



Submission No 45

Inquiry into Australia's Overseas Representation

SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION

Organisation: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Parliamentary Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Public Hearing
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Australia's Overseas Representation

Topic: Activities of Australian Diplomatic Posts

Question in Writing

The Committee has received evidence that demand for consular services is increasing.

- a) Would you discuss the merits of seeking to recover costs for consular services from those seeking those services? How precisely might reducing the cost burden be achieved?
- b) Would you discuss ways to encourage travellers to take out travel insurance?
- c) How does DFAT assess the effectiveness of its various diplomatic missions and Honorary Consuls?

Answer

- a) No. DFAT does not consider it appropriate to charge consular clients for services provided.
- b) DFAT continues to promote strongly the uptake of travel insurance through our Smartraveller campaign. The third phase of the Smartraveller campaign, launched in November 2011, features television, print and online advertisements specifically developed with the objective of encouraging travellers to take out travel insurance. The Smartraveller website and Smartraveller publications also all emphasise the importance of travel insurance.
- c) DFAT formally assesses the effectiveness of Australia's diplomatic missions through two mechanisms – the Post Evaluation Report (PER) process and the Post Liaison Visit (PLV) process. The PER process involves evaluation of post performance on a rolling basis, with each mission reviewed around every 18 months. DFAT seeks feedback from other agencies and departments on the performance of posts as part of the review process. PERs are discussed at regular meetings of the Departmental Executive where heads of mission are present.

Each year DFAT Deputy Secretaries lead small teams to a number of missions to conduct Post Liaison Visits (PLVs). The aim of these visits is to assess at first hand each mission's performance against agreed objectives. Approximately eight such visits take place each year.

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Honorary Consuls are appointed for two year terms. Supervising missions and relevant areas of the department are consulted on an Honorary Consul's performance before their reappointment is confirmed. In addition, supervising missions report annually on the performance of Honorary Consuls.

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Topic: Language Proficiencies

Question in Writing

You have provided data on the language proficiencies of DFAT staff.

- a) What steps do you take to ensure there is a match between language skills and overseas postings?
- b) How effective have these steps been? Would you provide results of any evaluations that have been undertaken?

Answer

- a) The department regularly monitors its language capacity to ensure that officers in our missions have the necessary language skills. In 2010, the department undertook an internal review of language training which identified the need for the department to improve language capacity in a number of languages, including Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Thai and Vietnamese. Following the review, 22 positions were redesignated as language designated positions, boosting the department's number of language designated positions to 163. In addition, we have begun introductory courses in Japanese and Arabic for officers with no prior knowledge of the language. We also provide immersion courses for officers with some pre-existing skill in a language to maintain or increase their skills.
- b) We are confident that these steps are addressing identified language deficiencies and are ensuring there is no mismatch between language skills and overseas postings. We are also confident that the quality of our language training is high. In the calendar year 2011, 85 staff attained additional language skills at the S3/R3 level.

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Topic: DFAT Staffing

Question in Writing

Ms Brodtmann

While the range and intensity of the department's activities have risen over recent years in response to government priorities, DFAT has around five per cent fewer staff than in 1996 (and around 14 percent fewer staff overseas) compared with the rest of the APS which now has around 12 per cent more staff.[page 15]

- A. Given policy advice and development is one of the main DFAT aims, what has been the fall in the number of policy staff from 1996?
- B. Have other areas grown, such as IT or administration?

Answer

- A. Between 30 June 1996 and 30 June 2011, the number of total policy positions (Canberra and overseas A-Based positions) decreased by 3 per cent (from 1025 to 991); policy positions in Canberra decreased by 4 per cent (from 651 to 625); and overseas policy positions (A-Based) decreased by 2 per cent (from 374 to 366).
- B. Between 30 June 1996 and 30 June 2011, consular positions in Canberra increased by 161 per cent (from 23 to 60); passport positions in Canberra increased by 227 per cent (from 48 to 157); and corporate positions (broadly defined as positions in finance, human resources, IT, property and security) in Canberra decreased by 12 per cent (from 521 to 461).

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Topic: Overseas representation in Morocco and Ukraine

Question in Writing

The Committee has received submissions and evidence at public hearings putting forward substantial arguments in favour of establishing embassies in Morocco and Ukraine (Sub. Nos 8, 10, 13; Transcript 17 February pp. 25–30; 44–9).

- . The Committee is aware of DFAT's priorities for establishing new diplomatic missions, but nevertheless, would you discuss the merits of each case?
- . What costs would be associated with opening embassies in Morocco and Ukraine?

Answer

The spread of our diplomatic representation around the world is regularly reviewed to ensure our diplomatic assets are deployed to maximum impact.

Australia is currently accredited to Morocco through our Embassy in Paris. Representation in Morocco would increase our capacity to engage with a significant player in North Africa, including in the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. It would support Australian commercial interests, including resources and agriculture, multilateral objectives, and increase our ability to manage consular demands in the region. Morocco has a dynamic economy, which holds some potential for Australian business. Opening an Embassy in Rabat could raise expectations among Morocco's neighbours for similar resident Australian representation. Costs to open an Embassy in Rabat would be in the order of \$25 million over four years.

The Australian Embassy in Vienna is currently accredited to Ukraine. We consider Ukraine to be well served by our embassy in Vienna due to cost-efficiency, policy alignment with other non-resident accreditations, the frequency of visits by Post, helpful consular sharing arrangements and the appointment of a new Honorary-Consul in Kyiv. However, an Embassy in Kyiv could enhance Australia's trade and investment outcomes through a presence in a key European growth economy with large, developing natural resource reserves. An Embassy would also increase engagement on transnational security issues, on which the Ukraine's active stance has been demonstrated through contributions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Costs to open an Embassy would be in the order of \$17 million over four years.

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Topic: Cross-postings and Repatriation

Question in Writing

Would you discuss the merits and drawbacks of cross-posting diplomatic staff as opposed to staff returning to Australia after an overseas posting?

Answer

In deciding who is posted where and when, the primary goal is to meet the operational needs of the department. Skills and experience, including language skills, the applicant's career aspirations and any relevant personal circumstances are also taken into consideration.

The department considers that, in order to remain effective in representing Australia overseas, a period of overseas service should be followed ideally by a period of service within Australia. This also assists the department in ensuring that, to the greatest extent possible, suitable employees are given equal access to, and opportunities for, posting to overseas positions.

Employees are generally expected to serve a minimum of two years in Australia between postings. However, this does not preclude cross-postings where there are compelling operational reasons, for example, where the cross-posted officer has specialised skills and experience for the particular position.

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Program: DFAT

Topic: Level of Staffing

Question on Notice

- a) Would you provide figures on the separation rates of DFAT staff—by age, public service level and function (for example 'diplomatic staff'); and on a year by year basis over the last decade?
- . How do these rates compare with other Commonwealth agencies; and with other diplomatic services such as the British Commonwealth and Foreign Office?
 - . Analysis of the data would be valuable.
- b) How has the relatively static staff and funding levels over recent years (as compared to other agencies) affected DFAT staff? In particular, how has it affected:
- . separation rates;
 - . mobility and career development; and
 - . esprit de corps?

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Answer

- a) The number of on-going separations for DFAT staff by level on a year-by-year basis over the last decade is detailed below. To provide information by age and function, and to compare these rates with other diplomatic services such as the British Commonwealth and Foreign Office, would be a significant diversion of resources, and in these circumstances the additional work cannot be justified.

Financial Year	BB1/2 (including Graduates)	APS6/EL1	EL2	SES	Total	DFAT Separation Rate	APSC Separation Rate
	Separations	Separations	Separations	Separations	Separations		
2001-02	46	47	16	14	123	6.7%	7.5%
2002-03	39	34	16	11	100	5.5%	6.0%
2003-04	35	49	16	12	112	6.2%	6.0%
2004-05	34	65	12	12	123	6.7%	8.6%
2005-06	24	47	13	7	91	4.8%	7.1%
2006-07	39	49	17	4	109	5.3%	7.3%
2007-08	36	69	17	17	139	6.8%	8.2%
2008-09	38	52	23	7	120	5.6%	7.1%
2009-10	32	20	13	14	79	3.5%	6.5%
2010-11	43	63	20	11	137	5.7%	6.8%
Average	36.6	49.5	16.3	10.9	113.3	5.7%	7.1%

The separation rate in the department is very low by APS standards and it remains low. Over the past decade the average separation rate for DFAT was 5.7% compared to an APS average of 7.1%.

- b) Staff and funding levels over recent years have had no discernible affect on separation rates.

The 2010 DFAT staff survey showed that six in ten staff (60%) agreed their current job in DFAT will help their career aspirations (above the APS large agency average of 45%) and around half of DFAT staff (49%) indicated they were satisfied with their career development opportunities (above the APS large agency average of 42%).

The 2010 DFAT staff survey showed that staff perceptions and attitudes towards working in DFAT were positive. Around three-quarters of staff were

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satisfied with their job and with DFAT as an employer. Almost nine in ten staff (85%) are proud to work in DFAT (well above the APS large average of 68%).

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Topic: Language Proficiencies Data

Question in Writing

Gai Brodtmann

You have provided data on the language proficiencies of DFAT staff.

- a) How many positions overseas carry a requirement of at least S3 and/or R3 for the local language (on the assumption that this rating allows for professional use of the language)?
- b) Do any positions require S4 or S5?
- c) What is the break-up of the languages involved? That is, x Arabic, y Hindi, z Tetum, etc
- d) What are the criteria for deciding to make or keep a position one with a professional language requirement?
- e) We hear a lot about fewer students studying Asian languages at university - are there fewer suitable candidates for entry into DFAT with Asian language qualifications than say 10 or 20 years ago?
- f) In rough terms, to what extent does DFAT meet its language skills by recruitment at entry level as opposed to training an officer for a year or two prior to posting?

Answer

- a) 163 overseas positions currently require a minimum of S3 and/or R3.
- b) No overseas positions require S4/R4 or S5/R5 (S4+/R4+ is the highest rating we currently use).
- c) The break-up of language designated positions overseas is as follows:

Arabic	13
Bislama	2
Burmese	1
Cantonese	1
Farsi	2
French	15
French/Bislama	1
German	5
Greek	1
Indonesian	19
Italian	2
Japanese	11
Khmer	2

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Korean	6
Laotian	1
Malaysian	1
Mandarin	23
Polish	1
Portuguese	6
Portuguese/Tetum	2
Russian	2
Si Pijin	3
Spanish	17
Tagalog	2
Tetum	1
Thai	7
Tok Pisin	6
Turkish	3
Vietnamese	7

- d)** The following factors are considered when deciding whether a position has a professional language requirement:
- the nature of duties;
 - the frequency of a given task requiring proficiency in the local language; and
 - the time taken by that task and its contribution to achieving overall post objectives.
- e)** The department does not specifically recruit for staff with particular languages, although it is an advantage to have high demand languages, such as Mandarin, Japanese, Korean and Arabic. The department continues to recruit quality graduates with skills in Asian languages. (For example, in 2012 of the 54 graduates recruited, 21 had recognised Asian language skills.)
- f)** The majority of staff taking up a language designated position have received language training provided by the Department.

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Topic: Overseas representation of the European Union and Brussels

Question in Writing

A suggestion has been made to the Committee that diplomatic representation to European Union countries could be through a 'Super Embassy' in say Brussels, with satellite consulates in the other countries of the EU.

- . Would you discuss the merits/drawbacks of this suggestion?
- . What is the potential for efficiencies which might accrue from such a strategy?
- . Would it be worth it?

Answer

Australia's diplomatic representation model employs a mix of diplomatic missions (Embassies/High Commissions), regional offices (Consulates-General, Consulates), third-country accreditation, Trade Commission offices (Austrade) and Honorary Consuls. The composition of this network is subject to regular review.

Where DFAT has an in-country diplomatic presence involving Australia-based officer/s posted to a capital city, that office is nearly always an Embassy/High Commission. To downgrade an already existing Embassy/High Commission to a Consulate-General/Consulate would risk harming relations and affect diplomatic protections/privileges for posted staff. It also requires the permission of the host country, most of who are unwilling to host Consulate-Generals/Consulates in their capital cities.

Many of DFAT's EU Embassies are already relatively small posts of 1-3 Australia-based staff and most non-diplomatic Australian Government services already run on a 'hub-and-spoke' system such as passports and visa processing through regional centres (e.g. London). DFAT will continue to look for such efficiencies where obtainable, but DFAT's core diplomatic business relies on an effective in-country diplomatic presence using regular, face-to-face contact to develop strong, personal relationships with host governments.

Brussels has increased in relevance, largely because of the shift of powers to the European Union from EU Member States over successive years, and because of our involvement with NATO in ISAF. Resources have increased modestly in Brussels with the addition of a new third secretary position in 2011 and provision of some additional funding for LE resources over the 2010/11-2011/12 period.

Notwithstanding the shift in powers to Brussels, engaging EU Member States directly in capitals remains critical, particularly given the EU's hybrid (supranational/inter-

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governmental) character, and because of our particular bilateral interests in EU Member States.

Relations with major European countries remain of great importance to Australia. As well as being critically important trade and investment partners, many cooperate closely on high-priority defence and security challenges, and support Australian interests on a wide range of other global issues. It would not be at all practical to try to manage our relations with the major European powers, including the UK, Germany and France, remotely from Brussels. Given the very broad scope of our engagement with those countries, our diplomatic missions need to engage with, and develop a network of contacts in, a wide range of government and non-government actors. That could not realistically be done from another country.