

On behalf of: The Secretary of
State for Foreign,
Commonwealth and
Development Affairs
By: Sir Philip Robert Barton
KCMG OBE
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No: 2

Date: 18/05/23

IN THE MATTER OF:

**THE UNITED KINGDOM
COVID-19 INQUIRY**

**STATEMENT OF SIR PHILIP ROBERT BARTON KCMG OBE ON BEHALF
OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND
DEVELOPMENT AFFAIRS**

I, SIR PHILIP ROBERT BARTON KCMG OBE, Permanent Under-Secretary of State
("PUS") 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. In a [*draft*] statement dated [xxx] 2023, I, on behalf of the Secretary of State,
outlined the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office ("**FCO**") and the
Department for International Development ("**DFID**") in responding to the Covid-19
pandemic during the period 1 January 2020 to 1 September 2020. In this

statement, I refer to that statement as the “**FCDO’s First Module 2 Corporate Statement**”. Unless otherwise indicated, this statement addresses the same subject matter, but in respect of the work of the FCDO (the successor department to the FCO and DFID), during the period 2 September 2020 to 24 February 2022.¹

- 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 (“**PRB2/[xxx]**”), with ‘[xxx]’ referring to the number of the exhibit. All references to documents in this statement are to Exhibit (**PRB2/[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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¹ Section 11 of this statement relates to the whole period under consideration in Module 2 of the Inquiry.

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Section 2: Explanation of terminology

8. The FCDO came into existence on 2 September 2020 following the merger of DFID and the FCO pursuant to a transfer of functions order – the Transfer of Functions (Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs) Order 2020 (SI 2020/942) – made under sections 1 and 2 of the Ministers of the Crown Act 1975 (“**Transfer of Functions Order**”) [PRB2/1 - INQ000100689].
9. 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 that merged to become the FCDO.
10. To be consistent with the names used by these departments before 2 September 2020, 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.

Section 3: My background

11. I have been the PUS at the FCDO since 2 September 2020. As PUS, I am a Senior Civil Servant and the principal Civil Service adviser to the Secretary of State (and his / her Ministerial team).
12. As PUS, I am also responsible for the day-to-day management of the FCDO, and I serve as its Accounting Officer. Additionally, in my role as PUS, I am head of HM Diplomatic Service.

13. I joined the FCO in 1986 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 as British High Commissioner to India, British High Commissioner to Pakistan and Deputy Head of Mission in the United States of America. I have also worked in the Cabinet Office and No. 10 Downing Street (“**No. 10**”).

Section 4: The FCDO's role, function and responsibilities on 2 September 2020

14. In this section of my statement, I describe the FCDO's role, function and responsibilities on 2 September 2020. I provide this information to give context to subsequent sections in which I describe the FCDO's work in responding to the Covid-19² pandemic between 2 September 2020 and 24 February 2022. In doing so, I cross-refer, where appropriate, to Sections 5 and 7 of the FCDO's First Module 2 Corporate Statement.
15. As in the FCDO's First Module 2 Corporate Statement, I focus in this statement on the consular and travel-related dimensions of FCDO work, reflecting the scope of Module 2 of the Inquiry. I do not address matters relating to the preparedness and resilience of the UK for the Covid-19 pandemic. The FCDO addresses these matters in separate corporate statements, covering the FCO and DFID respectively, provided in response to Module 1 of the Inquiry.
16. The FCDO was established on 2 September 2020. Pursuant to the Transfer of Functions Order, the functions of both the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (“**FCO Secretary of State**”) and the Secretary of State for International Development (“**DFID Secretary of State**”) were transferred to the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (i.e., the Secretary of State – as the term has been defined above).
17. The effect of the merger was that the functions of the FCO and DFID were united in the new department, the FCDO. Reflecting this, the FCDO's role on 2 September 2020 was to lead HM Government's diplomatic, development and

² Reflecting the approach adopted in the FCDO's First Module 2 Corporate Statement, I refer, unless where appropriate, to “coronavirus” as “Covid-19” throughout this statement. I adopt this approach for ease of understanding. In doing so, I acknowledge that it was not until 11 February 2020 that 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”. To the extent that I address matters which pre-date 11 February 2020, this should be borne in mind.

consular work around the world. The FCDO had several over-arching objectives in order to deliver its priorities. Further detail can be found in the FCDO's 2020/21 Annual Report [PRB2/2 - INQ000100837].

18. In early September 2020, the FCDO employed approximately 17,300 members of staff in the UK and in its global network: 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 FCDO also delivered its policy priorities through its representation to, and relationships with, multilateral institutions, for example the UK Missions to the United Nations in New York and Geneva, and the UK Delegation to NATO in Brussels.
19. The FCDO represents all parts of the UK, ensuring the international interests of the devolved nations (i.e. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) are represented, delivered and advanced.
20. The FCDO's global network (often referred to as 'One HMG') provides a platform for the whole of HM Government to deliver its international objectives overseas.
21. Reflecting the FCDO's role (as set out above), in September 2020 the FCDO was in summary responsible for:
 - 21.1 Formulating and conducting the foreign policy of the UK including in respect of the UK's bilateral relations with other States, international institutions (such as the United Nations), and the Commonwealth;
 - 21.2 The UK's consular network and its consular work (which included protecting the interests of British nationals overseas); and
 - 21.3 The UK's overseas development work including in respect of the allocation of monies from the UK's Official Development Assistance (“**ODA**”).
22. The FCDO was the lead government department within HM Government in respect of the above matters.
23. In addition, I note that throughout the period covered by this statement the FCDO was the lead government department for the fourteen UK Overseas Territories, the FCDO's support to which is outside the scope of Module 2 of the Inquiry.

Section 5: Governance and decision making in the FCDO from 2 September 2020 to 24 February 2022

24. The FCDO's ministerial team was headed by the Secretary of State. On 2 September 2020, the Secretary of State was the Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP. As the FCDO's First Module 2 Corporate Statement explains, Mr Raab had been appointed by the then Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, as FCO Secretary of State on 24 July 2019. On 2 September 2020, on the establishment of the FCDO, Mr Raab became the Secretary of State. As Secretary of State, Mr Raab had overall responsibility for the work of the FCDO.
25. The Secretary of State was supported by a team of Ministers. The table below lists the FCDO Ministerial team (and their respective roles) on 2 September 2020.

| FCDO Ministerial team – 2 September 2020 | |
|---|---|
| Minister | Role |
| Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Minister for the Commonwealth, UN and South Asia |
| Rt Hon James Cleverly MP | Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa |
| Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park | Minister of State for the Pacific and the Environment |
| Rt Hon Wendy Morton MP | Minister for Europe and the Americas |
| James Duddridge MP | Minister for Africa |
| Rt Hon Nigel Adams MP * | Minister of State for Asia and Minister for Consular Policy |
| Baroness Sugg CBE* | Minister for Overseas Territories and Sustainable Development |

*until 25 November 2020

26. On 15 September 2021, Mr Raab was replaced by the Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP

as Secretary of State following a Ministerial reshuffle, conducted by the then Prime Minister the Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP. Ms Truss remained in post as Secretary of State until 6 September 2022 (when she became Prime Minister) and was supported by the Ministerial team below.

| FCDO Ministerial team – 15 September 2021 to 24 February 2022 | |
|---|---|
| Minister | Role |
| Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Minister of State for the Commonwealth, UN and South Asia |
| Rt Hon James Cleverly MP | Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa Minister of State for Europe, North America * |
| Vicky Ford MP | Minister for Africa Minister for Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean ** |
| Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park | Minister of State for the Pacific and the Environment |
| Rt Hon Amanda Milling MP | Minister for Asia Minister for Asia and Middle East and Minister for Consular Policy |
| Rt Hon Wendy Morton MP | Minister for Europe and the Americas (until December 2021) |
| Rt Hon Chris Heaton-Harris MP *** | Minister of State (Minister for Europe) (until February 2022) |

* Portfolio change from 8 February 2022

** Portfolio change from December 2021

*** From December 2021

27. The FCDO Ministerial team was supported by FCDO officials. On the establishment of the FCDO, I became its first PUS, the most senior Civil Servant in the FCDO (Civil Service grade Senior Civil Service 4) and remain in this post as at the date of this statement.
28. On 2 September 2020, I was supported in my leadership role by nine Directors General (“DGs”). Each DG was responsible for overseeing the work of

Directorates, an operational unit, ordinarily led by a Director (Civil Service grade Senior Civil Service 2).

29. Some Directorates in the FCDO were responsible for a particular region. Therefore, the Director of that Directorate would be known as the geographical Director for that region – for example, the Middle East and North Africa Director. Geographical Directors were also responsible for the work of the FCDO's Posts in that region. Other Directorates were responsible for cross-cutting development and foreign policy matters globally, for example global health or conflict prevention. Directors also led the FCDO's corporate functions, such as human resources or finance. Additionally, the FCDO's consular work was led by a Director.
30. The Secretary of State, as the most senior Minister in the FCDO, was ultimately responsible for the decisions made by the FCDO. Reflecting the considerable number of areas for which he/she was responsible, the Secretary of State was supported by his/her Ministerial team who had allocated portfolios. The most important and significant decisions would, however, be taken by the Secretary of State.
31. In taking decisions, the Secretary of State was supported by a private office consisting of civil servants whose primary responsibility was to ensure that the Secretary of State's decisions were communicated to and implemented within the FCDO, and that information and advice from officials reached the Secretary of State efficiently.
32. The 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.
33. I and my team of senior civil servants were responsible for advising Ministers and ensuring that their policy decisions were enacted. Additionally, I and the senior Civil Service leadership of the FCDO had a number of responsibilities relating to the corporate functions of the FCDO. As of 2 September 2020, these were discharged through several boards and committees, forming the FCDO's 'Corporate Governance Structure', and as shown below:
 - 33.1 Supervisory Board – the Supervisory Board (chaired by the Secretary of State) met quarterly and provided strategic direction, oversight, support

and challenge for the FCDO with a view to the long-term health, reputation and success of the FCDO. The Supervisory Board was made up of the DG for Finance and Corporate, DG for Delivery, the FCDO's non-executive Directors and me. Attendance for Ministers and other DGs was optional, depending on the agenda.

- 33.2 Management Board – I would chair the Management Board, which would meet monthly. It provided corporate leadership to the FCDO by delivering the policies and services decided by Ministers. It also ensured rigorous management of performance, strategic risk, people and duty of care to staff. The Management Board's membership included all DGs and relevant Directors and the FCDO's Non-Executive Directors.
- 33.3 Executive Committee (“ExCo”) – I would chair ExCo, which met weekly. Reporting to the Management Board, ExCo took decisions on strategic choices or challenges relating to sensitive or time-bound issues, day to day running of the FCDO as a department, emerging issues, risks or crises where early steers or a cross-departmental view, impact or action would be required. ExCo's membership included all DGs and certain Directors.

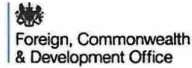
The FCDO's Corporate Governance Structure



((PRB2/2 - INQ000100837))

34. An overview of the senior leadership structure of the FCDO on 2 September 2020

is as follows:



FCDO organisation September 2020



Section 6: The merger of the FCO and DFID to form the FCDO

35. On 16 June 2020, the Prime Minister announced in the House of Commons that the FCO and DFID would merge. He said:

"This is exactly the moment when we must mobilise every one of our national assets, including our aid budget and expertise, to safeguard British interests and values overseas.

And the best possible instrument for doing that will be a new department charged with using all the tools of British influence to seize the opportunities ahead".

((PRB2/3 - INQ000100836))

36. Close FCO and DFID working in response to the Covid-19 pandemic predated both the announcement of the merger and its taking effect. From February 2020, all the FCO and DFID Ministers, apart from the FCO and DFID Secretaries of State, had shared private offices and held joint portfolios across the FCO and DFID, helping ensure DFID and the FCO were working together to deliver HM Government's objectives.
37. By way of example, on 8 February 2020 a joint FCO-DFID Coronavirus Taskforce (defined in the FCDO's First Module 2 Corporate Statement as the "**Coronavirus Taskforce**") was established in recognition of the fact that the Covid-19 pandemic

was likely to peak in other parts of the world beyond the initial outbreak reported in China, and that a more sustained response – international policy and operational, as well as consular – was likely to be needed.

38. Together with wider cross-HM Government collaboration, the Coronavirus Taskforce helped to ensure that the full scope of HM Government expertise and diplomatic networks was deployed to influence responses to the spread of Covid-19, support vulnerable countries, address the global health challenges, and provide UK leadership in research and vaccine development.
39. On 26 February 2020, in light of the Prime Minister's desire for HM Government's international operations to be more closely integrated, a first joint meeting of the Executive Committees of the FCO and DFID ("**JEXCO**") took place [**PRB2/4 - INQ000100821**]. This JEXCO meeting welcomed the joint work already being done by the Coronavirus Taskforce, noted that the pandemic was a fast-moving issue, and that the priority for the team would be to keep pace with the crisis and be able to surge to rapid responses.
40. A further example of joint FCO and DFID working in response to the pandemic prior to the merger was the delivery of the UK-hosted Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation ("**Gavi**") Global Vaccine Summit on 4 June 2020, where pledges amounted to US\$8.8bn for the development of COVID-19 diagnostics, treatment and vaccines. This was facilitated by DFID's development capability and the FCO's diplomacy expertise aligning towards a common objective.
41. Following the Prime Minister's announcement of the departmental merger on 16 June 2020, further meetings of the FCO and DFID JEXCO took place weekly until the merger itself (on 2 September 2020).
42. At an operational level, close working on Covid-19 continued between the FCO and DFID officials following the disbandment of the Coronavirus Taskforce in June 2020, through the then newly established FCO C-19 Directorate and DFID's Covid Hub.
43. There was, in parallel, an intensive period of preparatory work on the many organisational and corporate aspects of establishing the FCDO, in the just over two months between the Prime Minister's announcement of the merger on 16 June 2020 and the launch of the new department on 2 September 2020.

44. This significant programme of activity was staffed and run separately to the core Covid-19 pandemic response, which continued at full pace throughout this period. There was, however, some overlap in the call on certain areas of resource, involving in particular private offices and the corporate areas of both the FCO and DFID, for example, human resources, financial, IT and legal issues relating to the establishment of the new department. Staff in those areas faced the task of working on the merger in addition to the pandemic response. There was also a degree of uncertainty for staff, particularly those most directly affected by the merger.
45. As is the case with all machinery of government changes, this phase consisted of the immediate work required to support the coming into being of a new department at a point in time. The practical implementation of the merger was developed and deepened further in the months following the FCDO's launch on 2 September 2020.
46. From 2 September 2020, at a Ministerial level, the FCO and DFID joint ministerial team initially continued in their roles in the FCDO with their previous portfolios. This ensured continuity of delivery, including in respect of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
47. In October 2020, what had been the FCO C-19 Directorate and the DFID Covid Hub were brought together as a single FCDO C-19 Directorate. This merged Directorate combined diplomatic and development expertise to continue to coordinate the international dimension of the UK's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
48. More generally, the merger enabled the FCDO to bring together the respective expertise of its legacy departments to create more effective joint teams, for example in the work on vaccines by the FCDO's new Global Health Directorate. The development expertise of DFID, in particular as a long-standing leader on global health issues, and the foreign policy expertise of the FCO came together in the new department to lead all work on Covid-19 including: analysis of the virus and early learning of developments across the world; comparative use of non-pharmaceutical interventions ("NPIs") and pharmaceutical interventions in other countries; developing science and data links; developing and distributing vaccines; and monitoring and analysing geopolitical developments that could have an impact on vaccine work.

Section 7: FCDO structural changes in response to the Covid-19 pandemic

C-19 Directorate

49. As explained in the FCDO's First Module 2 Corporate Statement, on 1 June 2020 the C-19 Directorate came into existence as an FCO Directorate. On the same day, the former FCO-DFID Coronavirus Taskforce ceased to exist as an *ad hoc* taskforce.
50. As set out above, the C-19 Directorate remained in place following the merger of the FCO and DFID, becoming the FCDO's C-19 Directorate.
51. There was broad continuity in the Civil Service leadership of international work on the pandemic through the merger. Having jointly led the Coronavirus Taskforce, Simon Manley was appointed interim DG overseeing the C-19 Directorate until 30 September 2020 to ensure a smooth transition as the FCDO C-19 Directorate became the responsibility of Vijay Rangarajan (the new FCDO DG Americas and Overseas Territories) from that date. Robert Tinline became Director of the FCO C-19 Directorate on 1 July 2020, and remained as Director throughout the merger beyond 24 February 2022. Catherine Nettleton joined as additional Director in January 2021, and remained in post beyond 24 February 2022.
52. In May 2021, the FCDO's C-19 Directorate and Global Health Directorate merged to become a new FCDO Global Health and C-19 Directorate.
53. It was envisaged that the new Directorate would evolve over time into primarily a Global Health Directorate, as demands of Covid-19 work reduced. Initially, however, the new Directorate retained three joint Directors, with Darren Welch continuing to lead on the Global Health agenda and Catherine Nettleton and Rob Tinline leading on Covid-19 related work.
54. The key responsibilities for the new Directorate were as follows:
 - 54.1 Global Health and C-19 Strategy Department, responsible for strategy, planning, scrutiny, G7/G20, and Official Development Assistance issues.
 - 54.2 Human Development Department, responsible for policy on healthy, resilient societies, sexual & reproductive health and rights, climate and health and ending preventable deaths.

- 54.3 Global Funds Department, responsible for the UK's investments in and policy towards Gavi, Global Fund³, World Health Organization ("WHO") and other health institutions.
- 54.4 Senior Global Health and Board Representative to the Global Health Institutions, UK representative to the boards of the Global Health Institutions, and leading HM Government's work through the UK's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva ("UKMis Geneva") with Geneva based global health institutions.
- 54.5 Vaccines, Therapeutics and Diagnostics Department, responsible for supply chains, co-ordinating with lead FCDO departments on British nationals/Overseas Territories/HM Government staff overseas, surplus dose policy, overseas assistance, vaccine hesitancy and pandemic origins, vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics global strategy, COVAX⁴ and equitable access.
- 54.6 Border Policy Department, responsible for UK border measures, exemptions from UK border measures and the future of international travel.
- 54.7 Health Certification and Coordination Department, responsible for health certification for travel, Business Management Team.

Section 8: The role of the FCDO in providing advice on the emergence and spread of Covid-19 variants and other countries' implementation of non-pharmaceutical interventions to HM Government

55. The FCDO's role in providing advice to No. 10, the Cabinet Office and other HM Government departments on the emergence of new Covid-19 variants, data modelling and information about the use of NPIs by other countries between 2 September 2020 and 24 February 2022 can be described broadly as follows:

55.1 Diplomatic Telegram ("DipTel") reporting. The FCDO and its overseas network sent a significant number of DipTels concerning Covid-19 during the period 2

³ The Global Fund is a global health partnership, funded by the private sector, non-governmental organisations and governments, which finances programmes to tackle pandemics.

⁴ COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access, abbreviated as COVAX, is a worldwide initiative aimed at equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines directed by Gavi, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, and the World Health Organization, alongside key delivery partner UNICEF.

September 2020 and 24 February 2022, this included reporting of meetings and discussions with international organisations, such as the WHO in Geneva. All HM Government departments received the twice-daily FCDO DipTel summary, an email containing all DipTels issued by the FCDO in the UK and its Posts. Many of these DipTels were also addressed to No. 10, the Cabinet Office, Department for Transport (“**DfT**”), Department for Health and Social Care (“**DHSC**”) and other HM Government departments as action addressees.

55.2 Specific advice and analysis from Posts to contribute to Joint Biosecurity Centre (“**JBC**”) and Public Health England (“**PHE**”) risk assessments and to provide international comparisons.

55.3 Facilitation of expert dialogues between HM Government and international partners.

56. In order to inform the FCDO’s longer-term pandemic planning and risk management, the FCDO Science Cell, a team which brought together the FCO and DFID’s scientific expertise, developed five-year epidemiological scenarios. These were combined with scenarios covering economic, geopolitical, governance, conflict and humanitarian issues and were designed to inform both policy-making and organisational preparedness. The first scenarios were presented to ExCo on 16 March 2021 and updated scenarios were presented to ExCo at regular (roughly six-month) intervals thereafter [**PRB2/5 - INQ000100427; PBR2/6 - INQ000100823**]. These scenarios were also shared across HM Government at senior levels and were, for example, discussed by the NSC(O) Committee.

DipTel reporting

57. During the period 2 September 2020 to 24 February 2022, Posts in the FCDO network reported by DipTel on the emergence of Covid-19 variants and other countries’ implementation of NPIs. For example, on 21 December 2020 UKMis Geneva issued a DipTel reporting the WHO’s reactions to the detection of a new variant of Covid-19 in the UK [**PRB2/7 - INQ000089484**] and on 22 December 2020 the British High Commission in Pretoria sent a DipTel reporting the emergence and spread of a new Covid-19 variant in South Africa similar to that circulating in the UK [**PRB2/8 - INQ000089485**]. On 20 January 2022, the British Embassy in Berlin reported on the impact the Omicron variant was having at that time in Germany [**PRB2/9 - INQ000100825**].

58. Further details of this reporting are set out in the chronology prepared for the Inquiry by the FCDO, which has been provided together with the underlying documents.

Specific advice and analysis

59. Through its overseas network, the FCDO provided contextual information on countries' epidemiological data which fed into JBC's and PHE's risk assessments, which, in turn, informed decisions on International Travel Corridors and the red, amber and green ratings of countries under the 'traffic light' system.
60. Until 28 September 2020, the FCDO's Posts provided this information through completion of a situation report and questionnaire [PRB2/10 - INQ000100822]. From 28 September 2020, the FCDO – in consultation with JBC and PHE – streamlined the reporting process, with the network being required to submit a weekly report.
61. In the period 2 September 2020 to 24 February 2022, the International Comparators Joint Unit ("ICJU"), which I describe in the FCDO's First Module 2 Corporate Statement, continued to provide weekly Covid-19 international comparator dashboards to other parts of HM Government, including No. 10, the Cabinet Office and DfT. These dashboards provided comparative data, including on the imposition of NPIs, from other countries. The FCDO's Posts assisted ICJU in obtaining and contextualising the data.

Facilitation of expert dialogues with international partners

62. The FCDO, through its overseas network, facilitated dialogues between experts in HM Government and international partners on the emergence and spread of new Covid-19 variants and the implementation of NPIs. For example on 7 and 10 November 2020, following an outbreak of SARS-Cov-2 in mink farms in Denmark, the FCDO facilitated high level calls between UK and Danish science and health experts to inform JBC's and PHE's understanding of how Denmark was responding to the outbreak and the effectiveness of Danish measures [PRB2/11 - INQ000100269]. This is one example of facilitations and conversations that were happening across the overseas network, with Heads of Mission and their teams keeping very close to key overseas government ministers, health professionals and other local stakeholders. Further scientific dialogues between HM Government and international partners that the FCDO facilitated are detailed in the accompanying chronology.

Section 9: The role of the FCDO in key decision making relating to the imposition of UK-wide and, later, England-wide non-pharmaceutical interventions between 2 September 2020 and 24 February 2022

63. In this section of my statement, I explain the role of the FCDO in key decision making relating to the imposition of UK-wide and, later, England-wide NPIs between 2 September 2020 and 24 February 2022.
64. Reflecting the approach adopted in the FCDO's First Module 2 Corporate Statement, for the purpose of this section, I have taken NPIs to mean public health measures that aim to prevent and/or control Covid-19 transmission in the community – for example, promoting and facilitating physical distancing and self-isolation.
65. In summary, the FCDO contributed to key HM Government decision making between 2 September 2020 and 24 February 2022 relating to the imposition of UK-wide and, later, England-wide NPIs through the Secretary of State's participation in Cabinet meetings and other meetings with the Prime Minister, and Secretary of State and Ministerial participation in COBR(M), COVID(O), the Small Ministerial Group, Global Travel Taskforce and International Ministerial Implementation Group meetings as detailed in the chronology provided separately to the Inquiry.
66. While the FCDO's role in relation to the imposition of NPIs in the UK and later in England between 2 September 2020 and 24 February 2022 was limited relative to other HM Government departments, the FCDO was the lead government department during this period in respect of overseas travel advice and was part of the decision making body (COVID(O)) in respect of international travel and border measures, including leading on diplomatic and foreign government exemptions to border measures.

International travel and border measures

67. From 2 September 2020, the FCDO's role in relation to international travel and border health measures was threefold:
- 67.1 First, the FCDO collected information and undertook analysis that fed into and informed wider HM Government decision making as described above. The FCDO also communicated this information through its travel advice pages;
- 67.2 Second, the FCDO led on designing, implementing and maintaining exemptions to the border health measures which were imposed under the Health Protection

(Coronavirus, International Travel) (England) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/568) (“**2020 Regulations**”), for diplomatic missions and international organisations; representatives of a foreign country or British overseas territory; and Crown Servants and government contractors. These measures were aimed at meeting our obligations under international law, for example to those with diplomatic status, and underpinning the continued international operation of HM Government.

67.3 Third, the FCDO played an active role through COVID(O) in the decision making around border measures, including on issues such as vaccine certification and the imposition of short-term exemptions to support British nationals to leave countries experiencing political unrest in line with FCDO travel advice.

68. I note also that the FCDO’s consular work to support British nationals abroad affected by Covid-19 continued throughout this period.

International travel

69. During the period 2 September 2020 to 24 February 2022, HM Government introduced restrictions on travellers to England, aimed at slowing the spread of Covid-19 and new Variants of Concern (“**VoC**”). These border health measures were imposed under the auspices of the 2020 Regulations, which were revoked and replaced on 17 May 2021 by the Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel and Operator Liability) (England) Regulations 2021 (SI 2021/582) (now revoked) (“**2021 Regulations**”), and were largely replicated by the Devolved Administrations.

70. The Secretary of State was a member of COVID(O), which took decisions on the introduction and review of the 2020 Regulations and the 2021 Regulations. The Secretary of State – or an FCDO Minister on his/her behalf – participated in COVID(O). If not attending the meeting, the Secretary of State would agree the positions which the FCDO should take on matters to be discussed at the meeting, usually in response to written advice from officials, and disseminate his/her views to whichever Minister was attending so that they could represent these at the COVID(O) meeting.

The FCDO's role in diplomatic, foreign country representative and Crown Servant exemptions to border health measures

71. During the period 2 September 2020 to 24 February 2022, border health measures under the auspices of the 2020 Regulations, evolved including from 15 January 2021 the requirement for travellers to the UK to take a pre-departure test and from 15 February 2021 for travellers from “red list” countries to enter managed quarantine.
72. In introducing these and other related border health measures, COVID(O) agreed that work-related exemptions were required to maintain essential services and the flow of goods, as well as to ensure the UK was meeting its international obligations and maintaining our ability to operate internationally. In this regard, the FCDO led on designing, implementing and maintaining appropriate exemptions, and their robust application, for:
- 72.1 ‘Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations’ – The FCDO’s Protocol Directorate managed the policy and operation of these exemptions;
- 72.2 ‘Representatives of a Foreign Country or Territory or UK Overseas Territory’ – the FCDO’s geographical Directorates managed these exemptions, with decisions being taken by a Deputy Director or Director, except for those coming from red list countries, where decisions were taken by the PUS;
- 72.3 ‘Crown Servants and Government Contractors’ – The FCDO managed this category on behalf of HM Government, but the FCDO’s Human Resources Directorate administered exemptions for FCDO staff - staff from other HM Government departments working overseas or in the UK were required to seek exemptions through their own department, with the approval of their Head of Mission;
- 72.4 ‘Foreign Policy Interlocutors who had been invited to the UK by the Secretary of State to conduct official business with the UK’; and
- 72.5 ‘UK-hosted international events’ – exemptions were in place for specific large-scale international events hosted by HM Government in England, e.g. the G7, and the Global Education Summit. The FCDO also worked very closely with the Cabinet Office on arrangements for hosting the COP26 climate change conference under Covid-19 conditions, including as regards to the exemptions required to support that conference.

73. With effect from 11 February 2022, FCDO exemptions under the 2021 Regulations were simplified into three categories:
- 73.1 Persons on Official Business, for example representatives from foreign countries and International Organisations;
 - 73.2 Diplomatic Missions, Consular Posts, Heads of State; and
 - 73.3 Essential HM Government work, operations and state business (this category covered HM Government staff).
74. The separate exemption category for 'International Events' was removed.
75. The FCDO rigorously applied UK travel restrictions and border health measures to its own staff.
76. On several occasions in 2021, ExCo considered the accumulated pressure on staff and their families overseas who had faced severe restriction on their ability to travel, including to return to the UK. As such, an ExCo meeting on 15 June 2021 [**PRB2/12- INQ000100687; PRB2/13 - INQ000100824**] agreed measures to strengthen the FCDO's Health and Welfare function to help address this challenge. A further FCDO ExCo meeting on 6 July 2021 [**PRB2/14 - INQ000100688**] agreed additional measures to tackle the most pressing concerns facing FCDO staff. This was to ensure that staff and their dependants were not left behind in new arrangements then under consideration by HM Government to facilitate entry to the UK for people with evidence of double vaccination, and included increasing the number of resilience journeys available to staff in 'red-list' countries.

The FCDO's broader contribution to international travel and border measures

77. During the period 2 September 2020 to 24 February 2022, in addition to the border measures described above, HM Government implemented a range of international travel measures, including 'International Travel Corridors' (described in the FCDO's First Module 2 Corporate Statement) and the 'traffic light' system for travellers from different countries.
78. On 17 May 2021, a 'traffic light' system was introduced whereby travellers to England were subject to varying border health measures according to the red, amber or green rating of the country/territory of their point of departure. Decisions on individual country ratings were taken by COVID(O) on a three-weekly basis.

79. The FCDO's role in this process was to represent HM Government's international interests, including in decision making on travel and border measures, and managing the risk to HM Government's international priorities. This included participation at Ministerial level in COVID(O), including through responses to Ministerial write-rounds between COVID(O) meetings, and FCDO officials' participation in the cross-HM Government International Travel Programme Board. For example, following deteriorating political situations in Myanmar in February 2021 and Ethiopia in November 2021, the FCDO secured from COVID(O) short-term exemptions to pre-departure testing for travellers from these countries to reduce barriers to British nationals being able to follow FCDO travel advice to consider leaving [PRB2/15 - INQ000100833; PRB2/16 - INQ000100840; PRB2/17 - INQ000100835; PRB2/18 - INQ000100841]. More generally, managing the impact of decisions to add and remove countries from the border health measures red list formed a significant part of the FCDO's diplomacy with international partners during this period, as well as, through consular work, with British nationals and others impacted by the decisions.
80. FCDO officials also provided advice to COVID(O) on the practicalities of border health measures, by drawing on information from the FCDO's overseas network. For example, in June 2021, the FCDO's advice on turn-around times for PCR tests [PRB2/19 - INQ000100834] in many parts of the world influenced COVID(O)'s decision to maintain the three-day pre-departure testing window for travellers to the UK rather than reducing it to two days, which would not have been possible to implement for travellers from many countries, including those travelling on long-haul flights.

Vaccination certification

81. From 19 July 2021, UK residents who were returning to England from an amber listed country and had received an NHS vaccine were no longer required to self-isolate on arrival [PRB2/20 - INQ000100838]. On 2 August 2021, this 'fully-vaccinated' policy was expanded to include residents from the European Union ("EU"), USA and a small number of other countries who had been vaccinated with EU or US Food and Drug Administration approved vaccinations [PRB2/21 - INQ000100839].
82. On 17 September 2021, Ministers agreed at COVID(O) to extend the fully vaccinated travel policy to travellers from countries/territories which met certain criteria [PRB2/22 - INQ000100842]. The addition of countries to the fully vaccinated policy was conducted through a weekly write-round by the Secretary of State for Transport to

other members of COVID(O). The FCDO's contribution to this weekly decision making process was to provide advice, obtained through its overseas network, relating to other countries' Covid-19 certification standards, fraud risk, and the types and dosage of vaccinations administered.

Travel advice

83. The role and purpose of travel advice, and the FCDO's role in relation to the setting of travel advice, is set out in the FCDO's First Module 2 Corporate Statement and the description there of how that advice was formulated at the FCO also applies to the provision of travel advice by the FCDO. Between 2 September 2020 and 24 February 2022, the FCDO updated its travel advice pages on gov.uk 8,105 times. A significant but decreasing proportion of these travel advice changes were in relation to Covid-19, largely reflecting factual changes regarding public health measures in the country concerned.
84. The FCDO's chronology in respect of the period to which this statement relates documents key updates to the FCDO's travel advice in relation to VoC and global travel advisories between 2 September 2020 and 24 February 2022, and I do not repeat the content of those travel advice updates here. Instead, I explain briefly how decisions on changes to travel advice in relation to Covid-19 were made during this period.
85. I should highlight here the different purposes of HM Government's border health measures and FCDO travel advice, one being NPIs to prevent or control the spread of Covid-19 in the UK and the other being the provision of objective information to help British nationals travelling or living abroad to make informed decisions about foreign travel and to stay safe. In this context, the FCDO would, and did, advise against all but essential travel to a country when it assessed the risk to the traveller from Covid-19 to be unacceptably high.
86. Reflecting their different purposes, decisions on border health measures and FCDO travel advice drew on different information sources. Decisions on International Travel Corridors and countries' red, amber and green ratings drew on JBC's risk assessments, which were based on epidemiological data. On the other hand, the Covid-19 element of FCDO travel advice drew on advice from PHE, and the National Travel Health Network and Centre ("**NaTHNaC**"), the organisation mandated to provide health advice to British nationals travelling overseas. Although provided by

different organisations (for the first part of the period covered by this statement⁵) and for different purposes, much of the same data underpinned decisions on border health measures and FCDO travel advice.

87. A further distinction is that decisions on border health measures were taken by COVID(O), whereas the FCDO took decisions on changes to travel advice, with significant decisions relating to travel advice changes being referred to FCDO Ministers.
88. Noting the purpose of FCDO travel advice outlined above, the FCDO sought, where possible, and consistent with this purpose, to align its travel advice with COVID(O)'s decisions on border health measures. The FCDO undertook routine reviews of countries to which it advised against all, or all but essential, travel because of Covid-19 concurrently with COVID(O)'s weekly reviews of International Travel Corridors, and three-weekly reviews of countries' red, amber and green ratings under the 'traffic light' system. Similarly, when a VoC was detected, the FCDO worked, where possible, to align its travel advice with decisions taken by COVID(O) on border health measures. For example, on 25 November 2021, COVID(O) decided to add South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Eswatini and Zimbabwe to the red list because of growing cases of the Omicron variant, and the FCDO changed its travel advice for these six countries on the same day to advise against all but essential travel.

Section 10: The FCDO and the Devolved Administrations between 2 September 2020 and 24 February 2022

89. The FCDO engaged regularly with the Devolved Administrations (i.e. the Devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) during the period 2 September 2020 and 24 February 2022 through meetings and the sharing of documents.
90. During this period, the Devolved Administrations received the twice-daily FCDO DipTel summary, i.e. an email containing all DipTels issued by the FCDO in London and its Posts. These DipTel summaries included DipTels from Posts on the spread of Covid-19 and the measures that countries were taking in response, and instructions from the FCDO in London to its Posts on the UK's international response to the

⁵ The JBC and PHE were separate organisations until 1 October 2020 when they were merged to form the UK Health Security Agency ("UKHSA").

pandemic.

91. Between 2 September 2020 and 24 February 2022, FCDO officials participated in the DfT-chaired Devolved Administration Travel Group (previously known as the Devolved Administration Strategy Group). The purpose of these meetings, which initially took place weekly but later moved to three-weekly, was to discuss upcoming border policy developments with the aim of achieving policy alignment across the UK. The FCDO updated the Devolved Administrations on 'FCDO-owned' exemptions to the 2020 Regulations (see paragraph 72 above onwards), including the rationale in relation to exemptions.
92. The FCDO also engaged with Devolved Administration officials through the FCDO's and Devolved Administrations' participation in the DfT-chaired International Travel Programme Board
93. Finally, and as noted above, FCDO officials also worked extensively as part of a Cabinet Office-led HM Government process on arrangements to support delivery of a successful COP26 in Glasgow, with FCDO officials heavily engaged on providing advice around travel regulations for in-person attendance of around 45,000 delegates, as well as working with the UN on registration and ensuring delegates had access to vaccines in their home countries before travelling. The FCDO also worked with UKHSA to share best practice health mitigations from previous large-scale events with policy makers in Scotland. Our network of Posts facilitated attendance from country delegations. Finally, the FCDO was responsible for arranging and staffing a VIP protocol receiving/trouble-shooting team based in Glasgow and Edinburgh during the conference itself.

Section 11: Difficulties or challenges encountered in supporting core political and administrative decision making with the Prime Minister/No. 10, Cabinet, Cabinet Committees, Ministerial Implementation Groups and lead government departments between 1 January 2020 and 24 February 2022

94. At the outset of this section, I set out a high-level explanation of the context in which the FCDO's legacy departments – and the FCO in particular – were operating at the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic. I then address, as requested by the Inquiry, difficulties and challenges that the FCO and FCDO encountered in supporting core political and administrative decision making within HM Government during the period

from 1 January 2020 to 24 February 2022.⁶

95. In drawing together these reflections, I have considered, although not adopted in all their detail, a number of internal 'lessons learned' reviews examining various aspects of the FCO and FCDO's Covid-19 response⁷. I have also drawn on direct and indirect discussions with current and former senior officials involved in the response and on my own experience. What follows is offered by way of reflection rather than comprehensive review.
96. At the outset, I should record my view that the FCDO's (and its legacy departments') staff in the UK and overseas responded superbly to the difficulties and challenges posed by the unprecedented scale and nature of the pandemic, which had direct personal impacts on staff members and their families, as it did for so many others involved in the pandemic response, and for very many people in the UK. Many 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. Many faced acute pressures. The FCDO and its legacy departments, like others, lost colleagues to Covid-19, and many staff lost family or friends to Covid-19. I am immensely proud of the dedicated and selfless response of my colleagues, and take this opportunity to offer my deepest sympathies for all lives lost to the pandemic.

Context at the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic

97. The Covid-19 crisis started in an already challenging context for the FCO's work at the beginning of 2020. The FCO's Consular Directorate, which was at the heart of the FCO's response to Covid-19, had dealt with several major challenges in late 2019, including the repatriation to the UK of over 144,000 passengers stranded by the collapse of the travel company Thomas Cook. The FCO was dealing with a range of significant international issues, including ongoing tensions with Russia, strained UK relations with Iran, and the violent aftermath of protests in Hong Kong, as well as preparations for the UK's departure from the EU at the end of January 2020, which included extended contingency planning for a potential 'no deal' Brexit. While one

⁶ This section relates to the whole period under consideration in Module 2, including that otherwise covered in the FCDO's First Module 2 Corporate Statement.

⁷ These documents have been provided separately to the Inquiry.

consequence was that the FCO had recent experience of planning for, and delivery of, major crisis response operations, it also meant that the Covid-19 outbreak came at a point when resilience was already very stretched.

98. While the FCO had well-developed processes for responding to individual crises, and indeed had been in crisis mode nine times in 2019, it became clear during the first three months of 2020 that the global and multi-faceted nature of this crisis – dealing simultaneously with repatriations, sourcing personal protective equipment, ventilators and other medical supplies, and supporting the rest of HM Government in providing information and data – required a different level of response.
99. Securing the right staff with the right skills, working across these areas, in the most effective internal structures took time to get right, and, as I describe in the FCDO's First Module 2 Corporate Statement, more than one structural and staffing model iteration. For example, while the original remit for the FCO-DFID Coronavirus Taskforce had established the right initial set of objectives in response to the pandemic, in practice the crisis was too large in scale for a small central unit to deliver, and it struggled to harness the wider capabilities of the FCO at that stage. Responsibilities as between the Coronavirus Taskforce and other parts of the FCO also took time to work through and become clear.
100. The FCO ExCo's decisions in March 2020 to mobilise staff across the whole of the FCO to focus on Covid-19, effected a step-change that allowed the FCO to focus fully on the pandemic before the first UK lockdown [PRB2/23 - INQ000100832] and [PRB2/24 - INQ000089527]. This was at the necessary organisational cost of dropping or delaying other areas of business deemed non-essential in the context of the pandemic. This included pausing language and other pre-posting preparation and suspending routine foreign policy engagement with other countries.
101. The FCO learned and adapted during the pandemic. For example, the experience of the Coronavirus Taskforce informed the FCO ExCo's decision to create a new Covid-19 Directorate in recognition of the need for significant, ring-fenced resources given the likely trajectory of the pandemic.

The overseas network

102. Staff at Posts were also affected by, and needed to comply with, local Covid-19 restrictions. This meant that globally, as well as in the UK, operations moved rapidly to online working. Many crisis teams were formed and operated entirely remotely. As

noted already, FCO and DFID staff overseas were also affected by separation from family in the UK, with strains on both personal and professional lives, creating ongoing staff wellbeing and welfare issues. I mention these issues not to suggest that the FCO and DFID were 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.

103. Covid-19 posed extraordinary practical, logistical and welfare challenges for FCO and DFID operations in the UK and overseas, including the need in some overseas locations to reduce, or in a limited number of cases temporarily suspend, Post operations and to draw down (i.e. bring home) staff and their dependants in response to local Covid-19 health and travel restrictions. Decisions taken by overseas governments, sometimes at great speed and with little or no notice, made for a challenging operating environment for some Posts. Moreover, other countries' decisions about managing their own ports and borders, quarantine arrangements, airspace closures, support to their own people and interactions with international health organisations, impacted the ability to function and deliver Covid-19 objectives. The vast majority of Posts did, however, remain operational throughout.

Repatriation of British nationals and other consular support

104. The work to repatriate and provide other consular support to British nationals overseas affected by the pandemic's outbreak had no post-war precedent in terms of scale, complexity and duration. Between January and March 2020, the FCO launched six separate crisis responses to repatriate British nationals (compared to nine in the whole of 2019). The FCO's early model was to run a separate crisis response for each location-specific repatriation, starting with Wuhan in China, and then extending to other locations.

105. This set of discrete crisis response operations evolved into a global repatriation operation as Covid-19 spread. As noted in the FCDO's First Module 2 Corporate Statement, the air charter operation brought over 38,000 people back to the UK, on 186 flights, from 57 different countries and territories. Ministry of Defence flights helped hundreds more, including from some of the most remote locations. More than 19,000 British nationals were successfully disembarked from 60 cruise ships. FCO staff worked around the clock to keep transit hubs and routes open, liaise with host Governments and public health services, and provide consular assistance to those

most in need, enabling 1.3 million British nationals to return via commercial routes, of whom an estimated 132,000 were on flights directly assisted by HM Government. The FCO also worked with overseas partner governments to ensure the return of more than 4,000 British nationals on the charter flights of those governments, and supported more than 8,000 foreign nationals in return.

106. As I set out in the FCDO's First Module 2 Corporate Statement, the FCO also provided consular support to British nationals in need, including providing just under 3,000 repatriation travel loans with a total loan value of over £2m. By the end of May 2020, the FCO had published more than 4,300 travel advice updates on its website, compared to 2,300 in the whole of 2019. Between 16 March and 17 June 2020, the FCO and its contracted providers handled over 172,000 telephone enquiries, compared to 104,000 in the same period in 2019.

FCO platform and staffing to support the repatriation and consular effort

107. Like many international organisations, the FCO faced a major challenge in sustaining its operations while complying with public health restrictions in the UK and internationally, particularly when the first lockdown was introduced in the UK from 27 March 2020.

108. At the peak of the crisis in 2020, over 90% of FCO staff in the UK were working away from the office. Many of them were fully engaged in supporting the Covid-19 response. This required rapid strengthening of the FCO's IT infrastructure.

109. The scale of the discrete repatriation operations between January and March 2020 tested the capacity and capability of the FCO's crisis management IT applications, which had been effective in previous crises. For example, FCO staff reconciling information from several data sources to produce passenger manifests for charter flights from Peru was inefficient. The decision to outsource the booking and ticketing process for the global repatriations operation addressed this, both in providing a more efficient system and freeing up FCO staff to support other aspects of the repatriations operation. There were also issues with aspects of call handling and communications – affecting how some British nationals would have experienced the response – which the FCO worked to scale up and address as the repatriations progressed.

110. I turn now to difficulties and challenges encountered by the FCDO and its legacy departments in their engagement with core political and administrative decision making within HM Government between 1 January 2020 and 24 February 2022.

Scaling up Covid-19 joint work across HM Government

111. Some of my comments above on the challenges faced more generally apply also to the FCO's experience of working with other parts of HM Government on Covid-19, as all departments moved to remote working during the first national lockdown. For example, one practical issue was the suitability of IT software for remote cross-HM Government working, specifically the challenge of different collaboration and videoconferencing platforms being used by different HM Government departments.

112. At the start of the crisis, the responsible FCO and DFID DGs chaired a steering group approximately twice a week to convene cross-HM Government senior officials to discuss the emerging international risks and to plan responses. It was unclear, however, how this fitted with central processes led by the Cabinet Office (Civil Contingencies Secretariat ("**CCS**")) and National Security Secretariat, with DHSC's role as Covid-19 lead government department, or with Ministerial COBR meetings. In previous major crises with an international dimension, the CCS had provided a central strategic secretariat and tasking function, accountable to Ministerial COBR meetings, in support of the FCO as the lead government department focussed on international affairs. While the CCS initially chaired daily cross-HM Government officials' meetings on all aspects of the pandemic, including domestic aspects, there was no dedicated cross-HM Government working-level meeting to manage the international dimension, though the creation in mid-March 2020 of the COVID-19 Ministerial Implementation Groups assisted considerably.

International data requirements and coordination

113. The pandemic brought an unprecedented number of requests to the FCO's global network from across HM Government for data, insight and analysis on all aspects of Covid-19. The FCO's previous means of providing information, principally through DipTels, while still relevant and important, was insufficient to meet the level and variety of demands.

114. The FCO therefore increasingly moved to a data-driven approach, producing central products to try to manage the flow of requests to individual Posts and the quality of information in response. As I outlined in the FCDO's First Module 2 Corporate Statement, on 6 April 2020 the first Global Daily Dashboard was published, setting out details of economic, health and social restrictions in place across a range of countries.

115. This product was well-received by the Cabinet Office and No. 10. When the Joint Intelligence Organisation were asked by No. 10 to create a central international data analysis unit, they pulled in the FCO's Information and Analysis Team to create a joint team. From early July 2020, this joint unit was renamed the 'International Observatory'.
116. In the early stages of the pandemic, and until the whole of HM Government refocused almost all government work on Covid-19 related matters, the FCO faced challenges in trying to push forward HM Government's wider international strategy when overall priorities were, quite understandably, mainly focused on the domestic aspects of the pandemic. There were challenges too in securing agreement from other HM Government departments to explain clearly and rapidly to our international partners all that HM Government was doing to address the pandemic in the UK and around the world.
117. Following the introduction of the 'traffic light' border health measures in May 2021, which were intended to manage the public health risks of Covid-19 in the UK, there was a desire from No. 10 and DHSC for the FCDO's travel advice to be aligned fully with border health measures. Fundamentally, there were tensions between the underlying purposes of the FCDO travel advice (which were based on an objective assessment by PHE and NaTHNaC of the health risks in that country, rather than being driven by border health measures imposed on travellers from that country) and border health measures (which were focused on the UK situation) and their respective advisory and compulsory statuses. Ultimately this was resolved and the decisions were made in parallel.
118. A final challenge was that, for data security reasons, COVID(O) papers were often only circulated very shortly before the meeting. As a result, FCDO officials were often required to brief Ministers for these meetings without sight of papers. Even allowing for the circumstances, this was a concern in the context of the decisions under consideration.
119. Given the scale and complexity of the overall situation, it is not surprising that such challenges ultimately arose. Despite all that came our collective way, I am proud of how the FCDO – and its legacy departments – were able to manage these and other issues. Staff showed outstanding adaptability, determination and resilience in serving the UK in the most exceptional of circumstances.

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 *18th May 2018*

Personal Data

SIR PHILIP ROBERT BARTON KCMG OBE

On behalf of: The Secretary of
State for Foreign,
Commonwealth and
Development Affairs
By: Sir Philip Robert Barton
KCMG OBE
Exhibit: PRB2
No: 2

Date: 18/05/23

**STATEMENT OF SIR PHILIP ROBERT
BARTON KCMG OBE ON BEHALF OF
THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND
DEVELOPMENT AFFAIRS**

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