

*The Political Officer
in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade*

5. Political officers face a number of obstacles to their work. Some of these are department-wide issues affecting all groups. The department has yet to articulate a mission for the age of globalization, notwithstanding the substantial efforts it has made to change with the times. This affects political officers more than any other group. Policy development is being accorded new weight, but it has struggled in the past, in large part because of a shortage of officers and over-tasking. As a senior official outside DFAIT observed, "They're not short of talent, just overextended". Business planning is improving, but it is still not delivering all the benefits it could. And information management is chaotic despite drawing down 7.4% of the overall DFAIT budget.

6. Issues particular to political officers include vacancies in the ranks of those supposed to be available to do political work and the policy of trying to fill the gaps by hiring term employees to do political work, which has created other problems. There are continued difficulties in clarifying the respective roles of functional and geographic bureaux, and progress has been slow in developing standard operating procedures for some key functions such as political reporting, managing crises, organizing visits and conferences, and preparing briefing books.

7. Addressing these problems would substantially improve the productivity of political resources, help the department deliver better service to government and Canadians, and position Canada to deal more effectively with globalization. For the most part, solutions have already been identified. They can be found in the practices of other foreign ministries and other government departments, and in some cases are already being implemented successfully in particular units of the department itself. Many of the proposals raised in the study can be implemented within three to six months, and all within a year or two at most. Little new money would be required.