

Whether this is your first posting or you are a foreign service veteran, there are probably a hundred questions running through your mind about your new assignment.

Where does one look for the answers? You may already have discovered some of the sources of information available in Ottawa - the Posting Briefing Centre and other sections of the Bureau of Personnel, the Foreign Service Community Association, your collective bargaining unit, your bank and so forth. Overseas, the Head of Mission or post administrative officer can often be very helpful. Or, you may have decided to rely extensively on your own and your friends' experience in helping to find out what you think you need to know.

However you decide to proceed, the key to a healthy and satisfying assignment is awareness and preparedness. This means trying to gain a full appreciation of what you are getting into before you leave. If you are aware of what to expect and prepared to plan and organize your time and actions accordingly, you will be able to anticipate problems before they occur, minimize inconvenience and avoid serious difficulties.

This Handbook is all about awareness and preparedness. It attempts to generate awareness about the conditions and implications of rotational employment in the foreign service. It also tries to help employees and their families prepare for going on a posting and for certain aspects of life outside Canada. It aims to do these things by discussing and illustrating the Foreign Service Directives - the FSDs - and relating them to key events which take place during the posting cycle. At the same time, it draws together under one cover useful information and advice from various sources about a multitude of other topics - from "accommodation" to "zloty" - which are in some way linked to the Directives.

If you do not already have a copy of the FSDs, pick one up from your Assignment Officer or from the Posting Briefing Centre. Later chapters in this Handbook will deal with each of the directives in some detail. For now, try to start thinking about the FSDs in terms of how they will affect your relationship with your employer and your personal lifestyle.