and basically advise them where we've got to in the key decisions we'd made, which really didn't want to have a disagreement about so that was quite a delicate and important meeting, which I had to do at the same time. After that was over, I rushed back to the summit work. And it turned out that Mexico was by no means the only country to have submitted its video late. In fact, it was 9pm in London, and there was a huge backlog of videos which were being, which had been edited. And it was essential overnight to get all of those videos out to posts across the world, so that they could be checked for anything controversial and if necessary, have defensive lines written. And, of course, luckily, because of the time difference, I was able to do that and it worked really well. In fact, a learning point for all future conferences is that we should always have someone in a different time zone, you never know when it's going to be useful. So it's a really busy life, but a very fulfilling one. And right now for family reasons, I'm actually looking to move back to the UK and hopefully enter the Civil Service on a formal basis. But I know I'm going to miss Mexico enormously. And it's been really a privilege and an immensely enjoyable challenge representing the UK abroad.

Thanks Dominic. It was really great to hear a bit more in depth from Dominic there about his work, the challenges, the joys, the benefits of the time difference sometimes. Peter, did you want to pull anything out from that? I thought it was a really thoughtful and interesting set of reflections.

Yeah, there's an awful lot in what in what Dominic said. First of all, the importance of the work you know, that work on vaccines, what could be more important than helping the international and national response to the challenge? Secondly, what struck me was the cross governmental nature of the work you know, going back to that point, there are 30 departments or agencies around the world, you know, in some of the posts like Mexico quite a few are there, and the fact that we can bring all of government to bear in a particular country context overseas. I think that nice little line from Dominic about we're all ambassadors, you know that's true. I mean, it's true of all of our people overseas. I mean, it's true of every Brit travelling overseas as well. But I think that's an important point to bear in mind, because whoever you meet, you know, as a civil servant or a British national overseas, they will view the UK through you, no pressure. He mentioned the earthquake, well, the earthquakes that we've had in Mexico, so a reminder of some of the perils that are out there, you know, natural and human made. And we've actually had to rebuild, find a new embassy in Mexico City as a consequence of the events a few years ago and the seismic risk there. And then the final thing, and Dominic said that, you know, he was locally engaged in Mexico so just a reminder that those local staff that I, or staff appointed in country that I talked about, you know, are very often nationals of the state concerned, but they could be third

country nationals or they could be Brits, you know, as in as in Dominic's case. So there's an opportunity for people to think about that as well. Thanks.

Great, as I said, what a really rich set of reflections that I think are beginning to kind of fill out the colour of what it's like to be living overseas. Let's keep going then because we've got a few more voices that we're keen to hear from. And if I can, I'd like to turn to another pair of colleagues who are working in China. So we're going to hear a little bit from Andrew and from Su Si in China to talk about how they have been working to keep, to help keep international trade functioning, and also what it's been like thinking about issues around PPE during the COVID epidemic. So let's hear from them.

Hello, my name is Andrew Mitchell, and I'm a Director General of the Department for International Trade. It's a great pleasure to be here today at Civil Service Live and to talk to you a little bit about the role of the international civil servant. In fact, I'll be introducing a colleague shortly to talk more about this topic. But first, to set the context. We began a piece of work some three months ago to support the Department for Health and Social Care in the procurement of medical goods from markets overseas. And we started that work at the point at which the traditional supply chains run by the department had begun to buckle under the pressure of distortions in the international medical supply chain market, as a consequence of vastly increased demand for PPE and other medical devices such as ventilators, at the same time that COVID-19 was beginning to impact on production in those markets. And we saw that it was possible for the government to play a role in supporting that procurement process through our posts overseas. And our special guest this afternoon represents one of those posts. And this story really embodies three principles that, in my career as an international civil servant, I've experienced as being particularly important. The first is collaboration. We are ultimately about one team overseas as we are at home. And working together, we're stronger, and we are better. And we do everything that we do, under the auspices of that head of mission approach led through the fantastic teams that we have at our missions overseas, be they from the Department for International Trade, from the Foreign Office, from other partners, and this is a story in part about collaboration. It's also about a second principle, expertise. Our people overseas are really our value add. They are the value that we bring to international policy-making, to international operations, because they understand the markets that we operate in and if our expertise is in international trade, it is also in those markets. So our local staff are absolutely key to that understanding of the market, to that expertise. And we're also about agility, that third principle. As teams overseas, we know that almost anything can happen. And we have to be ready to respond. Although you never quite know that a major pandemic will hit you, you nonetheless need to be prepared and ready to respond when that happens. And this is a story about collaboration, expertise, and agility and it's my great pleasure to introduce my colleague from the Department of International Trade in China, Su Si.

Hello, my name is Su Si. I'm the Head of Education Technology and Higher Education at the Department for International Trade here in China. But in response to the pandemic, I'm also now a member of China COVID-19 Procurement Task Force, responsible for PPE procurement as a part of the Global Strategic Sourcing Engagement, or we call it GSSEP. My normal job at DIT is to link business and people. I work with local Chinese government, companies, universities, schools, and link them with what the UK has to offer. So I never thought that one day I will receive a phone call from London in the middle of night. That one day I would have to become a gloves expert. That one day I'd

have to to secure an order of 2.8 billion gloves and haggling to knock 20 million pounds off the price. Procuring PPE is a challenging job, especially when facing unprecedented market conditions, limited availability of raw materials, time pressures and competitions from other buyers. It has been an unbelievable journey. It is a really high pressured environment with two shifts working seven days a week. We start at 8am in the morning, and the day could end at midnight. We also have people out in the United States and Australia working to Chinese hours, living a vampire life in front of a laptop. It has certainly been a steep learning curve. But the great thing about our PPE team is how supportive everyone is, from the colleagues working on sourcing strategy and identifying potential supplies to people like me who talk to suppliers. I'm proud that this work embodies One HMG working across DIT, FCO, CO, MOD and DHSC. It reflects our values, respect, expertise, resilience, creativity, courage and public service. And I'm proud to play a small part in this great global effort to tackle COVID-19, protect our frontline workers and save lives.

Wow, I found that really quite poignant, quite inspiring to hear from Su Si about what she's been doing during the COVID outbreak, working shifts, staff are stepping up into that crisis team to procure PPE and become a sudden expert in medical gloves. It's just quite remarkable, and you also gave us some really clear watch words about working overseas. So, Peter, have you got, have you got thoughts on that, as I find it quite meaning actually.

No, I agree with you. I mean, what came through again is the importance and the adaptability. That was the really striking thing with this sudden demand for a massive intervention in terms of the medical equipment. And the other thing I'd just like to thank Su Si for, which is quoting the values that we've agreed for, all One HMG operations overseas, so I won't repeat them, she mentioned them there. But that was something we brought in over the last 18 months or so to give us a common set of values like respect and expertise that inform the whole operation. So back to you.

Great, Peter. And the other thing that actually, I'm really reminded of from Su Si's comments is the fact that of course, we've had our posts all over the world stepping up into crisis structures during this Coronavirus pandemic, in order to bring British nationals home, but also to step up a response in those countries that are facing a pandemic. So, you know, there's an awful lot been going on and people have really worked incredibly hard in recent months overseas just as they have in the UK. I'm going to keep this moving because we've got, I hope, time for just two more videos so we're going to canter through them. The first is from some colleagues of mine from DFID in Bangladesh, Alexandra and Sheila.

My name is Ali. I'm a Social Development Advisor in DFID at the British High Commission in Bangladesh.

Hi, I'm Sheila, I'm Governance Advisor in DFID Bangladesh office. We both work together in DFID in UK's response to this Rohingya crisis. In 2017, almost around 850,000 Rohingya fled violence atrocities from Myanmar and arrived in Cox's Bazar, which is in the south part of Bangladesh. UK is the second largest donor for this humanitarian response.

So the days that we get to do field visits are definitely my favourite part of the job. In fact, that's how I spent my birthday this year. And that's a large part of why I work overseas. It's a great opportunity to reconnect with the people that we're here to help and to really make sure that those people are at the heart of everything that we're doing. It's a great opportunity to make sure that we're doing the right things, that we're responding to the needs and the struggles that people are facing on the ground, and also one of the ways that we monitor where UK taxpayer money is going and how it's being used.

Thanks Ali. <inaudible> is always, is fully packed, but works. Sometimes we we start with an early breakfast meeting, a call before we head off to the camp, then it's usually a very packed field visit because we want to sort of get as much as possible. Then we come back, then we have several other meetings with different partners, NGOs, multilaterals, to hear more from them.

So the last time we were in the camps was in March, just before everything locked down because of COVID-19. I was in Kutupalong, which is the largest and most densely populated refugee camp in the world. It's also known as the mega camp. It's home to about 600,000 refugees. I was there visiting some of the work that we support UNFPA to do with young girls. So for example, I visited one group in a women's safe space, where the girls were learning about hand washing practices, particularly important given COVID-19. And then I visited another group which was learning about, which was a group of young girls learning about their rights including what healthy relationships look like, and how they can access family planning when they're ready to start a family. And that work's really, really important. Adolescent girls can be a really difficult community to reach and they're extremely vulnerable. There aren't many education opportunities available to them. And the community is quite conservative, so when there's fear in the camps, the girls can be restricted to the shelters. They're also at risk of trafficking and child marriage. But when you meet the girls, and when they're participating in a group session, like the ones I talked about, that's so awesome. And I love being able to take that opportunity to build relationships with them. I spent a lot of that day just chatting about what they do for fun, what rules they break, who has makeup, who has a secret boyfriend. And that's a great way, it's one of the main ways that I learned about the challenges in their lives, what they're really experiencing and also what UK aid can do to help.

Along with Ali, I also visited the camp as well. I participated in different discussion with civil society groups and youth groups to learn and hear their aspirations challenges and dreams. One of the few things that is coming very repeatedly on all our field visits is access to health, access to education, their mobility, internet access, but what struck me most is to see the rebuilding of the confidence of the women, despite the challenges that they face, both in their community and beyond the community as well. During the visit, we also ensured that we met different other stakeholders like district administration, government officials, local civil society organisations, different media outlets. Listening and discussing with those individuals not only helped me to understand the Rohingya issue on the, mostly on the Cox's Bazar in general, but also helped me to raise the concerns of the community, the Rohingya community, and some of the issues that that they have raised and also, gave us opportunity to influence and advocate on their behalf. In my visit, I also met the district judge to talk about and to learn how the justice system is working, especially how government is responding to their grievances, the legal system in the camp. I met the Bangladesh police, district administration to understand, understand the security and governance issue in the camp, and how they're responding to that issue as

well. I really enjoyed my joint visit with Ali, although we do wear different hats, but at the end of the day, we do bring our perspective together and help to shape up UK's knowledge to this response. All these meetings and discussion not only build our own knowledge, but it also helps UK's response and also build the advocacy agenda for the Bangladesh government and also for the international stage as well.

No, it's not. And the Rohingya response can sometimes feel like a losing battle. It's hard to convey how many challenges there are in a humanitarian emergency of this size and complexity. But getting to visit the camps really gives us a new sense of energy. Because you see the change that's happening on the ground, you see the progress, and we can tell that we are making a difference.

That was great to hear from colleagues working on that Rohingya crisis. And I have to say that yes, some of my best days ever have been spent, frankly, on those field trips, getting to know the communities which we're serving and which we're working with. But also then, frankly, taking that information the next day and meeting with people in the highest echelons of government, and feeling like we can be agents of change and taking those stories from the voiceless, and putting it into those people, into the ears of the people in power and really trying to change, change things and change what's happening. Peter, if you'll forgive me, I'm going to race us on to the final video just because we don't have much time. And I'm keen that we reserve as much for you to answer the questions that we hear from our audience. So if I may then, let's hear finally from Jennifer Anderson, who's been working through the COVID crisis on repatriating British citizens around the world.

Hello, my name is Jennifer Anderson. I'm the Director for Consular Services at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London. And that means that I, with my hundreds of colleagues in London and around the world, are responsible for supporting British people, should they get into difficulty overseas, be it in normal times or in times of crisis. And my day in the life is Wednesday, the 18th of March. That was the day this year, that was the day in the UK where we all woke to the news that schools were closing, and exams were off. But for us in the Foreign Office, we were actually entering the single biggest crisis of recent times. We were watching and seeing the unfolding of a global lockdown. At enormous speed international borders were being closed, transport corridors were being shut off. We estimated that day that up to 1.3 million British people were trying to get back to the UK - an absolutely unprecedented surge for help and cry for help. So it was a pretty tough day, I will be honest with you. We spent the day trying to mobilise our teams around this enormous task. I looked back on my emails and my diary and I was in meetings with the Department of Transport, I was talking to our posts, we had an ongoing crisis in our crisis centre where we were trying to safely dock and bring back to the UK over 700 British people who were on a cruise ship that had a major COVID infection on it, in the Caribbean. So there was a lot going on. When I look back on that day, I can kind of see six things I think I kind of hold close to me as a civil servant.

First is, very British diplomat. And, you know, we do lots of other things, but actually in truth, in moments of crisis, when push comes to shove, it's the safety and wellbeing of British nationals that matters most. And that day, that week, that month, my entire ministry mobilised its resources around this task. Within weeks we had over 600 staff specifically working on trying to bring British people back to the UK and to support them were they stuck overseas. And we also had our entire diplomatic network, locally engaged staff, diplomats, people from other government departments who are working

in our embassies and consulates and high commissions abroad, a huge team, absolutely unprecedented team. Second thing is that no team, no department, no ministry is an island. We could not have got through that day, or the period after that, without the closest possible collaboration with partners, and most of them were under pressure as well. So you know, it helps if you know each other before but as civil servants, you've got to be able to build relationships of trust, and mobilise each other around common objectives really, really quickly. I think the third thing I take away is the power of data. We didn't know where everybody was, we didn't know who they were. And we had to pull that information together incredibly quickly and in an incredibly uncertain environment. So the thing we did that day, which I look back on and think that was the right thing to do, is we established a data team. And by the end of the week we were saying it was the most important spreadsheet in the Foreign Office. And they were collating all the information from around our posts, from the airlines, to pull together the picture of who we thought needed help, who was stuck, who was going to be able to find a commercial flight, and where were we going to have to do something different? A fourth thing, I look back on that day, and it's really about the welfare of our staff. We talk about it all the time but actually, the first thing I did that day was record a message to staff. I sent it out by WhatsApp because I wanted them to hear my voice. And I wanted them to know that no matter how uncertain it was, and we were all entering lockdown, they were all working from their homes. We would get through this, we would get through it together. But also it was right that they were worried about themselves and their families and putting them first and I wanted them to know that that was okay and important. And it has been incredibly important to us ever since.

I think the fifth thing is you've got to know your own limits.

I was really maxed out, as was all my team. And the only thing to do was to ask for help. So by the end of that day, and by the end of that week, specifically, we'd all brought in former people who've done our jobs or others who knew how to do them. We were all working on shift systems. I was sharing my job with another former Consular Director. And we worked on shifts for the next two months, as did nearly all my colleagues and we could not have got through that period, if we hadn't all been asking for help and offering help, it was incredibly important. And I guess the final thing I would say is I look on that day and in some ways, it was the hardest day. It wasn't a day that I thought we were winning, but, by any means, but it was the day that we started to do the right thing. And sometimes doing the right thing is the most important thing, you start a process and that process will deliver. So you've got to have faith that those decisions at the early stage when it feels really uncertain are still the right thing to be doing. So that's it. That's my day in the life of. Thank you for listening.

That was great. And again, what a moving testimony from Jennifer about what's been happening during the COVID crisis. Peter, I'm conscious that we're really close to the end of our session, but I'm desperate to allow some time for questions. So I'm going to cut straight to the chase. And I'm going to ask you two questions that have been posted by a number of colleagues in the chat bar. The first is what advice would you give to a civil servant interested in a career in the international parts of the Civil Service? And the second is to talk about diversity and inclusion, and to ask what's being done to encourage more diversity in our international work? And how do we ensure that our diplomats and our international staff look like our society? Thanks.

Thanks. So on the first one, I'd come back to the point I made earlier about, you know, a surprising amount of UK Government activity overseas, departments being active overseas. So first of all, look at your own department, see what opportunities there might be there. But then also opportunities in DFID in the FCO and our future department, some of those will be advertised across Whitehall as well. So have a look at that. But first of all, look and see what your own department might have to offer. Diversity and inclusion, obviously hugely important topic. I know a theme, rightly, a theme of this conference. And we have a double responsibility, I think, as the Foreign Office, to be visibly representative of the country. So we've made some progress, particularly I think, in terms of representation of women in senior roles. And if you look right now, our ambassadors to the US, to China, to Russia, to Mexico that we saw, to many other places, they're all women. We have a couple now of black female appointees. We will keep doing as much as we possibly can to promote diversity and be truly representative of the country. We're not there yet, but we're working on it.

Fantastic. Thanks, Peter. That was really helpful. So we're coming to the end of our session, and I'm going to try and be very clever and do two things at once. The first is I want to go back to the poll that we gave you all at the beginning of the session, and ask you to have another go at telling us how you're feeling about your knowledge and understanding of the roles of working out in the international Civil Service, to see if we've done our job in this session, and whether we've helped increase your knowledge of what it's like out there. But as we're waiting for those poll results to come in, I'm going to ask Peter, just a couple of other super quick questions. The first is to talk to us a little bit about digital diplomacy. Is it possible to work on international matters and to be based on an international project whilst actually physically being in the UK? And the second one is, could you say a little bit more about the merger between DFID and the FCO and how you think that's going to change things in the future? Thanks Peter.

Okay, so on the first one, I mean, Jennifer spoke about the importance of data in our work including in the recent example of the crisis of COVID-19 and what's been really interesting, if you go back to Dominic, wasn't it, in Mexico, a lot of our work we did, we did as a seamless, I hope, global operation. So we had colleagues around the world through the tech that we now have through systems like this, actually fuelling the work that was being organised in London as well. I'm sure there is much, much more to come, you know, in that area. So, you know, it's the way of the present and certainly the way of the future and I've forgotten the second question Debbie, sorry.

The second question was about the merger between DFID and the FCO and how you think it might change things.

Okay. I mean, it was, genuinely I forgot. But this is huge for me, for you, for everybody in our two departments. I believe in this. I mean, having been in in Africa, I think it's the right thing to do, to bring together all the main elements of British activity overseas, you know, as regards DFID and the Foreign Office. We have a lot of work to do, as you know, Debbie, we have to reorganise ourselves quite significantly. I think that's more true at the UK end that is in our overseas posts, because I think, you know, in a lot of our embassies and high commissions concerned, they're pretty integrated already. Thanks.

Thanks, Peter. I agree with all of that. And of course, the challenge to all of us is to make this new and better than it's ever been before. And I think that's the spirit that we're going into this with. So let's cut to our poll, I hope you've all had a chance to vote and to tell us. Oh, wow, what a great result! That's really exciting. Thanks, everyone. I think we were kind of around a three at the beginning of the session, and it feels as though we've hopefully done our jobs with all of those great colleagues and all of those video clips, and we're now nudging up towards the top end of the box. So I hope that you've really, really found this useful. Please do fill in the session evaluation, and tell us whether this session was useful. Was it a good use of your time? Have you learned something new? And most importantly, how can we improve this session if we were to run it in future years? But we're out of time so my job is to sign off, to say a massive thank you to Peter Jones, to say a massive thank you to all the colleagues who put this session together, and who've contributed to the video clips, but most importantly, to say really big thank you to all of you for joining us. And as I said, I hope it's been a useful session to you and I hope that you'll find ways to joint up what you've learned with what you're doing at the moment, but also think about a career in the future in the international parts of the Civil Service. Thanks very much for joining us today. Bye bye. Thank you.