

On behalf of: The Secretary of  
State for Foreign,  
Commonwealth and  
Development Affairs  
By: Thomas Drew CMG  
Exhibit: TD1  
No: 1

Date: 16 February 2023

**IN THE MATTER OF:**

**THE UNITED KINGDOM  
COVID-19 INQUIRY**

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**STATEMENT OF THOMAS DREW CMG ON BEHALF OF THE  
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH  
AND DEVELOPMENT AFFAIRS**

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**I, THOMAS DREW CMG**, Director General (“**DG**”) for Defence and Intelligence at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (“**FCDO**”), King Charles Street, London SW1A 2AH, **WILL SAY** as follows:

**Section 1: Introduction**

1. I make this statement on behalf of the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (“**Secretary of State**”) for the United Kingdom (“**UK**”) Covid-19 Inquiry (“**Inquiry**”).
2. This statement pertains to Module One of the Inquiry, which examines the preparedness and resilience of the UK for the Covid-19 pandemic covering the period from 11 June 2009 to 21 January 2020 (“**Module One Period**”).
3. I am duly authorised by the Secretary of State to make this statement on his behalf.
4. The contents of this statement are true to the best of my knowledge and belief. Many of

the matters referred to are not within my personal knowledge, so I have drawn on the recollections of those officials who were working on the matters relevant to this statement.

5. There is now produced and shown to me a paginated bundle of true copy documents marked (“TD1 [xxx]”), with ‘[xxx]’ referring to the page number of the exhibit. All references to documents in this statement are to Exhibit ([TD1 [xxx]]) unless otherwise stated.
6. This statement has been prepared with the assistance of officials in the FCDO, including the FCDO’s Covid-19 Inquiry Unit.
7. My statement is structured as follows:

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## **Section 2: Preliminary points**

8. At the outset of my statement, I wish to note, on behalf of the Secretary of State, the following preliminary points.

- 8.1 First, the Secretary of State welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Inquiry. The Secretary of State supports the Inquiry in fulfilling its terms of reference.
- 8.2 Second, reflecting the Secretary of State's goal of supporting the Inquiry in its work, the FCDO has gone to considerable effort to locate information and documents which respond to the Inquiry's requests. Notwithstanding the extensive information provided with this statement (and provided to date preceding this statement), the Secretary of State remains ready to assist the Inquiry further through the provision of additional information and documents.
- 8.3 Third, on 2 September 2020 the Department for International Development ("DFID") and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office ("FCO") merged to form a new department, the FCDO<sup>1</sup>. As the Module One Period predates the date when the FCO and DFID merged to become the FCDO, separate statements have been prepared covering each department. This statement covers the resilience and preparedness of the FCO; whether the risk of a Covid-19<sup>2</sup> pandemic was properly identified and planned for by the FCO; and whether the FCO was ready for such an eventuality. A separate statement has been prepared covering DFID's role in this regard.
- 8.4 Fourth, unless otherwise specified, where I have provided a description of the FCO's activities or structures, the information reflects the position as at 21 January 2020. Where matters materially evolved or changed before this date during the Module One Period, they are set out.

### **Section 3: Explanation of terminology**

9. The FCO and DFID are now sometimes referred to, particularly in FCDO internal documents, as "legacy departments" and, in internal and external documents as "ex-FCO" and "ex-DFID". These terms all describe the departments which merged to become the FCDO.
10. To be consistent with the names used by these departments before 2 September 2020,

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<sup>1</sup> See the Transfer of Functions (Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs) Order 2020 (SI 2020/942) made as an Order in Council pursuant to sections 1 and 2 of the Ministers of the Crown Act 1975.

<sup>2</sup> On 11 February 2020, the World Health Organization officially announced "severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)" or "Covid-19" as the name of what until then had been referred to generically as "coronavirus". For ease of reference and except where otherwise appropriate, I refer to coronavirus as "Covid-19" throughout this statement.

this statement will use the term “FCO” to refer to activities undertaken by and material originating from the former Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the term “DFID” to refer to activities undertaken by and material originating from the former Department for International Development. The term “FCDO” will be used to refer to activities undertaken by and material originating from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office since its establishment on 2 September 2020.

11. This statement will, where appropriate, use the term “the UK key preparedness and resilience functions” to refer to the following:

11.1 UK domestic general risk management;

11.2 UK domestic whole-system risk management;

11.3 planning for, preparing for and managing the risk of:

11.3.1 UK general civil emergencies; and

11.3.2 UK whole-system civil emergencies; and

11.4 planning for, preparing for and managing the risk of:

11.4.1 high consequence infectious diseases within the UK;

11.4.2 epidemics within the UK; and

11.4.3 pandemics within the UK.

#### **Section 4: My background**

12. I have been the DG for Defence and Intelligence at the FCDO since March 2022. I am a Senior Civil Servant (Civil Service grade Senior Civil Service Grade 3) and am responsible for the delivery of UK policy for the FCDO response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and for Eastern Europe and Central Asia policy. I am responsible, globally, for issues relating to defence, intelligence and national security; information threats; crisis management; and consular services within the FCDO. Prior to this I was DG, Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan from September 2020 to March 2022, and before that DG, Consular and Security at the FCO.

13. I have been a member of the FCDO Management Board since September 2020 and was a member of the FCO’s Management Board from January to September 2020.

14. I joined the FCO in 1995 and have worked in the Civil Service since then. During my time as a civil servant, I have worked in a number of roles in the FCO and FCDO, both in the UK and overseas, including British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Principal Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs ("**FCO Secretary of State**"), the Rt Hon William Hague MP<sup>3</sup>, and FCO Secretary of State the Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP<sup>4</sup>, and National Security Director. I also worked in the Home Office as Director in the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism.

**Section 5: The FCO's role and responsibilities with regard to the UK key preparedness and resilience functions**

15. In this section of my statement, I explain the FCO's roles and responsibilities during the Module One Period. I provide this context to illustrate how the FCO's roles and responsibilities related to the UK key preparedness and resilience functions, and to explain the extent of the FCO's remit with regard to the scope of Module One of the Inquiry.

16. At the outset, I note that Module One of the Inquiry relates to the UK's own key preparedness and resilience functions domestically, whereas the FCO's work responding to crises and emergencies concerned those overseas and therefore the majority of such work is not within the scope of this module. Furthermore, the FCO did not have responsibility, either singularly or jointly, for any of the UK key preparedness and resilience functions of Her Majesty's Government<sup>5</sup> ("**HM Government**").

17. Where the FCO's work in respect of crises and emergencies overseas had an impact on or related to the UK key preparedness and resilience functions, I cover this in this statement.

***The FCO's role concerning UK key preparedness and resilience functions and overseas crises***

18. The FCO's role in January 2020 was to lead HM Government's global diplomatic network to advance British interests and act for the people of the UK around the world, supporting all HM Government activity overseas. As such, the FCO was the lead government department within HM Government for providing information and advice concerning international affairs and working with international partners, and in

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<sup>3</sup> Now Lord Hague of Richmond, PC FRSL

<sup>4</sup> Now Lord Hammond of Runnymede, PC

<sup>5</sup> Now His Majesty's Government following the accession of King Charles III.

formulating international policy.

19. The FCO was the lead government department for consular and crisis support to British nationals overseas. I describe this in further detail in Section 8 of this statement.
20. In January 2020, there were (and are) 14 UK Overseas Territories. The FCO was the lead government department for the Overseas Territories.

### ***The FCO's objectives***

21. The FCO's role as described above was reflected in the FCO's Annual Report and Accounts for 2019-2020 [TD1/1-108] (and thus was the case on 21 January 2020), fulfilled through three over-arching objectives, which were to:
  - 21.1 'Protect our people' – utilising the UK's hard power expertise to protect UK citizens and the UK's allies through its cyber expertise, P5 status<sup>6</sup> and membership of NATO, to counter terrorism, prevent weapons proliferation, counter malicious cyber activity, and tackle state and non-state threats.
  - 21.2 'Project our influence and demonstrate diplomatic leadership' – advancing UK interests by protecting and promoting the UK's values, influence and soft power (a term understood to mean the range of cultural, economic and other assets of attraction and influence available to the UK compared to other countries, including the English language). Working through the rules-based international system, with partners, to make the world safer and fairer by supporting human rights, democracy, good governance, the rule of law, and preventing and resolving conflict.
  - 21.3 'Promote our prosperity' – by projecting the UK as a connected, innovative and active global economy, ensuring it is an attractive investment destination, opening overseas markets, driving economic reform, championing UK business, and enhancing global free trade through key international bodies.

### **Section 6: Structures, Governance and risk management in the FCO**

22. In this section of my statement, I explain the FCO's structures, governance and approach to risk management. I note the Inquiry's request for a description of the FCO's development between 2009 and 2020. While there were changes to those

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<sup>6</sup> "P5" status here refers to the UK's status as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

holding Ministerial and senior leadership roles during this period (i.e. the Module One Period), there were no material changes to the FCO's internal structures and governance relevant to Module One of the Inquiry. I therefore provide a snapshot of the FCO's structures and governance in January 2020. I outline briefly changes to the FCO's approach to risk management during the period from 2009 to January 2020. For completeness, though not relevant to the UK's preparedness and resilience functions, I also outline the 'Machinery of Government' ("**MoG**") changes which the FCO underwent during this period.

23. The FCO's Ministerial team was headed by the FCO Secretary of State. In January 2020<sup>7</sup>, the FCO Secretary of State was the Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP. Mr Raab had been appointed by then Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, as FCO Secretary of State on 24 July 2019.<sup>8</sup>
24. As FCO Secretary of State, Mr Raab had overall responsibility for the work of the FCO.
25. The FCO Secretary of State was supported by a team of Ministers.
26. The FCO Ministerial team was supported by FCO officials. The most senior civil servant in the FCO in January 2020 was the then Permanent under Secretary of State ("**PUS**"), Sir Simon McDonald.<sup>9</sup>
27. As PUS, Sir Simon was responsible for the day-to-day management of the FCO and he served as its Accounting Officer. Additionally, as PUS, Sir Simon chaired various boards in the FCO (described in further detail below) and was head of HM Diplomatic Service.
28. Sir Simon was supported in his leadership role by six DGs (civil service grade Senior Civil Service 3). Each DG was responsible for overseeing the work of Directorates – a Directorate is an operational unit ordinarily led by a Director (Civil Service grade Senior Civil Service 2).
29. Some Directorates in the FCO were responsible for a particular region of the world, in which case the person in charge of the Directorate would be known as the geographical

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<sup>7</sup> I have not listed all those who held Ministerial or Senior Civil Service leadership roles in the FCO between 2009 and 2020 but have named individual office-holders where relevant throughout this statement.

<sup>8</sup> For completeness, I note that Mr Raab remained in post as FCO (and then FCDO) Secretary of State until 15 September 2021, when he was replaced by the Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP as Secretary of State.

<sup>9</sup> Now Lord McDonald of Salford, GCMG, KCVO.

Director for that region – for example, the Asia-Pacific Director. Geographical Directors were also responsible for the work of the FCO's Posts in that region. Other Directorates were responsible for cross-cutting (or 'thematic') matters, such as consular services or national security, or were responsible for an FCO corporate function, such as human resources or finance.

30. The FCO Secretary of State, as the most senior Minister in the FCO, was ultimately responsible for the decisions made by the FCO. Reflecting the considerable number of areas for which he was responsible, the FCO Secretary of State was supported by his Ministerial team who had allocated portfolios. The most important and significant decisions were, however, taken by the FCO Secretary of State.
31. The FCO Secretary of State was also supported by a number of special advisers or "SPADs". SPADs are temporary political advisers employed as civil servants to provide political advice and support that would generally be outside the remit of the Civil Service.

#### ***The FCO's global network***

32. During the period covered by this statement, the UK was represented overseas through the FCO's global network of British High Commissions in Commonwealth countries and British Embassies in non-Commonwealth countries ("Posts"). Larger countries had one or more subordinate Posts – usually Deputy High Commissions, British Consulates-General or Consulates – which reported to the High Commission or Embassy in the capital. The High Commissioner or Ambassador in overall charge of the UK's diplomatic presence in a country, which might involve one or more Posts, was referred to as the 'Head of Mission'. The person in charge of a subordinate Post such as a Consulate-General, was referred to as the 'Head of Post'. The FCO also delivered its policy priorities through its representation to, and relationships with, multilateral institutions (e.g. the UK's Missions to the United Nations ("UN") in New York and Geneva, and the UK Delegation to NATO in Brussels).
33. The FCO represented all parts of the UK, ensuring the international interests of the devolved nations (i.e. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) were represented, delivered and advanced.
34. In January 2020, 34 HM Government partners (i.e. other HM Government departments and agencies) were based on the FCO's global platform (i.e. they used it for their overseas operations), including the Department for International Trade ("DIT"), DFID,



the Home Office and the British Council. The network comprised 280 Posts, including ten at multilateral organisations, such as the UN, in 178 countries and territories.

### ***FCO Structural changes***

35. The FCO was subject to the following MoG changes between 11 June 2009 and 21 January 2020.
- 35.1 On 1 April 2011, the Overseas Passport Service was transferred from the FCO to HM Passport Office (“**HMPO**”), an executive agency of the Home Office [TD1/121]. The FCO’s overseas passport processing centres continued to process UK passport applications and issue UK passports to overseas applicants, operating under HMPO’s authority, until all the work was repatriated to the UK in 2014.
- 35.2 On 14 July 2016, staff from the FCO’s Europe Directorate and the UK’s Permanent Representation<sup>10</sup> to the EU in Brussels (“**UKRep Brussels**”), as well as staff from the Cabinet Office’s Europe Unit were combined to form a new Department for Exiting the European Union (“**DEXEU**”) [TD1/225 - 227]. DEXEU’s role was to oversee preparations for the withdrawal of the UK from the EU and lead work to establish the future relationship between the UK and the EU. Following the UK’s exit from the EU on 31 January 2020, DEXEU was dissolved and the FCO assumed responsibility for coordinating EU Member State engagement on EU negotiation issues [TD1/340]. Around 100 staff moved from DEXEU to the FCO; some were FCO staff who had moved to DEXEU when it was established in 2016.
36. The above MoG changes did not affect the FCO’s remit with regard to the matters covered in Module One of the Inquiry.

### ***FCO governance***

37. As noted above, the PUS, and his team of senior civil servants, was responsible for advising FCO Ministers and ensuring that their policy decisions were enacted. Additionally, the PUS and the senior civil service leadership of the FCO had a number of responsibilities relating to the corporate functions of the FCO. These were essentially

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<sup>10</sup> The UK’s diplomatic mission to the EU was described as a Permanent Representation while the UK was a member of the EU. Since the UK left the EU, the UK’s diplomatic mission is described as a Permanent Mission.

discharged through several boards and committees, notably:

- 37.1 Supervisory Board – the Supervisory Board (chaired by the FCO Secretary of State) was established in December 2011 [TD1/178] and met at least once each financial year thereafter. It provided collective strategic leadership, advising on strategic and high-level operational issues affecting the FCO. Alongside the FCO Secretary of State, members of the Supervisory Board also included FCO Ministers, the PUS, the Chief Operating Officer, the Finance Director, the FCO's non-executive directors, and at least one other DG on rotation.
- 37.2 Management Board – the Management Board would ordinarily be chaired by the PUS and would in general meet monthly. It provided corporate leadership to the FCO by delivering the policies and services decided by Ministers. It comprised DGs, and certain Directors and Non-Executive Directors.
- 37.3 Executive Committee – the Executive Committee (“**ExCo**”) was made up of the executive members of the FCO Management Board and met weekly. It had delegated authority to make decisions on certain issues, including strategic choices and challenges relating to sensitive or time-bound issues, as well as decisions relating to the day-to-day running of the FCO as a department (including human resources, budget and resourcing issues), emerging issues, risks and crises. ExCo would ordinarily be chaired by the PUS and consisted of DGs and certain Directors.
- 37.4 Network Board – the One HMG Overseas Network Board was chaired by the FCO's Chief Operating Officer and met quarterly. It was attended by chief operating officers or senior officials with similar roles from the main large government departments, agencies and organisations represented overseas, including the Home Office, MOD, DFID, DIT, HM Revenue and Customs, the British Council, and the National Crime Agency, as well as HM Treasury and the Cabinet Office. The Network Board provided a forum to coordinate HM Government activity overseas and enable the FCO to operate the One HMG platform overseas efficiently and effectively. The Network Board was essential for resolving shared challenges and helping set the strategic direction for HM Government's work overseas, including in reminding all departments to encourage their staff to engage collegiately in Posts' crisis preparedness and crisis response operations under the authority of the Head of Mission. The Network Board also reviewed risks from the FCO's risk registers relevant to the One HMG

platform, and how the FCO and other departments could discharge their duty of care towards staff overseas.

37.5 Audit and Risk Assurance Committee – a Non-Executive Director chaired the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee<sup>11</sup> (“ARAC”) and its membership comprised two further independent members. It met five times a year. The FCO’s Chief Operating Officer, a National Audit Office Director, FCO Head of Internal Audit, FCO Finance Director and other Directors would attend as required. ARAC supported the Management Board and PUS as Accounting Officer by advising on the effectiveness of arrangements for governance, risk management and internal control. It reviewed the comprehensiveness, reliability and integrity of assurances provided to the Management Board and PUS. It had no executive responsibilities. I provide further detail on the role of ARAC in risk management in paragraph 39 below.

#### ***FCO approach to risk management***

38. Throughout the Module One Period risk management was embedded into the FCO’s business planning systems with identified risk owners. There was a hierarchy of risk registers which were reviewed systematically and there were clearly-defined processes for escalating risks to the FCO’s Management Board and its subcommittees. Major projects, including in the corporate area, had their own risk matrices and management plans.

39. In January 2020 [TD1/45] the FCO had a three-level risk management framework:

39.1 Top Risk Register (“TRR”): The TRR contained 25-30 major, urgent, risks that posed a significant threat to the FCO’s ability to deliver its policy and operational objectives. ARAC and ExCo considered the TRR on a quarterly basis. The Management Board and Supervisory Board also reviewed Top Risks formally at least twice per year. Furthermore, Directors were also challenged on management of any risks on the TRR for which they were responsible at the twice-yearly impact challenge session on FCO priority outcomes led by the Strategy Director. The TRR was presented as a ‘heat map’, assessing risks’ likelihood and potential impact, in order to identify those risks most urgently requiring the attention of the Management Board and its committees. The heat map was supported by a

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<sup>11</sup> This committee was called the Audit and Risk Committee until 2015, but its remit remained broadly similar throughout the period covered by this statement.

detailed analysis of each risk, including whether it could be managed or mitigated within existing resources or required additional resource.

39.2 Bubbling-Under Risk Register (“**BURR**”): The BURR typically contained forthcoming risks that were not yet significant enough to be included in the TRR, but needed to be brought to the attention of the FCO’s Management Board. Risks on the BURR were ‘on the horizon’ risks of lower likelihood of occurring. They required monitoring at an organisational level because they could escalate in significance

39.3 Post and Directorate risk registers: Heads of Mission and Directors managed and were accountable for risks within their Post or Directorate. Directors escalated risks, if necessary, to the TRR or the BURR. Directors were required to update their entries for the TRR on a quarterly basis ahead of discussion by ARAC and ExCo.

## **Section 7: The FCO’s preparedness and resilience for business continuity in the event of emergencies**

40. In this section of my statement, I outline the plans and processes which the FCO had in place for business continuity in the event of emergencies.

41. In the event of an incident which disrupted the FCO’s normal operations, the FCO’s business continuity objectives were to maintain the delivery of key services in the UK and overseas in support of its departmental objectives, as described in paragraph 21, and to recover effectively afterwards. The PUS had responsibility for the FCO’s business continuity. In January 2020 this responsibility was discharged by the FCO’s then Chief Operating Officer, Peter Jones. The Business Continuity Manager in the Chief Operating Officer’s Office was responsible for the FCO’s Business Continuity Management Policy [TD1/354 - 355]. In the event of an emergency, the PUS was responsible for activating the FCO UK business continuity plan. Overseas, Heads of Mission were responsible for activating individual Post business continuity plans.

42. The FCO had an overarching Business Continuity Management plan for its UK offices [TD1/356 - 365]. FCO Directors in the UK were responsible for business continuity planning and preparedness within their Directorate. Each Director was supported by a business continuity champion. Each Directorate was required to have its own Directorate business continuity plan, for which guidance and a template were available on the FCO’s Intranet [TD1/366 - 373]. Directorates were required to review and test their business continuity plan annually and Directors were required to confirm this in their Annual Consolidated Certificate of Assurance (“**ACCA**”) [TD1/354 - 355].

43. Heads of Mission were responsible for business continuity planning and preparedness in their Post [TD1/354 - 355]. Every Post was required to have a business continuity plan, for which a template was provided on the FCO's Intranet [TD1/366 - 373]. The business continuity plan was annexed to the Post's Crisis Management Plan, which I describe further in paragraphs 67 to 68 below. Posts were required to test their emergency equipment monthly, telephone trees quarterly and their business continuity plans annually. Heads of Mission were required to confirm this had been carried out in their ACCA.

***Planning and preparedness for business continuity in the event of a pandemic***

44. The FCO's Business Continuity Management Plan and Post and Directorate business continuity plans were intended to ensure continuity of essential services following any incident that disrupted or threatened to disrupt the FCO's operations. They were designed to be applicable to a range of potential eventualities, and not tailored to a specific type of incident. The FCO's business continuity plan did, however, include annexes with guidance for some types of incident, including an annex entitled "Pandemic roles and responsibilities", which indicated which part of the FCO would be responsible for support to staff and British nationals overseas, and internal and external communications in response to a pandemic [TD1/374 - 377]. Following Exercise Winter Willow in 2007, which I describe further in paragraph 100, the FCO issued advice to its Posts on business continuity and contingency planning for an influenza pandemic, which was updated most recently during the Module One Period in 2017 [TD1/378 - 391].
45. While falling outside the Module One Period, I should note that the FCO's then Chief Operating Officer led a 'table-top' exercise on 5 March 2020 to test the FCO's preparedness for the Covid-19 pandemic [TD1/392 - 404].

**Section 8: The FCO's preparedness and resilience for crises overseas**

46. In this section of my statement, I explain the FCO's role in planning, readiness and preparedness in respect of emerging crises overseas.
47. At the outset I should explain that the FCO's approach to a crisis was set out in its 'Crisis Management Doctrine' ("**Crisis Doctrine**"). The Crisis Doctrine was updated periodically and the version in place in January 2020 is that which had been published in December 2019 [TD1/405 - 427]. All references to and quotations from the FCO's Crisis Doctrine in this statement refer to that version unless otherwise specified.

48. The Crisis Doctrine defined a crisis for the FCO as “a specific and exceptional mode of operation, outside of normal business, caused by an event or situation which overwhelms the FCO’s ability to operate as normal” [TD1/405 - 427].

***The FCO’s role as lead government department for consular and crisis work overseas***

49. As noted in paragraph 19 above, the FCO was the lead government department for HM Government’s consular and overseas crisis work.
50. This responsibility was reflected in the FCO’s Foreign Policy Priority outcomes in 2019-2020 [TD1/428 - 429] as ‘FPPO Objective 1’ which is summarised in the 19/20 Annual Report [TD1/13] as follows:

*“- Stand up for British citizens overseas by providing high quality, accessible consular services globally, focussed on those most in need.*

*- Reduce preventable incidents affecting British people overseas through collaboration with partners and governments.*

*- Respond rapidly to all overseas crises, leading cross-government action.”*

51. The key elements of the FCO’s role as the lead government department for consular and crisis work overseas were as follows:

51.1 Providing consular services globally to British nationals overseas, with support ranging from issuing emergency travel documents to providing support to British nationals and their families affected by crises overseas, including acts of terrorism, natural disasters and the collapse of airlines and tour operators; and

51.2 Issuing travel advice to inform British nationals so that individuals could make decisions about travelling abroad. The purpose of providing advice was thus to assist British nationals in making their own decisions about international travel. In this context, I should note that FCO Travel Advice is advisory only. Any decision to travel, to stay in or leave a country is for British nationals to take.

***Parameters of the FCO’s role in crisis management overseas***

52. The FCO’s Crisis Doctrine stated that the FCO was likely to be the lead government department for a crisis overseas which:

*“- Threatens or involves serious damage to the human welfare or security of a significant*

*number of British or other eligible persons overseas or severe disruption to their ability to travel, leading to an increased requirement for assistance and advice, including consular assistance;*

- Threatens or involves a serious impact on UK strategic interests requiring an extraordinary, coordinated foreign policy response, working with other UK Government departments and external organisations;*
- Threatens or involves serious damage to the human welfare, security or environment of a UK Overseas Territory;*
- Attracts high levels of parliamentary, media and public interest requiring coordinated, consistent and effective communications from across the FCO and wider UK Government.”*

**[TD1/408]**

53. While noting that “the type of crisis that the FCO is called upon to manage is constantly changing”, and that “the FCO crisis response doctrine is designed to be flexible and to adapt to this”, the Crisis Doctrine identified the following as types of crisis the FCO faced most frequently:

53.1 overseas terrorist incidents;

53.2 situations where large numbers of British people require assistance (ranging from British people facing exceptional travel disruption through to an evacuation from a conflict zone);

53.3 natural disasters;

53.4 incidents involving UK Overseas Territories;

53.5 overseas political crises; and,

53.6 on occasion, incidents within the UK especially with a significant overseas aspect

**[TD1/409].**

54. The Crisis Doctrine further noted that the following fell outside the definition of an FCO-led crisis:

*“- A humanitarian disaster overseas which does not involve significant impact on British or eligible persons or UK strategic interests (beyond the provision of humanitarian assistance) will usually be led by the Department for International Development (DFID),*

*but the lead for such an event should always be agreed between the FCO and DFID.”*

*- An open-ended issue or situation where a longer term response will be required. This may require the restructuring of the organisation to address the issues.”*

[TD1/408]

### ***The development of FCO's approach to crisis management***

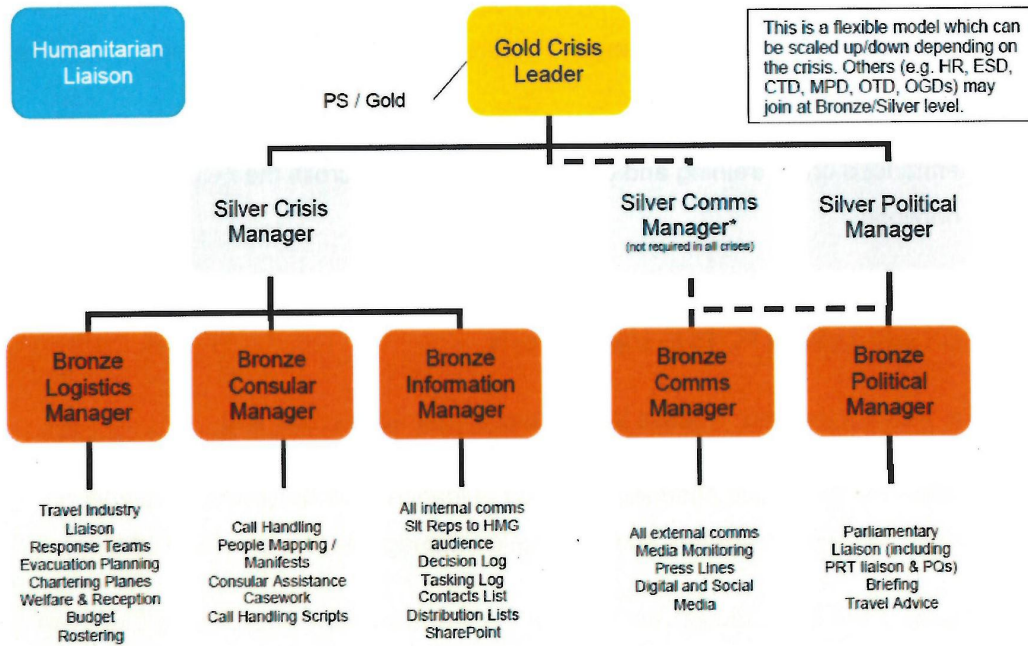
55. The FCO's structures, processes, planning and preparedness to support British nationals in crises overseas were overseen by the Consular Crisis Department (“**CCD**”), which later became the Crisis Management Department (“**CMD**”), within the FCO's Consular Directorate.
56. The FCO's development of a crisis preparedness doctrine and accountability for professionalising and regularly testing the FCO's crisis preparedness began following the Indian Ocean tsunami in December 2004 with a significant programme of work, in which the UK Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee (“**FAC**”) took a close interest [TD1/430 - 478]. This resulted in the establishment of:
  - 56.1 a dedicated CCD working out of a purpose-built crisis centre in the FCO's offices in King Charles Street in London;
  - 56.2 Rapid Deployment Teams (“**RDTs**”), teams of trained FCO staff on standby to deploy at a minimum of 24 hours' notice to support a Post in helping British nationals affected by a crisis;
  - 56.3 the London Emergency Response team, a cadre of trained FCO staff volunteers who were on call to provide surge call handling capacity in London in the event of a crisis; and
  - 56.4 agreed standards for crisis preparedness and a regular testing regime monitored and operated by CCD of civil contingency and crisis plans for a set of different scenarios (including a pandemic) [TD1/479 - 496] for all Posts around the world.
57. In 2011, following the challenges faced in the evacuation of British nationals from Libya during the Arab Spring, the FCO undertook a review of its arrangements for leading the evacuations of British nationals in a crisis [TD1/497 - 569]. The review considered the contingency arrangements that the FCO in the UK and all Posts had in place, and the triggers and procedures for moving to a crisis footing and mounting evacuation operations. As a result of the review's findings, the FCO made significant changes to its



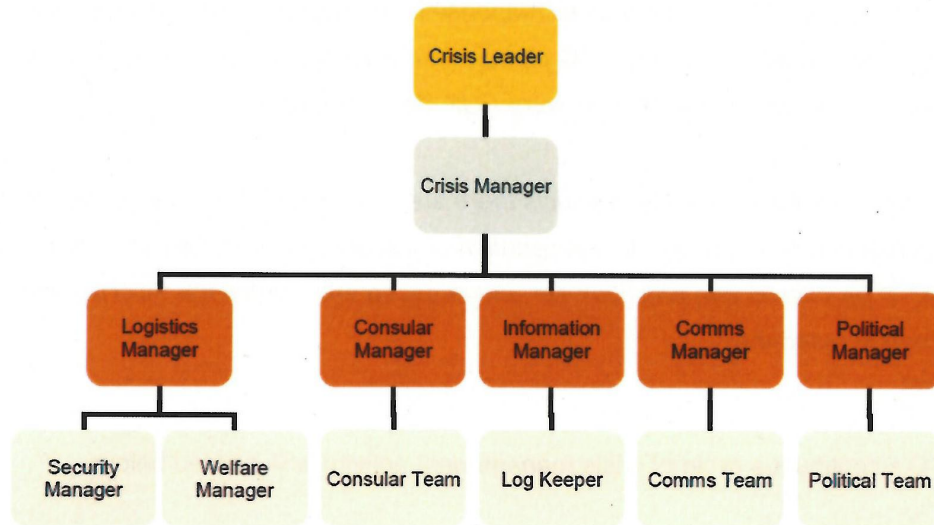
processes, structures, planning and preparedness for crises overseas including introducing:

- 57.1 a clear command structure in the FCO in London (the “**Gold, Silver, Bronze**” model);
  - 57.2 an ‘all risks’ approach to crisis preparedness, in other words, the expectation was that the FCO would have the right practices, procedures, systems and structures to be able to respond to a range of different crises rather than having a different plan for each type of crisis;
  - 57.3 enhanced crisis training and exercising capability across the FCO’s global network;
  - 57.4 an expanded cadre of trained FCO volunteers to assist the UK crisis response and UK and regional RDTs to support Posts;
  - 57.5 a ‘lessons learned’ process to take place after each crisis; and
  - 57.6 reflecting the above changes, updated guidance, checklists and templates on roles and responsibilities and information management in a crisis [TD1/584].
58. As a result of the 2011 review, the remit of the then Consular Crisis Department was expanded to oversee all work across the FCO on crisis planning and preparedness (although ownership of crisis risks remained with geographical and thematic directorates). The department was renamed CMD and the department’s staffing and budgets were increased to reflect its expanded remit.
59. After 2011, the FCO’s crisis management systems and processes continued to evolve in the light of lessons identified during further crises. A significant development was the introduction in 2013 of a new IT system, Crisis Hub [TD1/714] and [TD1/767], which enabled FCO staff around the world and colleagues in other HM Government departments to access and update the same information in real time during crises, and British nationals to request assistance by text message and on-line.
60. The FCO’s resilience to respond to concurrent or multiple sequential crises was increased further in 2017: in implementing lessons learned from Hurricanes Irma and Maria in the Caribbean, the FCO’s crisis surge capacity in the UK was increased by ensuring that 20% of all FCO staff in London were crisis trained, thereby providing an additional crisis ready resource [TD1/851]. Nevertheless, in broad terms, the crisis

management approach which the FCO adopted in 2011 remained in place up to and beyond January 2020. The diagram below, which is included in the June 2020 Crisis Doctrine [TD1/1020], illustrates the Gold, Silver, Bronze crisis structure, as used by the FCO in London.



61. The diagram below, which is included in the June 2020 Crisis Doctrine [TD1/1021], illustrates the Gold, Silver, Bronze crisis structure, as used by the FCO at its Posts.



### ***FCO crisis management principles***

62. As the Crisis Doctrine set out, the FCO's crisis management approach was based on a cycle of effective preparation, response, recovery and continuous improvement. The key principles were:

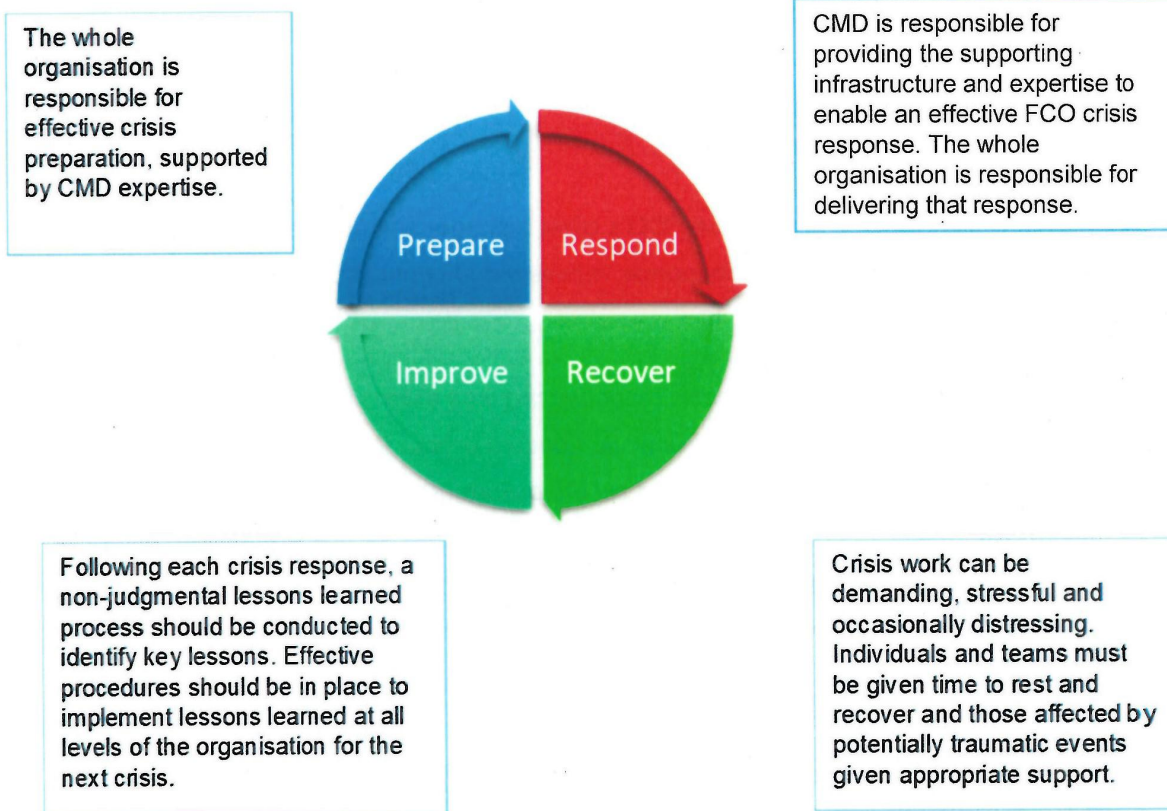
*"90% preparation: An effective crisis response requires extensive preparation and should make up approximately 90% of crisis work. Leaders across the organisation have a particular responsibility to lead this and set the culture of preparedness for individuals, directorates and posts. Geographical directors own the risk for preparation and response in their region of responsibility, Heads of Mission own the risk for their post and CMD is responsible for supporting, developing and promoting the crisis preparedness of the FCO.*

- *Over respond and pare back: if a crisis appears likely it is better to move into crisis and surge resources into a response, rather than waiting and then having to catch up with events.*
- *Clear objectives, roles, responsibilities and accountability: A senior responsible officer sets the direction of the crisis response supported by a clear structure and understood by all.*

- *Whole of Mission Response: a crisis response is the highest priority effort for the FCO. Overseas all staff on the FCO platform must participate. Every response must include relevant departments from across UK Government.*
- *Continuous Improvement: during crisis there are always elements that go well and things that can be improved. It is essential that lessons are identified and issues in systems, processes and practices are addressed to ensure that the FCO remains effective in response.”*

[TD1/410]

63. The FCO’s continuous cycle of crisis management activity is illustrated below:



[TD1/410]

**FCO crisis resources**

64. As described in paragraph 58 above, CMD oversaw the FCO’s work to prepare for crises. In January 2020, CMD had an established network of Regional Crisis Advisers (“RCAs”) based at Posts who provided advice to Posts in preparing for and managing

crises. The Crisis Doctrine set out that CMD was also able to provide “enhanced support” in the UK, whereby its expertise was drawn upon to advise and support FCO Directorates where there was a reasonable expectation that the department would need to enter crisis mode [TD1/425].

65. In addition to resources from CMD, FCO Directorates in the UK could draw on the following resources during a crisis:
  - 65.1 London Response Team (“LRT”), a cadre of crisis-trained FCO staff who were rostered on-call on average one week in every five for immediate deployment in the UK to support a crisis response. In January 2020, there were approximately 200 active LRT staff with 25 on call at any given time.
  - 65.2 Directorate Crisis List (“DCL”) staff. From 2018, 20% of staff in each of the FCO’s Directorates in the UK were required to be crisis trained and Directors were obliged to release these staff to support a crisis response if the PUS directed that such additional surge capacity was required. In January 2020, there were approximately 500 members of FCO staff on DCLs.
66. Overseas, in addition to staff from the Post itself, depending on the scale and nature of the crisis, the following support was available during a crisis:
  - 66.1 RDTs. In January 2020, there were approximately 220 RDT members across the FCO’s global network, on five regional hub rosters, with up to ten RDT volunteers on standby for each regional roster at any given time, totalling up to 50 volunteers on standby at any given time across the FCO’s global network.
  - 66.2 Staff from neighbouring Posts to provide surge capacity.
  - 66.3 The FCO’s Consular Contact Centre, with teams in Malaga and Ottawa, combined with outsourced call handling services if required.
  - 66.4 Wider HM Government expertise – depending on the scale and nature of the crisis, staff from other parts of HM Government, for example MOD Operational Liaison and Reconnaissance Teams (OLRTs), the UK Police and DFID, provided support on the ground or from the UK.
  - 66.5 Non-Government agencies, for example the British Red Cross.

***Crisis planning, training and exercising***

67. Every Post was required to have an up to date crisis management plan (“**CMP**”), reviewed and tested at least once a year and signed off by the Head of Mission and the geographical Director in the UK. Some Posts were also required to maintain more advanced plans for specific risks, for example an evacuation plan (with supporting operational plans and trigger-point documents) for countries with a high risk of conflict. Geographical Directorates were responsible for maintaining these, working with CMD and stakeholders across HM Government, in particular the MOD and DFID.
68. Until 2011, Posts were required to maintain and test a pandemic crisis plan. However, when the all risks approach to crisis preparedness was adopted in 2011, Posts were no longer required to have different plans for different crisis scenarios. Thus, from 2011, Posts were not required to maintain and test a separate pandemic crisis plan.
69. The FCO in the UK and its Posts regularly tested their crisis preparedness through ‘semi-live’ exercises (responding to a plausible real-life situation, with a simulated real-life operational timeline) and ‘table-top’ exercises (structured discussions of crisis roles and responsibilities in response to a plausible real-life situation). Every Post was required to undertake at least one semi-live exercise to test its crisis preparedness each year.
70. CMD provided guidance on conducting crisis exercises, including the development of semi-live and table-top crisis exercise scenarios. These scenarios reflected the most frequently occurring crises affecting British nationals (overseas terrorist incidents, major transport accidents and natural disasters). While Posts had used avian flu scenarios to test their pandemic plans prior to the move to the all risks CMP in 2011 [TD1/1022 - 1028], given their relative infrequency and limited impact on British nationals, the all risks CMP exercise scenarios did not include international health emergencies.
71. CMD also conducted regional semi-live and table-top exercises, involving staff in the relevant geographical Directorate in the UK and Posts in the region. In 2019, CMD conducted ten regional semi-live crisis exercises in Bangladesh, Cayman, China, EU countries, India, Jamaica, Malaysia, Morocco, Nepal and Singapore.
72. CMD was responsible for crisis training. In addition to initial and refresher training for RDT, LRT and DCL staff (as described in paragraphs 65 - 66 above) CMD ran regular crisis leadership courses for senior staff in the UK and those preparing to undertake overseas postings.

***Monitoring emerging crises: Crisis watch and crisis mode***

73. The FCO's Crisis Doctrine noted that some crises had a rapid onset, for example the result of an overseas terrorist incident or plane crash. In such cases, the FCO's 24/7 Global Response Centre would manage the initial response, assess the scale of the incident and make an initial judgement on whether a crisis response was likely to be required. However, for slower moving situations, the FCO's Posts and geographical Directorates in the UK were responsible for monitoring emerging issues and providing early warning to CMD, who would provide advice on the best approach including a move into "crisis watch" or full "crisis mode".
74. The FCO's Crisis Doctrine set out that crisis watch was an alert state which Posts could move into to respond to developing situations. Being in crisis watch allowed an FCO Post to signal to London that an event of significance was underway that could lead to a full crisis. Crisis watch situation reports ("**sitreps**") were used to keep London informed of events. If the situation continued to worsen, Posts would consider a move into full crisis mode.
75. A move into full crisis mode overseas would be taken when the risk of a Directorate or Post being overwhelmed was unacceptably high (or had already occurred). The Crisis Doctrine stated further that the effect of moving into a crisis mode of operations (as defined by the Crisis Doctrine) was that existing FCO resource (principally in the form of its diplomatic (civil service) and overseas locally engaged staff) could be redirected towards dealing with that crisis.
76. The Crisis Doctrine also set out that the decision to move into crisis mode was, in respect of the FCO in the UK, one made by the PUS, having considered a recommendation from CMD duty Senior Point of Contact and the relevant geographical or thematic lead (normally the relevant Director). The decision to move into crisis mode should follow the overarching principle of 'over respond and pare back'. By agreeing to move into crisis mode in London, the PUS would be signalling the importance of the issue to the whole of the FCO, allowing the use of additional staff resources from the FCO crisis volunteer cadres, and approving the use of the crisis budget to pay for anything directly relating to the crisis. In respect of a crisis outside the UK which required a crisis response from an FCO Post or network of Posts in a country, the decision to move into a crisis mode of operation would be taken by the relevant FCO Head of Mission.

## **Section 9: Information dissemination and communications during a crisis**

77. In this section of my statement, I describe how the FCO disseminated information and communicated with the rest of HM Government generally and during emerging crises overseas.

### ***Diplomatic Telegrams***

78. As noted in Section 5 of this statement, the FCO was the lead government department in providing information and advice concerning international affairs. One way in which the FCO would disseminate information and advice on international affairs to HM Government was through Diplomatic Telegrams ("**DipTels**"). I exhibit a guidance note which explains DipTels in further detail [TD1/1029 - 1037].

79. The FCO's Posts used DipTels to influence the development of HM Government's policy through analysis, comment and recommendations on international events. Posts also sent DipTels reporting on overseas civil emergencies, whole system emergencies and health emergencies in which there was an actual or potential UK interest. Such DipTels were not intended to substitute data and modelling by the World Health Organization ("**WHO**") or other agencies, or epidemiological data gathered by the Joint Biosecurity Centre ("**JBC**"), but provided local context and an assessment of the impact on UK interests. For example, on 20 January 2020, the British Embassy in Beijing issued a DipTel [TD1/1038 - 1040] reporting on the new strain of Coronavirus originating in Wuhan, noting the mass travel around Lunar New Year as a potential catalyst for the spread of the virus, and summarising the response of the Chinese Government.

80. Similarly, DipTels were sent by the UK's diplomatic missions to international organisations, such as the UK's Permanent Mission to the UN in Geneva ("**UKMis Geneva**"), which used DipTels to report on the actions of the WHO in its response to international health emergencies. For example, on 23 January 2020, UKMis Geneva sent a DipTel [TD1/1041 - 1042] providing insight and analysis into the WHO's emergency committee meeting on the novel Coronavirus the previous day.

### ***Situation reports***

81. The FCO's Crisis Doctrine required that, while in crisis mode, the FCO in London and its Overseas Posts should issue regular sitreps. The Crisis Doctrine stated that sitreps were intended to:

*"convey a single version of the information relevant to the crisis in a simplified format to multiple stakeholders who may need to perform duties in support of the response or*



*who may be impacted. A sitrep will provide a timely, relevant and accurate overview of what has, is, and will be happening operationally (and the outcomes/impacts of these operations) as well as all support activities and external influences”.*

**[TD1/420]**

82. The sitrep writer, a designated role in FCO crisis operations, compiled the sitrep using updates provided by different teams in the crisis operation. The sitrep was usually approved by the FCO staff member acting in the 'Gold' role, or if Gold was unavailable, one of the crisis 'Silvers'. The sitrep was then circulated by email to all staff working on the crisis and those who had an operational need to know, including FCO ministerial private offices and other parts of HM Government with an interest.
83. In addition, as the Crisis Doctrine also set out, the Gold crisis leader in the FCO in London often produced a "Senior Readers Update" towards the end of the crisis shift, to give Ministers and other senior officials a summary of the latest position.
84. Concerning communications beyond the FCO during a crisis, the FCO Crisis Doctrine stated the following:

*“Crises are difficult, highly scrutinised communications environments with significant uncertainties. Accurate, consistent and timely communication across all FCO channels (FCO Travel Advice, press lines, social media, interviews, call handling scripts, internal communication to staff) is key in reassuring the public and stakeholders that the UK Government has gripped the issue and is actively protecting British people, eligible persons and UK interests...*

*Public messaging must above all be accurate, honest, updated regularly and consistent in the UK and overseas. If the Travel Advice is up to date it can be used across other platforms, helping to reduce public call-volumes. Any advice given to staff must be consistent with Travel Advice, social media updates and the latest call handling script.”*

**[TD1/422]**

85. The Crisis Doctrine noted the importance of having agreed HM Government strategic objectives, a coherent single-script narrative and active engagement with other parts of HM Government during crises.

### **Advice to Ministers**

86. FCO officials provided advice to Ministers and the FCO Secretary of State through written submissions and other formats, including, for emerging crises and fast-moving issues, through daily update paragraphs (using email). For example, on 15 January 2020, drawing on information provided by the FCO's Posts in China, FCO officials in London sent an update paragraph to Joint FCO and DFID Minister for Asia and the Pacific, Minister Heather Wheeler, reporting 41 cases of a novel Coronavirus in Wuhan connected to a seafood market [TD1/1043]. This update noted that at that point there was no evidence of human to human transmission. On 17 and 20 January, FCO officials sent further update paragraphs to Ministers and the FCO Secretary of State, reporting rising cases of the novel Coronavirus, including cases in Thailand and Japan, with some cases not directly linked to the seafood market in Wuhan, suggesting human to human transmission of the virus [TD1/1044 - 1048].

#### **Section 10: Forecasting and expert advice on emerging crises overseas**

87. In this section of my statement, I describe how the FCO used forecasting and expert advice in respect of its consular and crisis work, and geopolitical horizon scanning more broadly.

##### ***Forecasting and horizon-scanning***

88. As noted, the FCO had responsibility within HM Government for consular and crisis work with regard to British nationals overseas. I describe below the principal forecasting tool and expert advice used by the FCO in its crisis work.

89. From 2018 CMD used a crisis horizon scanning tool ("HST"), (which it had developed in-house) for risk management and early identification of crises overseas [TD1/1049 - 1054]. The HST was produced every six months and provided a comparative analysis of three key aspects important to crisis readiness:

89.1 Risk (considering the threats and likely incidents that might cause a crisis);

89.2 Vulnerability (level of exposure if an incident were to occur); and

89.3 Preparedness (if an incident were to occur, how prepared was the FCO and its Posts).

90. RCAs were responsible for inputting data into the HST drawing on their own assessments and those of Posts in their region, and external sources such as the United Nations insight database. As it drew on subjective judgements and was a

snapshot in time, it was intended as the starting point for an interrogation of the issues, rather than a definitive assessment of risk, preparedness or vulnerability.

91. The HST was useful in identifying broad trends and its comparative analysis informed CMD's prioritisation of preparedness work with Posts, including where to undertake semi-live exercises [TD1/1049 - 1054]. In October 2019, CMD undertook a review of the HST to ascertain whether the methodology was capturing the right type of information and whether it was accurate enough to inform crisis planning and resource decisions [TD1/1055 - 1082].

### ***Geopolitical horizon scanning***

92. Beyond DipTel reporting, the FCO undertook and shared with other parts of HM Government horizon scanning of geopolitical threats and opportunities drawing on internal and external expertise. One example of this was the annual "*The World in...*" reports, in which the FCO's Strategy Directorate set out its predictions for geopolitical trends and themes for the coming year. This product was established specifically to enable the FCO to support the National Security Council's ("**NSC**") planning for foreign policy issues in the year ahead. It was discussed by NSC at Officials level ("**NSC(O)**") annually in December or January, and shared with FCDO Ministers, the Prime Minister and officials across HM Government.
93. The "The World in 2020" report, which was circulated across HM Government on 13 January 2020, listed several "black swans", low likelihood but high impact country, regional and global scenarios for 2020. The global black swans included a global pandemic triggering protests, migration and recession.

### ***Expert advice***

94. Since 2002, the National Travel Health Network and Centre ("**NaTHNaC**") had been commissioned by Public Health England<sup>12</sup> ("**PHE**") to provide travel health advice to the British public. Throughout the Module One Period the FCO used data and advice from NaTHNaC, alongside other advice from PHE in planning for, preparing for and managing the risk to British nationals overseas of high consequence infectious diseases, epidemics and pandemics.
95. In paragraph 51.2 above, I explained the role of FCO Travel Advice. NaTHNaC was the source of information about outbreaks of high consequence infectious diseases,

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<sup>12</sup> Now the UK Health Security Agency ("**UKHSA**")

epidemics and pandemics within FCO Travel Advice. Concerning the use of NaTHNaC's information, the FCO's Travel Advice policy during this period [TD1/1083 - 1091] was that references to specific diseases or outbreaks should be included only if the public were contacting the FCO in large numbers for information or advice about an outbreak and/or there was a clear need to draw travellers' attention to a serious outbreak. In these instances, FCO Travel Advice linked to NaTHNaC information, using neutral language that did not duplicate NaTHNaC's advice. Where relevant, NHS England and Scotland health advice pages were also linked from the FCO's Travel Advice pages on the gov.uk website, where specific advice was relevant for travellers.

### **Section 11: The role of the FCO in working with international organisations on planning and preparedness for international health emergencies**

96. In this section of my statement, I explain the role of the FCO with regard to engaging and sharing information with the EU and WHO on international health emergencies. I should note that the end date of the period covered by this statement predates the UK's exit from the EU on 31 January 2020.
97. As an EU member state during the Module One Period, the UK cooperated and worked with the EU across all areas of competence. During this period, the UK was represented in the EU by UKRep Brussels. Officials from UKRep Brussels, working closely with and through officials from the Department of Health and Social Care ("DHSC"), contributed to EU-level Working Groups on preparedness and response for cross-border health threats, including the development of Decision No 1082/2013/EU on serious cross-border threats which established the EU Health Security Committee and the Early Warning and Response System [TD1/1092 - 1106]. These were the main EU fora for information sharing on cross border health threats. UKRep Brussels reported on EU meetings and developments to HM Government by DipTel.
98. DHSC was throughout the Module One Period (and remains) the lead government department for HM Government's relationship with international health institutions including the WHO. During the Module One Period, the UK's Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva and other FCO staff in UKMis Geneva engaged WHO officials and represented the UK at WHO meetings, drawing on advice from DHSC and other parts of HM Government. As described in paragraph 80 above, UKMis Geneva provided reports of WHO meetings and developments to HM Government by DipTel.

## **Section 12: Lesson learning by the FCO from past simulation exercises and near pandemic events**

99. In this section of my statement, I describe the lesson learning by the FCO from those HM Government simulation exercises identified as of particular interest by the Inquiry and the FCO's responses to crises overseas, to the extent that they are relevant to the UK's planning, preparedness and resilience for high-consequence infectious diseases, epidemics and pandemics.

### ***Learning from past HM Government simulation exercises***

#### *Exercise Winter Willow (for Pandemic Influenza) (January – February 2007)*

100. The FCO participated in Exercise Winter Willow, a large-scale, cross-HM Government simulation exercise to test the UK's preparedness for an influenza pandemic in January and February 2007. Senior staff from the FCO in the UK and its Posts participated in this exercise over several days, including attending exercise Cabinet Office Briefing Room meetings. Through partnering with the US State Department, the FCO considered some specific manifestations of a pandemic that would be relevant for diplomatic services around the world.

101. In March 2007, the FCO's Consular Directorate held a Winter Willow 'wash-up' session for senior staff from Posts. It considered how the lessons which Exercise Winter Willow had identified could be applied to the FCO's pandemic planning and preparedness. The briefing provided an opportunity for FCO Heads of Mission and Deputy Heads of Mission to consider how their Posts' planning and preparedness to support British nationals in the event of an avian flu or other pandemic could be strengthened [TD1/1107 - 1115]. Key learning included the need to be able to scale up call handling services quickly in the expectation of large call volumes from British nationals; improved guidance and capabilities for delivering services to British nationals remotely; and clearer messaging to British nationals in countries with higher avian flu risks about contingency planning.

102. Following Exercise Winter Willow, the FCO's civil contingency plans for its overseas network were significantly overhauled in 2007 to include specific pandemic plans and guidance [TD1/479 - 496] and the development of the 'Pandemic Roles and Responsibilities' annex to the FCO's Business Continuity Management Framework, which I reference in paragraph 44 above. Posts were required to exercise their Post pandemic plan regularly through table-top and semi-live exercise (I provide an example

of a table-top exercise conducted by CCD and the FCO's China Network [TD1/1022 - 1028] until this and other separate crisis plans were replaced by a single CMP when the FCO adopted the all risks approach to crisis preparedness, described in paragraph 57.2.

*Exercise Cygnus (for Pandemic Influenza) (October 2016)*

103. The FCO did not participate in Exercise Cygnus, a three-day cross-HM Government simulation exercise to test the UK's response to an influenza pandemic in 2016, as the simulation was focussed on the UK's domestic response to a pandemic [TD1/1116]. Two staff from CMD observed the exercise.

104. Of the lessons which Exercise Cygnus identified for HM Government, one was identified for the FCO to implement: "Consideration should be given to the impact of a pandemic influenza on British Nationals Overseas".

105. Following Exercise Cygnus, the FCO continued to prepare for a range of overseas crisis responses in accordance with its all risks approach, through the preparation of crisis management plans, and an extensive training and exercising programme, in order to test the FCO's global network's ability to respond to a major consular emergency overseas and on the evacuation or drawdown<sup>13</sup> of staff from FCO overseas posts.

106. As a recommendation of Exercise Cygnus, the FCO tested its large scale remote working capabilities through live exercises [TD1/1117 - 1118]. IT infrastructure improvements identified from those exercises, for example, increasing the resilience of the IT network to support remote working and power outages, were implemented as part of the FCO's 'Tech Overhaul' programme. Furthermore, the FCO's Consular and Human Resources Directorates undertook table-top exercises to test the department's pandemic preparedness.

*FCO participation in other HM Government simulation exercises*

107. Following an extensive search of the FCO's electronic records and examination of the official lists of participants for each exercise, to the best of the FCDO's knowledge, it appears that the FCO did not participate in any of the following domestically-focussed HM Government simulation exercises:

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<sup>13</sup> This is a term used in the FCDO (and previously in the FCO) to describe situations in which the FCDO, in exercising its duty of care towards its staff posted overseas, instructs UK-based staff and/or their dependants to leave a Post either temporarily or permanently.

- 107.1 Surge Capacity Exercise (for Ebola) (March 2015)
- 107.2 Preparedness and Review Workshop (for Ebola) (May 2015);
- 107.3 Exercise Valverde (for novel Coronavirus) (2015);
- 107.4 Exercise Alice (for MERS) (February 2016);
- 107.5 Exercise Northern Light (for Ebola) (May 2016);
- 107.6 Exercise Cygnet (for Pandemic Influenza) (August 2016);
- 107.7 Exercise Typhon (for Lassa) (February 2017);
- 107.8 PHE and APHA Workshop (for Avian and Pandemic Influenza) (October 2017);
- 107.9 Exercise Broad St (for Lassa and H7N9 Influenza) (January 2018);
- 107.10 Exercise Cerberus (for Avian Influenza) (February 2018); or
- 107.11 Exercise Pica (for Pandemic Influenza) (September 2018).

#### ***Lesson learning from crises overseas***

108. As outlined above, continuous improvement was an integral part of the FCO's crisis management cycle. Following the conclusion of each FCO crisis operation in the UK, CMD oversaw a lessons identification process with those involved in the UK and at Posts. This enabled all teams to contribute in a non-judgemental forum on what went well and what could be improved, focussing on how the FCO overall responded to the crisis rather than the actions of individuals. Posts, London Directorates and CMD were expected to implement the recommendations which CMD identified in the lessons learned report within a three to six month period. Where Posts were in crisis mode but the UK was not, they were expected to carry out a similar lessons identification exercise.

109. Most crises which the FCO handled were in relation to incidents which were contained in a specific country or region, and pertained to natural disasters or terrorist incidents. Lessons learned reports from these crises are therefore beyond the scope of Module One of the Inquiry. Below, however, I outline lessons which the FCO identified from its responses to the 2013-2016 West African Ebola epidemic and the 2014-2015 Zika virus epidemic, which are relevant to the UK key preparedness and resilience functions.

*2013-2016 Western African Ebola epidemic*

110. Although the FCO in the UK and its overseas Posts worked in response to Ebola in Western Africa throughout and beyond the duration of the epidemic, the FCO's UK crisis response started in autumn 2014 and was scaled back in mid-2015 in line with the evolving epidemiology. The lessons learned report covers the period of the UK crisis response.

111. The lessons learned report<sup>14</sup> noted that, unlike previous crises, the FCO's role had gone beyond its usual political and consular work, and included significant work to support HM Government's humanitarian, health and development response. Many of the organisational changes put in place following previous crises, particularly around staff agility, had had a positive effect on the FCO's response. However, the report recognised that the non-traditional nature of this crisis had challenged the FCO's crisis systems and structures. The FCO had not at first understood the likely trajectory of the crisis, hampered by the fact that the underlying dynamic had been the epidemiology of the virus, rather than a more traditional crisis driver for the FCO such as conflict or political unrest. I set out the four over-arching lessons from the FCO's lessons learned report below:

- i) *Leverage the FCO's strong diplomatic network, position in Whitehall and existing FCO and HMG expertise from the outset*

112. Throughout HM Government's Ebola response, the FCO took a convening and challenging role, providing specific targeted effort where it had the expertise and leverage to add value (e.g. the senior cross-HM Government 'huddle' format established at the FCO early in the response was recognised as an asset and continued throughout the urgent crisis phase over several months). While it was not the FCO's role to provide epidemiological expertise, the report assessed that, where international events or trends appeared to have the potential to turn into an international crisis threatening the UK's national interests, the FCO was well placed to adopt a challenge function to ensure the breadth of available evidence was considered properly across HM Government, and risks were identified and mitigated. The report recommended that the FCO's expertise to help gather and evaluate evidence, interrogate assumptions, identify risks to the UK, and scope options for action should be harnessed in a similar way in future international

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<sup>14</sup> This document has been provided separately to the Inquiry.



crises threatening the UK's national interests.

- ii) Identify FCO's strategic added value and objectives in a crisis and stand up a crisis task force with the relevant expertise and the flexibility to adapt to changes in objectives*

113. In the early months of the epidemic, the FCO and HM Government had viewed it as a public health and humanitarian issue, for which responsibility lay beyond the FCO. The FCO's initial attention was, therefore, on the consular implications of the epidemic. However, once HM Government re-assessed the nature of the Ebola crisis and the risk to the UK, the FCO moved to provide more strategic policy leadership through the FCO Secretary of State. The FCO was able to deliver the diplomatic support, political leverage and physical platform needed in Sierra Leone to enable an enormous scale-up in DFID and MOD delivery.

114. The review concluded that the FCO could have recognised its ability to deliver the international solutions required to respond effectively to Ebola earlier in the crisis. Once this was recognised, the FCO Ebola Taskforce pivoted effectively so that its objectives and activities were focussed on the specific areas of cross-HM Government activity where the FCO could add most value. Revisiting the FCO's crisis objectives at regular intervals enabled a much better prioritisation of FCO resource and staff time, including by identifying where work could be more effectively delivered with or through other parts of HM Government.

- iii) Prioritise strengthening relationships with key departments across HM Government at all levels*

115. The importance of strengthening existing networks and relationships across HM Government as a crisis emerged was identified as a lesson for the FCO and HM Government. Doing so early on in the Ebola epidemic would have enhanced the FCO's and HM Government's ability to identify quickly where the FCO could add value to HM Government's overall response, for example, through leveraging its diplomatic network.

- iv) Once task force objectives and resource needs have been defined, work closely with Directorates to source relevant expertise*

116. The report assessed that the FCO had built an Ebola Taskforce with the right mix of skills and experience, but the process could have been quicker. Initially, deploying staff from other parts of the FCO to the crisis response had been challenging because it was

unknown how long staff would be needed, or the nature of the work they would be doing. Clear direction from the FCO's leadership on staffing a crisis response was essential, as was consulting other parts of the FCO to understand and secure the breadth of skills and expertise required to deliver the taskforce's objectives.

#### *2015-2016 Zika virus epidemic*

117. In 2016, alongside DFID's humanitarian response, the FCO led HM Government's response to the 2015-2016 Zika virus epidemic in South and Central America through its global network. I outline three lessons relevant to the UK key preparedness and resilience functions, which were identified by the FCO's Zika Coordinator<sup>15</sup> below:

*i) Position the FCO early in the HM Government response*

118. The review noted that leadership within HM Government in response to an international health emergency could be fluid, especially where interconnected policy strands were dispersed across different parts of HM Government. The value of Cabinet Office's Civil Contingencies Secretariat ("CCS") quickly convening a cross-HM Government senior officials' group and coordinating cross-HM Government activities throughout the response was recognised. The appointment of a senior FCO Zika Coordinator in March 2016 enabled the FCO and DFID to agree parameters and pursue mutually aligned outcomes to support HM Government's response.

119. The review considered that the FCO's leverage of and collaboration with its strong international partnerships, combined with accurate source reporting, provided an authoritative evidence base for those leading the other elements of HM Government's international and domestic response.

*ii) Harness the expertise of the FCO's global network*

120. The review recognised that, learning from its response to the West African Ebola epidemic, the FCO had harnessed the expertise of its global network with speed and agility to shape and drive HM Government's response to this international health emergency. Through its overseas Posts, the FCO facilitated the rapid establishment of expert-to-expert scientific links on the virus, particularly in countries where DFID was not represented. Regular sitreps from Posts, for example in the FCO's Brazil network, were recognised by other HM Government departments as valuable in informing the UK's

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<sup>15</sup> This document has been provided separately to the Inquiry.

response.

121. There was, however, scope to improve the FCO's agility in the UK and its engagement with cross-HM Government crisis structures. In response, in 2017, the FCO developed a checklist of how it would respond internally in the event of a health emergency and how it would engage with cross-HM Government crisis management processes through the CCS [TD1/1119].

122. The report also recommended that the FCO adopted a clearly established "crisis-like" process, with standardised sitrep-type reporting and a dedicated senior FCO point of contact for HM Government engagement in an emerging international health emergency that had not reached the threshold for the FCO to enter crisis mode. Such an approach was adopted in the FCO's response to Covid-19 beyond the consular operations, notably in the FCO's work on the global Personal Protective Equipment ("PPE") and ventilator procurement operation.

*iii) Use FCO Travel Advice as a vehicle through which to disseminate accurate and timely public health information to British nationals overseas*

123. The FCO's role in providing timely travel advice, with FCO country web pages linking to NaTHNaC health advice on the epidemic, was recognised as important in ensuring that British nationals, whether residents or visitors overseas, were fully informed of the risks and mitigations so that they could make their own decisions about remaining in or travelling to countries affected by the Zika virus epidemic.

### **Section 13: Critical reflections on the FCO's preparedness and resilience for the Covid-19 pandemic**

124. In this section of my statement, I provide some reflections on the FCO's planning, preparedness and readiness for the Covid-19 pandemic. What follows is offered by way of reflection rather than comprehensive review.

125. At the outset I should note the unprecedented scale and nature of Covid-19, which had direct personal impact upon FCO staff and their families, as it did for so many others involved in the pandemic response, and for very many people in the UK. Many FCO UK-based staff members serving overseas faced prolonged separation from family and loved ones at home as international travel was disrupted and shut down. All staff and families overseas, whether UK or country-based (staff employed locally by a Post), were subject to local public health restrictions in the countries in which they were serving. I

mention these issues not to suggest that the FCO was impacted more adversely than others, particularly those on the front line of the Covid-19 response, but to outline the background against which a global whole of organisation response was mobilised to support British nationals and the wider HM Government response.

126. The FCDO and its legacy departments, like others, lost colleagues to Covid-19, and many staff lost family or friends to Covid-19. I take this opportunity to offer my sympathies for all lives lost to the pandemic.
127. From the start of 2020, the FCO's Management Board and ExCo were monitoring the evolving Covid-19 situation, including as regards its impact on the delivery of FCO priorities and objectives, and the functioning of its global network. This included the decision in March 2020 for a complete organisational shift in priorities and resource allocation, recognising that standard previous crisis parameters were insufficient, as well as recognising the much longer-term nature of the unfolding situation.
128. The FCO in the UK first entered crisis mode in relation to Covid-19 in January 2020 to support the evacuation of British nationals from Wuhan. It operated in crisis mode five further times between February and March 2020 to support the repatriation of British nationals from three cruise ships and British travellers in Peru, and support British travellers following a Covid-19 outbreak at the H10 Hotel in Tenerife. In March 2020, the whole of the FCO's global network was mobilised to repatriate British nationals and support HM Government's PPE and ventilator procurement operation.
129. Between January and June 2020, the FCO assisted in the return of over 19,000 British nationals from cruise ships and 38,000 on planes it chartered. Furthermore, by keeping hubs and transit routes open, the FCO enabled over 1.3 million British nationals to return to the UK on commercial routes, of whom an estimated 132,000 were directly assisted by HM Government including via charter flights. The FCO provided welfare and consular assistance to British nationals who were unable to return to the UK immediately, with tailored consular assistance provided to 27,000 British nationals in 2020, 7000 more than in the preceding five years. FCO Travel Advice was updated constantly to reflect changes in local health measures and transport options, with 8,310 updates being made to FCO Travel Advice on gov.uk pages during 2020, a 263% increase on 2019.
130. The FCO also played an essential role in HM Government's sourcing and delivery of PPE, ventilators and medical supplies through its global network. Throughout the

pandemic, the FCO and FCDO led HM Government's international response, informing and advising HM Government on the international implications of Covid-19 and providing a platform for the UK's international leadership.

131. I identify three factors from the FCO's previous experiences and crisis planning which contributed to its effectiveness in supporting HM Government's response to Covid-19: its all risks approach to crisis preparedness; its regular experience of actual crises; and its systematic lesson learning process.

132. Firstly, the focus the FCO had placed on planning, training and exercising to equip it with the right practices, procedures, systems and structures to be able to respond to a range of different types of crisis supported the FCO in its response to the novel challenges which Covid-19 presented for the organisation – both in terms of its support to British nationals overseas and in adapting its crisis systems and structures to support HM Government's global procurement operation. Applying a lesson from its response to the Zika epidemic (as described in paragraph 122 above), the FCO's adoption of crisis processes such as the Gold, Silver, Bronze command structure and common format sitreps in its procurement work allowed FCO staff who were not subject matter experts quickly to contribute. More generally, the IT infrastructure improvements implemented since Exercise Cygnus, including increasing the IT network's capacity ten-fold to support remote working in early 2020, enabled the FCO's global network to move quickly to predominantly home-working while sustaining its Covid-19 response and the corporate services to support this.

133. Secondly, as a consequence of the frequent and sometimes simultaneous live crises which the FCO had responded to prior to January 2020, the FCO and many of its staff were experienced in moving in and out of crisis mode and adapting structures and processes to respond to different types of overseas crisis. For example, in 2019, among the largest of the crisis operations undertaken by the FCO in the UK and its overseas posts was the return of over 144,000 Thomas Cook passengers to the UK when the company fell into compulsory liquidation. Moreover, preparations for EU exit, including Operation Yellowhammer in 2019, provided a template for the FCO's leadership of large-scale, multi-country, crisis operations. This institutional muscle memory contributed to the FCO's agility in moving from one Covid-19 related crisis response to another and its resilience in sustaining "crisis-like" working for many months during 2020.

134. Thirdly, the centrality of continuous improvement in the FCO's crisis management cycle,

including systematically conducting lessons learned reviews at the end of each crisis allowed the FCO to hone its operations as the pandemic developed. For example, the inefficiencies identified in the need for FCO staff to reconcile information from several data sources to produce passenger manifests for the charter flights from Peru in March 2020 contributed to the decision to outsource the booking and ticketing process for the global repatriations operation.

135. There were, inevitably, elements of the Covid-19 pandemic that the FCO's planning and preparedness activities had been insufficient to mitigate fully against. FCO planning assumed, including from Exercises Winter Willow and Cygnus, that a pandemic, which by its nature would affect its own staff as well as British nationals globally, would test the resilience of its global network. In reality, the concurrent challenges of supporting British nationals to return to the UK and discharging the FCO's duty of care to its staff posted overseas, including drawing back some staff and their families from its Posts, placed more strain on the FCO's resilience than scenario-planning had anticipated.

136. Secondly, unlike previous recent international health emergencies, Covid-19 moved rapidly from being a crisis overseas, for which the FCO was well-prepared, to requiring a major HM Government domestic response. Therefore, although some lessons were applicable, such as the role of FCO Travel Advice, other lessons from the FCO's responses to the Ebola and Zika epidemics could not be applied to the Covid-19 pandemic.

137. Thirdly, and related to the above, while the FCO had stress-tested its resilience to handle several crises concurrently or a series of crises, through semi-live exercises and live crises, the scale of the response required by the FCO's global network to the Covid-19 pandemic exceeded considerably planning assumptions. For example, the assumption during Operation Cygnus was that British Nationals would seek to return to the UK only to access medical care and there was no assessment of the likely impact of a pandemic on international borders, airspace and travel. In reality, in the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic, the global repatriation of British nationals unable to return to the UK because of transport disruption formed the largest part of the FCO's Covid-19 response, dwarfing all of the FCO's previous crisis responses.

138. While recognising that the pandemic identified scope for improvements in crisis planning, preparedness and resilience and noting the FCO's commitment to continuous improvement, staff showed outstanding adaptability, determination and resilience in serving the UK in the most exceptional of circumstances. I am proud of the

dedicated and selfless response of my colleagues and thank them for their work.

**Statement of Truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this statement are true. I understand that proceedings for contempt of court may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief in its truth.

Dated

16 February 2013

Personal Data

**THOMAS DREW CMG**

On behalf of: The Secretary of  
State for Foreign,  
Commonwealth and  
Development Affairs  
By: Thomas Drew CMG  
Exhibit: TD1  
No: 1  
Date: 16 February 2023

in THE MATTER OF:

**THE UNITED KINGDOM  
COVID-19 INQUIRY**

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**STATEMENT OF THOMAS DREW  
CMG ON BEHALF OF THE  
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR  
FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND  
DEVELOPMENT AFFAIRS**

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FCDO

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