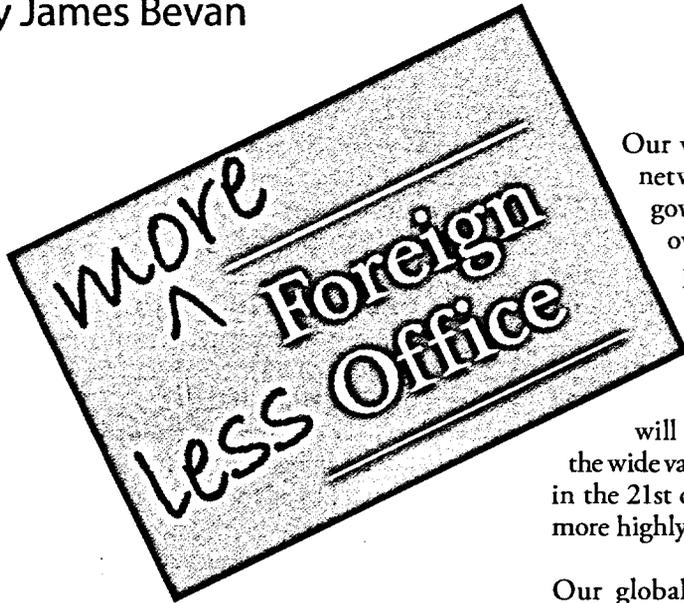


MORE Foreign, Less Office

By James Bevan



IN 2007, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) found itself operating a number of change programs. They were all working at different levels of effectiveness, all affecting the Office. But they spent little time coordinating with each other or assessing their cumulative impact in London and overseas—or, indeed, thinking about what overall vision for the future they were contributing to. Added to that, as with all government departments, were a tough financial climate and increasing competition from others working in the international arena. The FCO had to get smarter at how it changed to face the future.

So the High Level Change Plan was born. It brings together 12 major programs, which aim to deliver “more foreign, less office.”

If the plan works, we will have an organization that:

- is focused on changing the world, not administering itself;
- has most of its resources abroad, where they make the biggest difference; and
- looks outward, not inward, providing faster delivery with less bureaucracy.

Through the 12 programs in the plan, we look to change five big things about the Office: what we do, who we are, where we are, how we work and our culture.

Our work will focus on running a global network for the whole of the British government, delivering essential services overseas, shaping and leading foreign policy.

Our staff, however they are employed, will work closely to achieve the FCO’s objectives. They will represent all of modern Britain, have the wide variety of skills we need to operate abroad in the 21st century, and include more senior and more highly qualified locally engaged workers.

Our global footprint will shift toward more challenging places—with more staff in faraway places and fewer in the U.K. and Europe; more staff outside capital cities and offices, working flexibly and virtually, especially to influence places and people they can’t actually get to.

Our way of working will emphasize delivery, not bureaucracy—with more staff on the front line and fewer in the “centre,” better communication and knowledge sharing, and simpler, streamlined and standardized processes.

Our culture will be more innovative and experimental—with more confidence, creativity and risk-taking, more openness to new ideas—but it will keep our core values.

Ultimately, we will be a better organization and a better place to work.

The challenge is a large one, and will only be achieved by strong leadership at all levels across a widely dispersed network. It’s clear that large programs can be initiated from London, but they have to be interpreted and enacted locally to suit individual circumstances and local conditions. There is no “one size fits all” in the modern FCO.

James Bevan is Director General: Change and Delivery at the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office.



James Bevan: “There is no ‘one size fits all’ in the modern FCO.”

photo: FCO