



# FCO Stakeholder Survey 2008

## Overview Report

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Foreign & Commonwealth Office



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# 1. Executive Summary

As part of its ongoing commitment to monitor stakeholder perceptions, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office commissioned this survey of external stakeholders as a follow-up to surveys conducted in 2002 and 2006.

The principle objectives of the survey were to:

- Understand the perceptions of the FCO,
- Assess progress in meeting stakeholder expectations since 2006,
- Explore how the FCO might engage better and improve relationships with stakeholders going forward.

136 interviews were conducted with very senior representatives from Partners Across Government (PAGs), Parliament, the media, business, non-governmental organisations, think tanks, academics and representatives from faith groups. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, which included a mix of quantitative and qualitative measures. Due to the seniority of the people we interviewed, this survey tends to reflect the views of stakeholder interactions with the FCO at a fairly senior level. It is worth noting that the majority of those interviewed had established relations with the FCO and considered their relationship with the FCO to be important to them in their work.

## 1.1. Overall Perceptions

**As in 2006, the overall feedback from stakeholders is predominantly positive.**

The FCO is a highly valued and respected organisation and staff are viewed as a major asset, particularly at more senior levels. Four-fifths of stakeholders rate the services provided by the FCO as good, very good or excellent and half feel the services are better than those of other Government departments.

The feedback in 2008 builds on the already positive story to emerge from the 2006 survey, with further improvements noted in a number of areas. The FCO is also recognised by many stakeholders to be an organisation that is changing and modernising, however, it is acknowledged by some that this modernisation process may be hard for the FCO to achieve.

Criticisms of the FCO were frequently based around a perception of inconsistency in the service provision between staff and between posts rather than being focused on the organisation as a whole. This perceived inconsistency can undermine stakeholders' perceptions of the FCO as a whole, making it harder to consider the overall performance of the FCO to be 'excellent' rather than good or very good.

## 1.2. The Role and Strategy of the FCO

The FCO is seen to have a unique and important role both within Government and the UK as a whole. Awareness of the new Strategy Framework is high and it is broadly supported, however, there is a degree of uncertainty as to the impact it will have in the longer term.

Stakeholders believe that one of the key strengths of the FCO is its ability to take a broader perspective than other Government departments and this remains highly valued. There is a sense among stakeholders that the FCO is looking to establish its (changing) role against a backdrop of some of its traditional responsibilities being taken away and reduced budgets. As the revised role settles down there are some questions over how the FCO will fit within Government, in particular:

- How the different departments will work together, including who will take the lead.
- The impact of the FCO no longer employing specialists in certain areas, with specialisms such as science being re-deployed to the relevant Government departments. There is some uncertainty as to how this will impact the ability of the FCO to deal with issues where a level of specialist knowledge will be required.

A high proportion of Stakeholders (75%) were aware of the new Strategic Framework and were broadly supportive of the changes, although there are inevitably those that were concerned about how it will impact their own areas of activity. A sizeable proportion of stakeholders felt it is too early to assess the impact of the new Framework, partly as a result of the fairly regular strategy changes that are felt to have taken place within the FCO in recent years.

Stakeholders would now like to see these new priorities being given an opportunity to have an impact before any further change takes place. In addition, while some improvements have been noted, many stakeholders are waiting to see the longer-term impact of the changes before committing to an evaluation.

### 1.3. Strengths of the FCO

When asked, all stakeholders were able to articulate a number of strengths of the FCO.

Over and above the calibre of the people that it employs, the key strengths of the FCO are seen to be:

- The quality of its analysis and judgement, including the broader perspective and having a good understanding of the way other foreign governments and cultures think and the implications of this for the UK.
- The ability to make complex things a little simpler. This includes being strong on the explanation of policy and on the interpretation of the political environment.
- Having a high level of influence around the world. As a result there is a sense that the UK is still able to 'punch above its weight' in the international arena. British diplomats are considered to be highly respected overseas.
- Being proactive at networking and putting appropriate contacts together
- Looking after British citizens overseas.

## 1.4. Improvements to the FCO

**Almost half of stakeholders believe that the FCO has improved its services in the last couple of years.**

A number of the improvements noted are seen to build on the positive trend which has been taking place within the FCO over a number of years. In particular the FCO is seen to be increasingly:

- Commercial and business focused.
- Focused on providing a high standard of consular services to the general public.
- A more modern and outward facing organisation (seeming less stuffy, arrogant and old fashioned)
- Diverse and less hierarchical as an organisation.
- Streamlined in its operations - including the redeployment of resources from Europe and more developed markets into areas where there is greater need, such as areas of conflict and developing markets.

In addition, there is recognition that since the last survey (and over the course of the last 6-12 months in particular), the FCO has become:

- Increasingly open, accessible and committed to working with stakeholders both within Whitehall and outside.
  - This is reflected in the proportion feeling ‘very well’ engaged which has risen from 20% in 2006 to 42% in 2008.
  - The FCO is seen as both more willing to share information with and listen to the perspectives of the outside world.
  - Some stakeholders believe more formalised engagement processes have been put in place; where these exist they are appreciated.
- More strategically focused, with a clearer sense of leadership.
  - This includes an improved focus on delivery of policy and working collaboratively with PAGs to achieve common goals.
- More efficient. In particular, improvements are noted in the finance and IT systems and to the FCO’s website.
- Better at responding in a crisis situation and/or reacting to problems that arise.

While all these improvements are noted and appreciated there is a desire for these trends to continue; for some stakeholders this represents a desire to reduce the inconsistency in service delivery in certain areas, whereas for others it is about delivering an even better service.

## 1.5. Issues to address going forward

**While the feedback is overwhelmingly positive, a number of issues emerged from the research which relate to the role of the FCO and the service that it provides.**

- There is a perceived need for the FCO to maintain its confidence and ‘clout’ going forward, to ensure its voice within Government and the outside world continues to be heard.
- While the increased focus on delivering and meeting customer needs is appreciated there is a concern that this is not at the expense of intellectual leadership and the FCO providing a high

level British voice. The issue appears to be one of striking the right balance. There can on occasion appear to be too great a focus on procedures, service levels and ‘ticking boxes’ rather than on diplomacy and thinking strategically.

- As in 2006, there remains some concern over the degree to which British interests are represented in negotiations led by the FCO.
- There is a need to continue to focus on the actual delivery of policy. While there have been improvements noted in this area, for other stakeholders there is still further to go. The lack of focus can sometimes be the result of the attitudes of certain individuals but is also seen to be the result of a degree of disconnect between those developing strategy and those delivering.
- There is a degree of frustration expressed (particularly by NGOs and Faith groups) about the perceived institutionalised pragmatism that exists within the FCO.
- As in 2006, there is a sense of the FCO being an organisation under pressure, with limited resources. While the reasons for this are appreciated, there is some concern (among NGOs and business stakeholders in particular) that this can result in a deterioration of the services that the FCO is able to provide.
  - There are particular concerns that some areas of the world may not have the required level of FCO representation.
  - It is anticipated that improvements in the speed of response to external events will need to be continued going forward.
- As in 2006, there is felt to be a degree of inconsistency in the performance of staff, particularly at a more junior level and between posts. The inconsistency encompasses:
  - Levels of knowledge (in relation to the stakeholders’ sector or organisation)
  - Levels of understanding in relation to policy and local cultures
  - The levels of service received in terms of the support given and the helpfulness of individuals in aiming to meet the needs of individual stakeholders
- The inconsistency is also seen to be linked to the frequent rotation of senior staff between roles and posts, observed in 2006, also remains and is seen to impact on the level of mutual understanding that stakeholders are able to develop with the FCO.
- It is hoped that the trend towards increasing diversity within the FCO will continue, although it is appreciated that this takes time.

There is also a desire among stakeholders for the trend towards greater openness, accessibility and improved dialogue with the FCO to continue:

- Some PAGs are looking for a clearer focus on joint objectives between departments and a better understanding of the priorities and issues of other departments.
- The more regular, open and formalised engagement processes, which have been put in place with some stakeholders, should be viewed as best practice. There is a desire to roll this out more widely. For example:
  - Some members of the business community feel that more could be done to engage with them on a regular basis and exchange views.
- Certain stakeholders, particularly those with a less frequent need for engagement, would welcome assistance in accessing the FCO. In particular, greater clarity is required about whom within the FCO to contact about particular issues.

- There is more that could be done to improve the FCO's use of online technology. The principal requirements are to place information on the website faster and to make it more interactive.
  - There are also a small number of requests for making transcripts of briefings and meetings with spokespeople available online, providing electronic updates of FCO activities and personnel and setting up expert blogs on specialist topics.
- There is a need to ensure that issues are consistently followed up in a timely manner.

## 2. Survey Objectives

The objectives of the survey as outlined by the FCO are shown below:

- To broadly understand current perceptions of the FCO amongst its stakeholder groups and, in particular:
  - Measure key shifts since the last wave of research.
  - Assess progress in meeting stakeholder expectations since the last wave of research.
  - Understand what influences stakeholder views.
- To evaluate stakeholder perceptions of the FCO's ability to change/modernise.
- To identify current and future needs and expectations of the FCO to shape the priorities in future business plans.
- To evaluate how well the FCO engages stakeholders and to identify ways to improve communications further.
- To understand whether it is necessary to change the way in which the FCO interacts with any of its stakeholder groups.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Approach

In total 136 interviews were conducted across the selected stakeholder audience. All participants were among the most senior individuals working for each organisation, this reflecting the importance of the survey to the FCO.

As experienced in previous years, the co-operation rate achieved was very high with the majority of the target respondents agreeing to take part in the survey. This in itself highlights the importance of the FCO to the stakeholder audience. The feedback from each stakeholder was taken in confidence to ensure that stakeholders were provided a forum where they could be as open as possible with their views on the FCO.

All interviews were conducted between 28th April and 23rd May 2008. Of the 136 interviews, 35 were conducted face-to-face and the others were over the phone. The interview template, used in the 2002 and 2006 waves of research, is semi-structured as it is the most appropriate means of approaching this audience. The main benefit of this approach is its ability to provide both:

- 'Hard' quantitative data captured using predetermined response lists and semantic scales e.g. excellent, very good, good, etc.
- The richer, verbatim qualitative feedback that not only enhances the understanding of the quantitative numbers, but also provides the specifics of how to take issues forward.
- It allows us to benchmark progress against previous results

The questionnaire in 2008 also included a number of questions aimed specifically at PAGs. This section of the questionnaire asked specific questions around:

- How well the FCO runs its network to serve the whole of HMG
- The extent to which the FCO has contributed to delivering all relevant Public Service Agreements [PSAs]
- Where the new Service Level Agreements [SLAs] could be improved

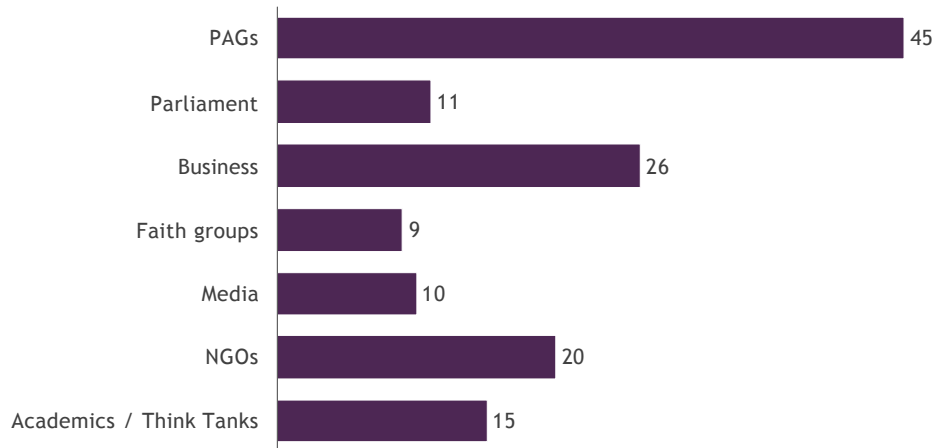
These questions were asked of both the main PAGs and the wider PAGs audience. The feedback from these questions has been reported on separately within a specific PAGs report and is not included in this document.

### 3.2. Overall Sample Structure

This graph overleaf shows the number of stakeholders that were interviewed as part of the survey. The sample sizes are broadly similar to the 2006 stakeholder survey with two notable exceptions. We increased the PAGs sample by 10 interviews and the NGOs/ Academics /Think Tanks sample (combined) by 19.

The sample structure is shown in figure 1 below.

Figure 1 - Number of Interviews Completed (Main Stakeholders)



### 3.3. Notes on Report Structure and Content

The subsequent sections of this report will combine the quantitative and qualitative feedback in order to provide a full picture of the views of the stakeholders. Typically in research studies we would be looking at sample sizes of no less than 50 and ideally greater than 100 for the purpose of quantitative reporting. However, when considering an audience of limited size, guidelines regarding minimum sample sizes are much more flexible, particularly when the survey involves interviewing a high proportion of the total selected audience (as is the case here). On this basis we will not only show the quantitative figures for the total sample, but will also show how the figures break down across the six distinct stakeholder audiences.

While the breaking out of the audiences will provide a sense of how different groups view the FCO, we would exercise caution in making definitive statements that one group is, for example, more positive than another. While we have a high degree of confidence in the validity of the data at an overall level, the analysis of the individual groups, particularly Parliament, the media and faith groups should be treated as indicative and directional.

Further points to note in relation to the quantitative data:

- Some stakeholders did not always feel able to respond to some of the quantitative questions. In the charts contained within the report we show an 'N/A' category which combines the responses of 'don't know', 'refused' and 'not applicable'.
- All quantitative data is shown in percentage form as opposed to absolute numbers, thereby making comparisons across groups easier to judge. Again we would exercise caution in making any definitive statements regarding differences across the groups.

While the qualitative feedback is delivered in an analysed form we do include verbatim quotes to illustrate some particular points.

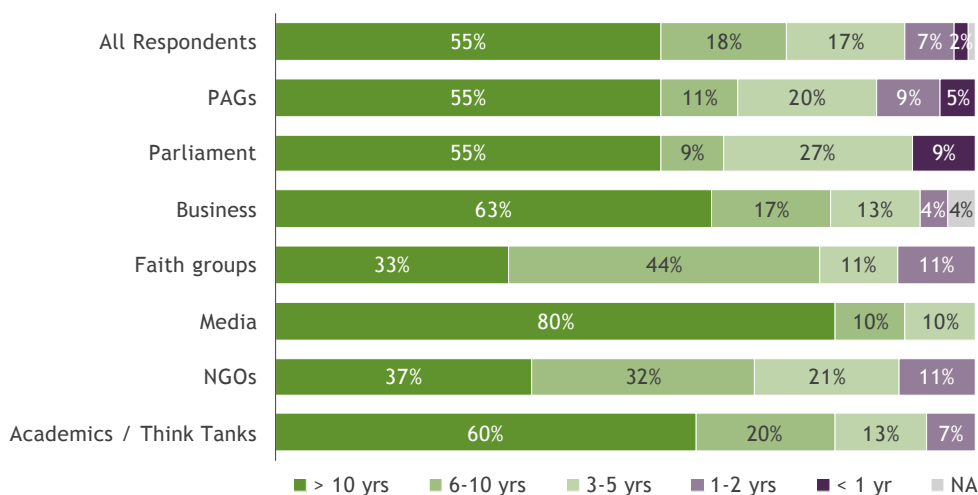
### 3.4. Background on Sample Profile

#### *Length of Relationship with FCO*

Relationships with the FCO tend to be relatively long standing as is evidenced by the data in figure 2, which shows that over half the stakeholders (55%) have been dealing with the FCO for ten years or more. The long relationships invariably have an impact on opinions as stakeholders are not only able to comment on changes since the last survey in 2006, but they also make comparisons going further back in time. It was also notable from a number of the interviews that some stakeholders have had dealings with the FCO in different organisations e.g. while working in different businesses, within the FCO itself or in different parts of Whitehall.

Figure 2 illustrates some minor variation across the groups, but the relationships are generally relatively long standing.

Figure 2: Length of Relationship with the FCO

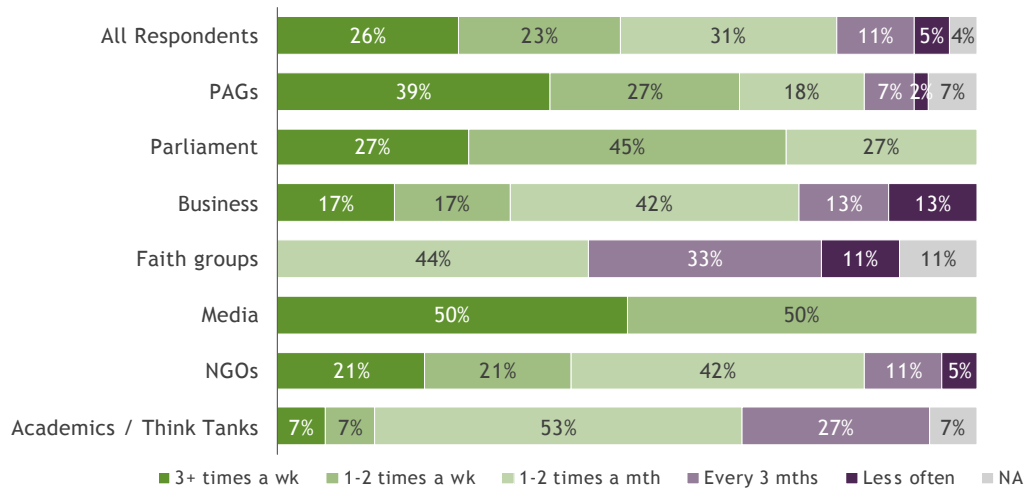


Base: All Main Stakeholders (n=132), PAGs (n=44), Parliament (n=11), Business (n=24), Faith groups (n=9), Media (n=10), NGOs (n=19) Think Tanks / Academics (n=15)

*Frequency of Contact with the FCO*

Across the stakeholder audiences, levels of contact vary quite widely. As maybe expected, high proportions of those in Parliament, PAGs and in the media are in contact several times a week or more. At the other end of the scale, those from faith groups have much less contact, with a relatively high proportion having contact once a quarter or less often. For some of those interviewed in this latter group, the lack of contact made it difficult to answer a number of the subsequent questions in the interview. The full distribution of responses is shown below:

Figure 3: Frequency of Contact with the FCO



Base: All Main Stakeholders (n=132), PAGs (n=44), Parliament (n=11), Business (n=24), Faith groups (n=9), Media (n=10), NGOs (n=19) Think Tanks / Academics (n=15)

## 4. The Role of the FCO

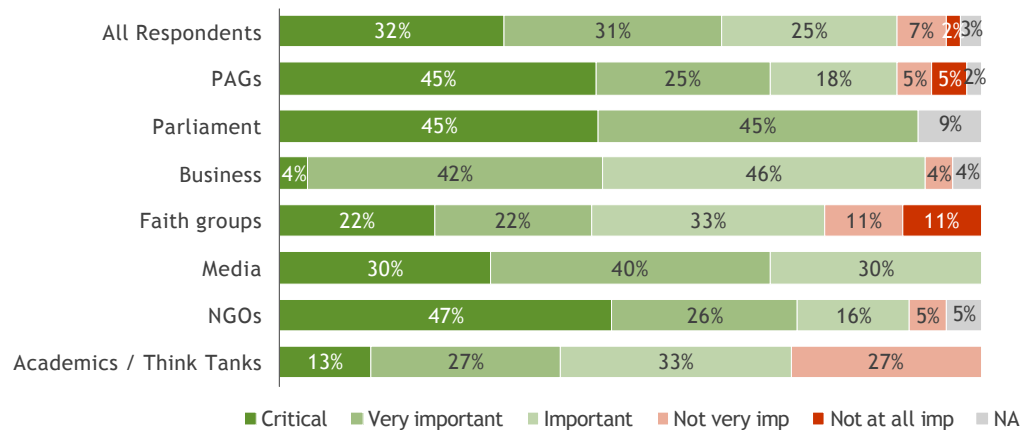
### 4.1. Importance of the Relationship with the FCO

The relationship with the FCO is important to these stakeholders.

The contact that these stakeholders have with the FCO is important to their work (88%) and for just under two-thirds (63%) it is either critical or very important.

As can be seen in figure 4 there is some variation across the stakeholder audiences with business and the faith groups, in particular, less likely to see the relationship as critical or very important. This lower level of ascribed importance is linked to the perceived impact that the FCO has on the work undertaken by the stakeholders. They may look to the FCO for information and support, but ultimately are focused on their own particular goals and objectives, which would not change should the FCO not be there as a partner.

Figure 4: Importance of the Relationship with the FCO



Base: All Main Stakeholders (n=132), PAGs (n=44), Parliament (n=11), Business (n=24), Faith groups (n=9), Media (n=10), NGOs (n=19) Think Tanks / Academics (n=15)

As might be expected, the data shows a link between the frequency of contact and the importance of the relationship, with those in greater contact being more likely to see the relationship as critical.

## 4.2. The Distinctive Contribution and Strengths of the FCO

The FCO is seen to have a distinct role both within Government and the UK.

Overall, the FCO is highly valued and respected as an organisation by the vast majority of its stakeholders. One of the key strengths of the FCO is the bright and talented people it employs, who are generally seen to respond well, be knowledgeable and culturally attuned.

Over and above the people, stakeholders are able to articulate a number of distinct contributions of the FCO which are highly valued by stakeholders.

### *Offering a Broader Perspective*

A key part of the FCO's distinctive role is that it is seen to be to provide a coherent overall foreign policy strategy under which other parts of Government operate. Most areas of Government are seen to have more specialised areas of knowledge, whereas the FCO has a more rounded, broad based and dispassionate perspective. As a result, the FCO is able to effectively contribute to the delivery of the broader UK strategic objectives, such as security and stability rather than narrowly focussing on a specific sector. In this role the FCO acts as a two-way channel, providing the public face of the UK to the outside world but also acting as a conduit of information into Government.

### *Analysis and judgment*

In addition, to providing an overview of the foreign policy context, the FCO is also seen to have a highly detailed knowledge of individual countries and their policies, with the ability to truly 'get under the skin' of foreign governments and cultures. The benefit is that, by getting to grips with other cultures, the FCO helps stakeholders to understand the impact of their international decision-making while understanding the varying agendas in a country. In addition, from a national perspective, the FCO is also seen as able to translate the assessment of foreign situations into the implications for the UK, having a unique understanding of how the world and the UK have changed.

*"They bring a unique understanding of the international footprint to the work of Government"*

Related to this is ability of the FCO to 'make complex things a little simpler'. This includes being strong on the explanation of policy and the interpretation of the political environment.

### *Influence & Diplomacy*

The FCO is felt to have a vital role in delivering UK policies and UK interests overseas, in addition to exerting an influence in international political decision-making. Part of this responsibility is seen to be supporting British business and organisations and representing their concerns overseas.

At its best the FCO is seen to represent the UK position and interests well, arguing a case in an effective and persuasive way, enabling the UK to 'punch above our weight'. Our diplomats are generally seen to compare favourably with those of other countries and command high levels of respect.

*"Its diplomacy and professionalism is second to none."*

The FCO viewed as being good at galvanising international communities to discuss their problems and is seen to be particularly strong in the areas of UN relations and international security.

### ***Facilitating Contacts***

Local ambassadorial staff are seen to be good at building local contacts and networks, which they proactively use to facilitate meetings between relevant individuals. A number of business respondents particularly mentioned as valuable the ability of the FCO to facilitate links into new countries where they do not have operations.

### ***Looking after British citizens overseas***

The FCO is viewed as responsible for managing a network of posts overseas which assist in achieving British interests and for consular services on the ground which support the travelling public overseas.

The FCO is seen to be performing this duty well; however, there are inevitably fewer mentions of this given the nature of the selected stakeholders' dealings with the FCO. The travel information and advice is also valued, particularly by business stakeholders.

## **4.3. The Changing Role of the FCO**

**The FCO is seen to be in a state of transition and stakeholders welcome its more inclusive and open approach to doing business. However, some are sceptical about the FCO's ability to change given its long-standing heritage.** The FCO is seen to be an organisation in something of a state of transition, looking to establish its (changing) role and standing in light of some of its traditional responsibilities being taken away and its reduced budgets. While this transition is taking place there are some question marks and concerns over how the FCO will adapt to the changing world and changing Whitehall environment. Despite this, there is a high level of support and respect for the FCO's efforts and even sympathy for the challenges it faces.

The distinction between foreign and home issues is seen to be increasingly blurred and it is acknowledged that the FCO will be required to work more collaboratively with other Government departments in future. Many believe that the precise role of the FCO within this new environment is still to be clarified, particularly in terms of how the different departments within Whitehall will work together and who will be taking the lead.

One of the FCO's great traditional strengths is seen to be its multidisciplinary expertise. However, with other Government departments now being responsible for global needs within their specialist fields, there is a degree of uncertainty as to the impact this will have on the FCO. While the increasingly generalist role of the FCO is recognised and understood, it is also seen to be important for the FCO to maintain sufficient depth of expertise in specialist areas in which it will be required to engage on as part of delivering its priorities (such as maintaining some science specialism).

Some concern is expressed, principally outside of the PAGs, that the confidence and 'clout' of the FCO is being diminished as a result of its changing role (vis-à-vis other departments) and budgetary constraints. The high profile of the FCO is seen to be important not only for our international standing and ability ensure the broader perspective is heard within Whitehall, it is also seen as essential if the FCO to continue to attract top calibre staff. There is a slight sense that a career in the FCO does not have the status it once held.

On occasion there is seen to be a lack of engagement between those developing the strategy and those delivering which means that the strategic objectives are not always met.

There is some sense that while British diplomats have 'the best' negotiating skills, they are known as facilitators not leaders. There are also those who feel that the FCO could do more to push British interests (and the interest of British business) in international debates, rather than take the role of 'global policeman'. Countries such as France and the US are often seen to do a better job of standing up for their own national interests whereas we are sometimes seen to be treading the line of 'political correctness'. On the other hand, those - in particular faith groups and NGOs - are pleased to see the FCO moving into a more global role, as this is seen to better reflect the modern world where it is essential to tackle the global problems the world faces as these ultimately impact British interests.

There is high awareness that resources are tight and this has resulted in certain posts being closed down or reduced, traditional government residences being sold off, programs being stopped (e.g. the language school) and visas being centralised into regional hubs. While there is general support for these changes, particularly among PAGs, there are those that are concerned that the organisation is overly stretched and in danger of diluting what it can offer. There are seen to be a number of potential impacts of this pressure on the FCO:

- There are those (particularly business respondents) that express concerns about residencies being sold off, particularly in parts of the world where having a visually impressive residency is considered culturally important.
- There is a fear of losing the 'British voice' by not having enough resources to get the British voice heard within institutional bodies such as the UN.
- There is some 'regret' that the FCO does not currently have the funding to spend on local projects that have traditionally been successful in maintaining and enhancing the reputation of the FCO (and as a result, the UK Government) in the local market.
- Staffing levels appearing rather thinly spread or too junior in some other areas, particularly in some developing markets (e.g. Central Asia, Central/South America) where demands are likely to increase going forward and/or there may be conflict in the future.
- Staff can appear overly stretched at times, resulting in delays, lack of follow-up and the need to chase.

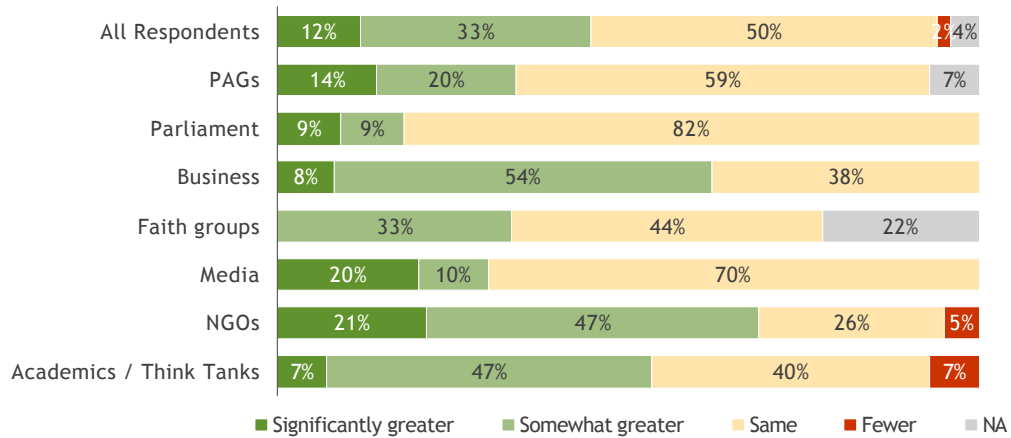
#### 4.4. Future Requirements and Developments

**Demand for support from the FCO is likely to increase in the future, with a variety of global issues driving demand.**

The ever changing nature of the political, economic and environmental situations around the globe inevitably means that stakeholders will continue to see the relationship they have with the FCO as an important one. Despite the challenge on existing resources, figure 5 shows that almost half (45%) of the stakeholders feel that their requirements from the FCO will actually be greater in the future. Only 2 stakeholders (one NGO and one academic/Think Tank) see their requirements reducing.

The data shows that businesses, the NGOs and the academics/Think Tanks in particular see an increase in their requirements.

Figure 5: Expected Changes in Requirements from the FCO



Base: All Main Stakeholders (n=132), PAGs (n=44), Parliament (n=11), Business (n=24), Faith groups (n=9), Media (n=10), NGOs (n=19) Think Tanks / Academics (n=15)

The figures above are broadly similar to those seen in 2006 when 56% felt that their requirements would be greater in the future.

Stakeholders were asked to articulate future trends that they believe will impact on the FCO and the way it carries out its work in the future. Many noted that the primary challenge for the FCO is the requirement for it to respond to unpredictable global events - most felt the FCO is needs to be increasingly geared up to respond quickly to such crises.

We have grouped the other identified trends into the following core areas.

**Focus Through Diminished Resource**

There is an expectation that the FCO going forward is going to continue to need to operate within a framework of diminished funding and resource. If funding is to remain tight, the FCO will need to decide whether it continues to spread itself thinly across the globe or selects a relatively small number of embassies on which to focus. If the latter approach is taken it is recognised that the locations of the FCO’s posts will need to be flexible as priorities and global events change.

**Global Issues**

The FCO is likely to continue to be influenced by the key global trends of climate change, global terrorism/security issues, globalisation of the world economy, competition for resources, security of energy supplies and large-scale migration of people. Stakeholders felt that policy issues will have an increasing international dimension and there is likely to be greater involvement of other Government departments in international work. As a result, there will be a need for the FCO to continue to determine its role within the UK’s globalisation policies and determine where it can add value.

### ***Evolution of Large Organisations***

The FCO will need to continue to define its role in light of the evolution of organisations such as the EU, the UN and even to an extent the Big Banks. The nature of diplomacy is seen to be changing as a result and there is a degree of uncertainty as to how the FCO will respond to this going forward.

### ***Rise in Developing Powers***

The increasing importance and influence of India, China and Latin America (in particular Brazil) was mentioned by many stakeholders. There is a need to both ensure bilateral relations with these economies are strong and that the tools for good relations are in place. For example, we will be required to have sufficient consular services on the ground and depth of expertise and language skills in these markets.

### ***Consumer & Business Focus***

With an increased number of people holidaying and businesses operating in 'far flung' locations, there is likely to be increased demand for the FCO's services overseas. The FCO is going to need to increasingly demonstrate how it can respond to increased media access and customer expectations. As the public becomes more demanding, the trend for improved 'customer care' and 'softer skills' within consular services is likely to continue.

The need to provide support to businesses working out of Britain is seen to be ongoing, with trade and commercial relations becoming increasingly important to the FCO's role.

### ***Modern Communications***

Modern communications and the growth in technology are not only set to continue to change the way the world communicates and does business but it also means the increased dominance of English around the world. There are mixed opinions in relation to the impact that improved communications will have on the way the FCO operates. While there is some feeling that they reduce the need for on the ground reporting and consular services, others feel that the nature of the FCO's work requires face-to-face discussion and understanding, something that electronic communications can supplement but not replace.

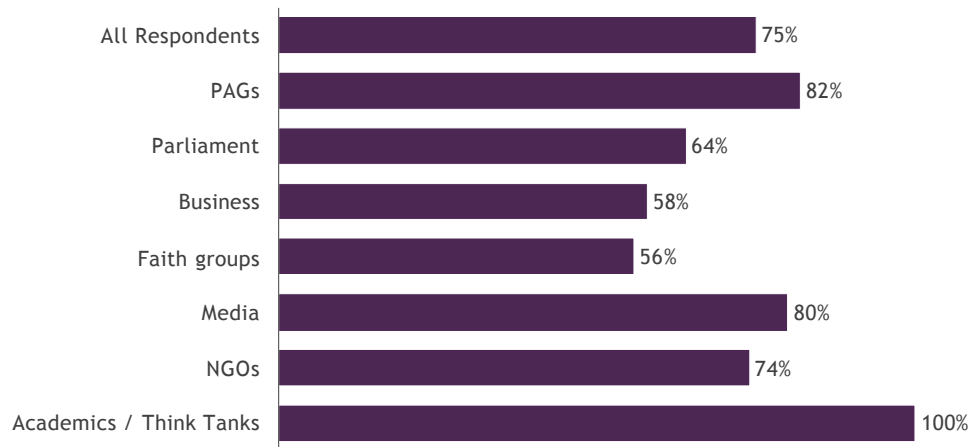
## **4.5. FCO Priorities and Initiatives (New Strategic Framework)**

**Awareness of the new Strategy Framework is high and it is broadly supported. However, there is a degree of uncertainty as to the impact it will have in the longer term.**

Stakeholders noted that the FCO's new Strategic Framework, which came into force in April 2008, was set against the context of its changing role and the challenges posed by a wide variety of global trends. . The launch of the new Strategic Framework was seen to have followed an extensive consultation programme involving the stakeholder audience.

Figure 6 shows that a high proportion (75%) of stakeholders are aware of the new Strategic Framework, with business and the faith groups being the least likely to be aware of its existence. A similar question was asked in 2006 in relation to the Government's International Priorities and at that time, 69% were aware. While the awareness of the new Strategic Framework is slightly higher than the comparable measure from two years ago, it still leaves a significant minority unaware.

Figure 6: Awareness Levels of the New Strategic Framework



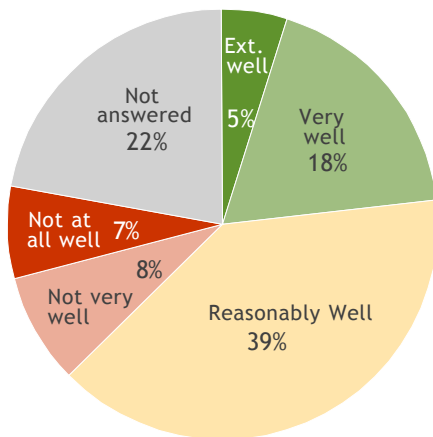
Base: All Main Stakeholders (n=132), PAGs (n=44), Parliament (n=11), Business (n=24), Faith groups (n=9), Media (n=10), NGOs (n=19) Think Tanks / Academics (n=15)

As would be expected, those in more frequent contact with the FCO are more likely to be aware of the Framework, but there are only marginal uplifts in awareness among those dealing with the FCO for ten years or more and among those for whom the relationship with the FCO is either critical or very important.

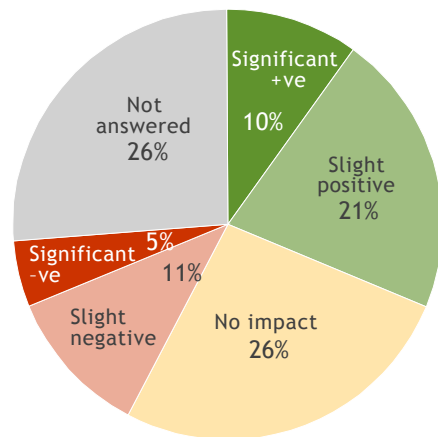
Views on whether the new Strategic Framework meets their needs and interests are broadly positive (see figure 7), but there are both some reservations and a sense of ‘wait and see’ what actually changes as a result of the implementation of the framework. While the need to rationalise the objectives is broadly understood and supported there are inevitably seen to be winners and losers within the new framework. Those organisations or Government departments who feel that the new framework is focusing on areas outside of their remit are concerned that their own area is being de-prioritised, for example, environmental issues outside of climate change, marine and aviation and agricultural concerns.

Figure 7: Extent to which the new Strategic Framework Meets Needs and Interests / Expected Impact on the way FCO works with stakeholders and their goals and objectives

Extent to Which Needs / interests Met



Expected impact on work with stakeholders



Base: All Aware of Framework (n=99)

While the sample sizes across the stakeholder groups are small (due to excluding those that are not aware of the Framework), the data indicates that NGOs and academics / Think Tanks are the groups most likely to feel positive about the framework both in terms of meeting their needs and the likely impact. Those who were consulted in the process are understandably more likely to support the new Strategic Framework.

While awareness levels are low among businesses, this audience tends to be the most negative about the Framework with around one in three of those aware feeling that it does not meet their needs and will have a negative impact for them. This is at least in part due to a concern among some business stakeholders that the business message is not as strong in the new priorities as they would like and/or they have resulted in a deprioritisation of their own area. There is a question mark among some stakeholders as to how interested the FCO is in dedicating resources to help UK business, compared with tackling the global issues such as world poverty and climate change.

While it is recognised to be difficult to achieve, there is a desire among some stakeholders for the FCO to take a longer-term outlook, without the need for continual change and evolution. There is a sense that with every new Foreign Secretary there is a new set of Strategic Objectives and a slight change of emphasis, which can result in a degree of cynicism around any new objectives set. Stakeholders felt that only time will tell whether these objectives represent a genuine shift to more focused priorities or whether ultimately things will continue as before. Also time is required to see how the priorities work together and what will happen if their own needs appear to fall outside of the priorities set.

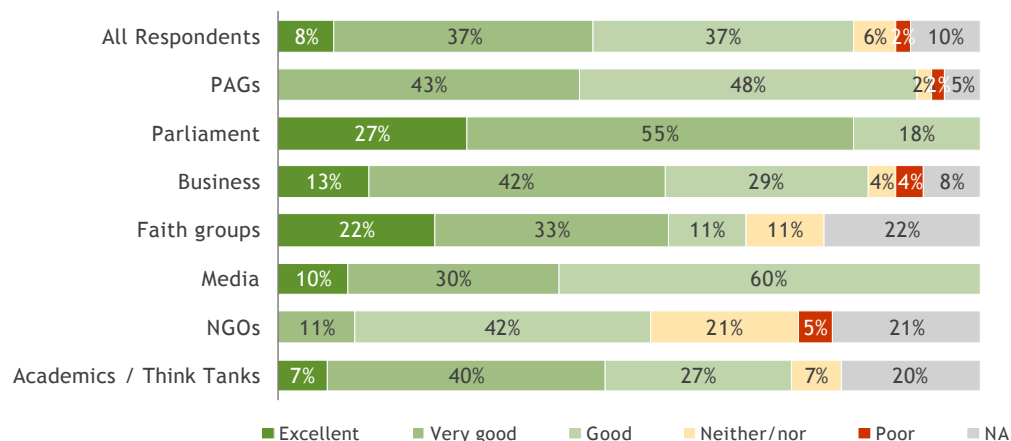
## 5. Performance Perceptions

### 5.1. Overall Performance Ratings

Stakeholders are positive about the overall performance of the FCO, with improvements noted since 2006.

As shown in figure 8, the vast majority (82%) feel that the FCO provides a service that is excellent, very good or good. This same question was asked in 2006 and a similar result was seen with 80% giving a rating of good or better. While there is consistency at this overall level, the proportion giving a rating of very good or excellent (45%) shows an improvement on 2006, when 33% gave a rating of very good (note: the rating of ‘excellent’ was added in to the 2008 survey).

Figure 8: Rating of Services Provided by the FCO



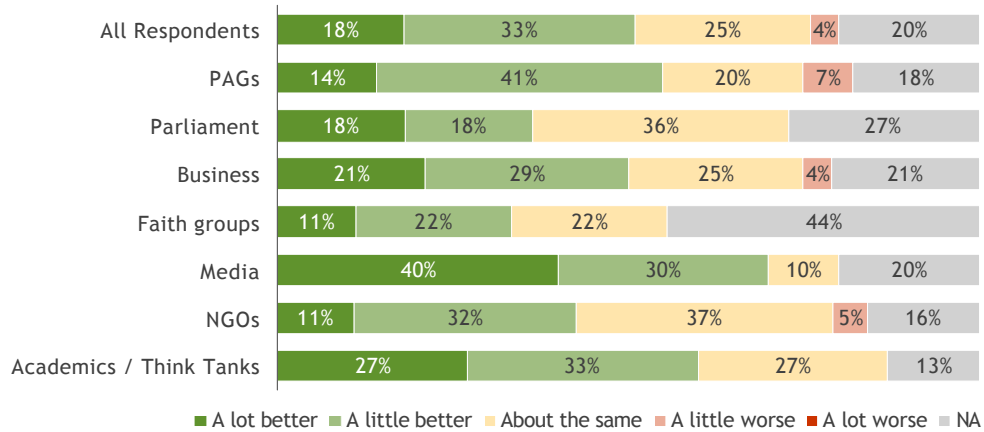
Base: All Main Stakeholders (n=132), PAGs (n=44), Parliament (n=11), Business (n=24), Faith groups (n=9), Media (n=10), NGOs (n=19) Think Tanks / Academics (n=15)

Stakeholders in Parliament appear to be the most positive group, with NGOs the least positive even when those unable to give a rating are factored out. No PAGs gave a rating of excellent; however, the vast majority consider FCO’s services to be good or very good.

The positive view of the FCO’s services is carried over into the stakeholder’s view of how the FCO compares with other Government departments (figure 9). When answering this question many felt that the FCO is ‘better than some, not as good as others’, but on balance the view was again positive with half (51%) stating that the FCO is either a lot or a little better than other departments and only 4% feeling it is worse. The scores are even more positive when it is noted that 20% of stakeholders are unable to make a valid comparison.

In 2006, 56% of stakeholders felt that the FCO was better than other Government departments, which is broadly similar to the proportion rating the FCO as better in 2008. Given the performance improvements which have been noted of the FCO over the last two years this suggests other Government departments have also been improving over the same period. This highlights the importance of continuous and ongoing improvement in order to maintain the FCO’s position as one of the better Departments to deal with.

Figure 9: Rating of FCO’s Services Compared to Other Government Departments

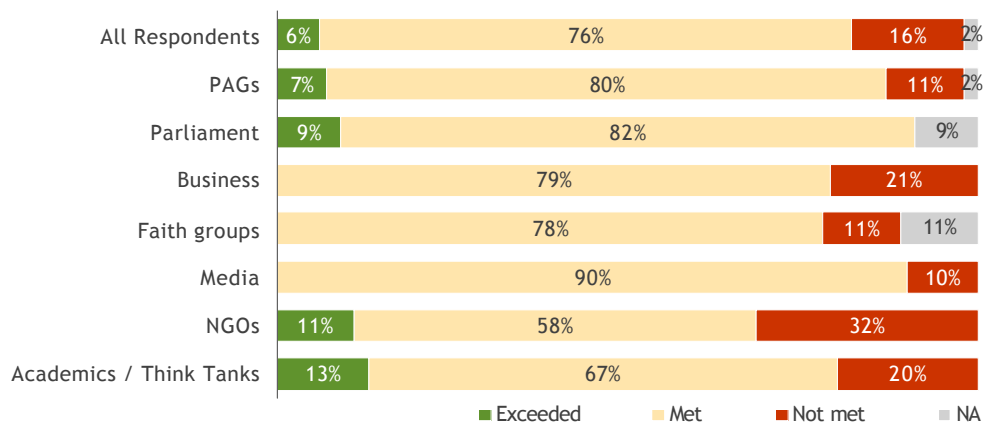


Base: All Main Stakeholders (n=132), PAGs (n=44), Parliament (n=11), Business (n=24), Faith groups (n=9), Media (n=10), NGOs (n=19) Think Tanks / Academics (n=15)

While the ratings in relation to the services provided are slightly more positive than 2006 data, there is a slight decline in the proportion of stakeholders that feel that the FCO is meeting or exceeding their needs and expectations. As shown in figure 10, around one in six stakeholders feel that their needs are not being met by the FCO. In 2006 91% felt that their needs and expectations were being met and only 8% did not.

At an overall level, the figures are still very positive with over 80% feeling that their needs and expectations are being met. While the majority of these state that their needs are met rather than exceeded it is worth noting that on answering this question stakeholders often point out that their expectations of the FCO are high. We will outline the reasons why needs are not fully being met later in the report.

Figure 10: Extent to which Needs and Expectations are being met



Base: All Main Stakeholders (n=132), PAGs (n=44), Parliament (n=11), Business (n=24), Faith groups (n=9), Media (n=10), NGOs (n=19) Think Tanks / Academics (n=15)

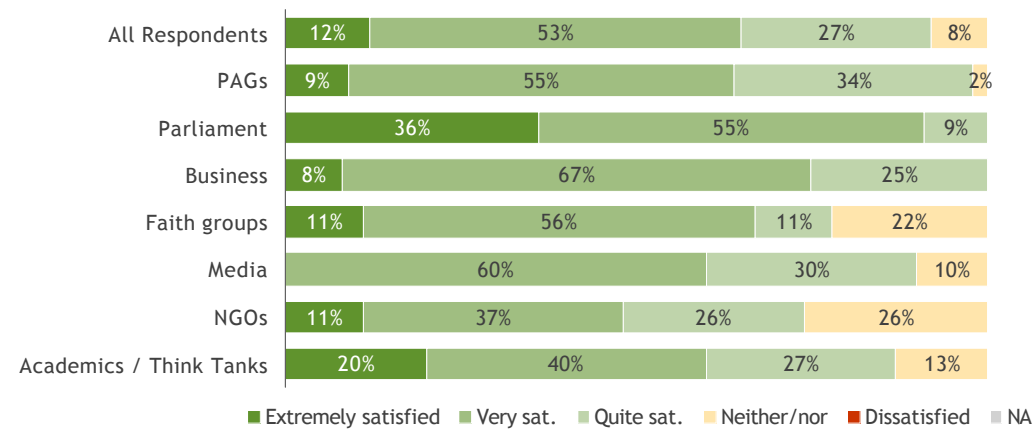
## 5.2. FCO People

**FCO staff are generally held in high regard by stakeholders and are a major strength for the Organisation.**

In general, stakeholders express a high level of satisfaction with the people with whom they deal, with over 90% at least quite satisfied and just under two-thirds (65%) being either extremely or very satisfied. These are very positive scores and it is also notable that none of the stakeholders expressed any overall dissatisfaction.

As seen elsewhere, there is variation across the main stakeholder groups, with Parliament and, to some extent, business tending to be the most positive groups.

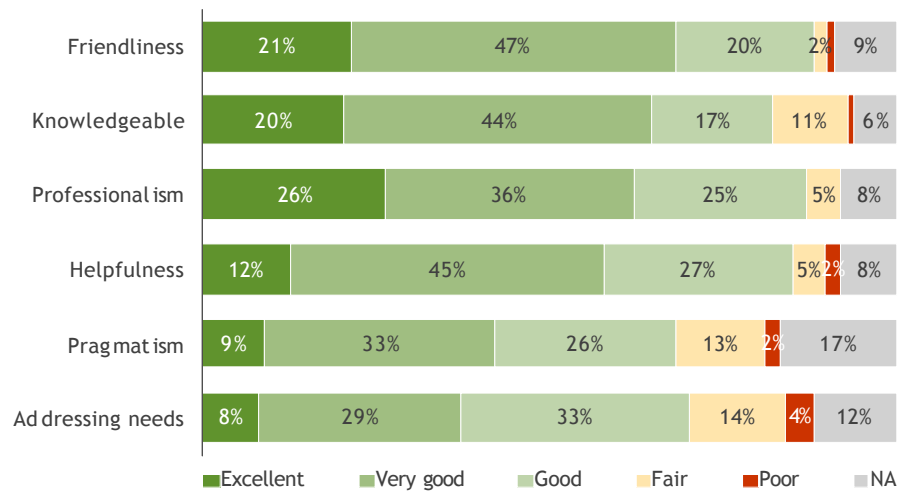
Figure 11: Overall Satisfaction with FCO Staff



Base: All Main Stakeholders (n=132), PAGs (n=44), Parliament (n=11), Business (n=24), Faith groups (n=9), Media (n=10), NGOs (n=19) Think Tanks / Academics (n=15)

In terms of specific attributes of their performance, staff are rated highly for the way they deal with stakeholders (friendly, helpful, professional) and the knowledge they display. When asked to spontaneously describe FCO staff, the most top of mind attribute quoted is that of being professional. At their best, staff are also seen to be “bright”, “responsive”, “flexible”, “committed”, and “enthusiastic” in their dealings with stakeholders. Senior staff, in particular, are noted for their “intellectual rigour” and “ability to give thoughtful analysis and advice”.

Figure 12: Rating of FCO Staff - Summary



Base: All Main Stakeholders (n=132), PAGs (n=44), Parliament (n=11), Business (n=24), Faith groups (n=9), Media (n=10), NGOs (n=19) Think Tanks / Academics (n=15)

As shown in Figure 12, over a fifth of stakeholders felt that FCO staff were excellent in their professionalism, friendliness and knowledgeability and over four fifths felt they were good or better in these attributes. All three of these attributes were viewed as important by stakeholders and this provides further evidence of the high esteem in which the FCO staff are typically held.

In relation to pragmatism, there is a sense among some stakeholders that staff at the FCO can be overly pragmatic on occasion. FCO staff can come across as somewhat cautious and risk averse, which while sometimes viewed as strength, can also be frustrating, particularly if it appears to be down to a lack of confidence or experience.

Based on the qualitative feedback it is apparent that ratings of staff would be even higher if some of the current inconsistency in performance could be removed. The issue of consistency that was raised by stakeholders in the 2006 survey still remains in 2008. Particularly at junior levels some staff are seen to place too much emphasis on procedure and 'box ticking' rather than thinking creatively. There are also issues in relation to:

- Levels of knowledge (in relation to the stakeholders' sector or organisation)
- Levels of understanding in relation to policy and local cultures
- The levels of service received in terms of the support given and the helpfulness of individuals in aiming to meet the needs of individual stakeholders
- Staff in some territories are still seen to demonstrate lower levels of commercial understanding, particularly outside of the more 'traditional' industry sectors such as manufacturing.

The inconsistency is also seen to be linked to the frequent rotation of senior staff between roles and posts, observed in 2006, also remains and is seen to impact on the level of mutual understanding that stakeholders are able to develop with the FCO.

While this variability is seen to be inherent in any large organisation, the system of regularly rotating staff is seen to exacerbate the issue with staff being able to move on before being held accountable or given an opportunity to develop their skills in depth. There is a desire for a greater consistency of more senior FCO personnel around the world. The regular rotation also means that the detailed knowledge of stakeholders' needs and organisations, and knowledge of local markets, moves on with the staff as they rotate.

*“Some are good and some are not so good. Some can think outside the box and do an excellent job, others are pen pushers with an ‘I can’t be bothered’ attitude. There is a huge turnover of staff at the junior level which makes it difficult with continuity” (NGO)*

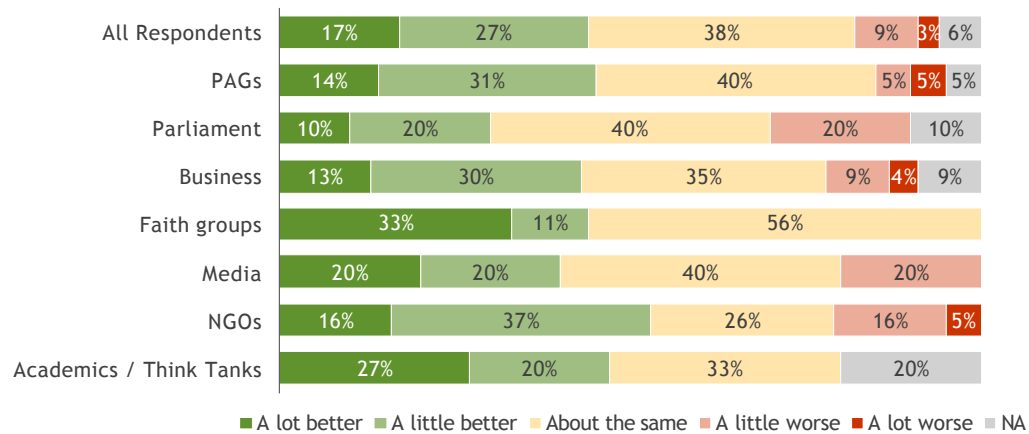
### 5.3. Performance Improvements

A number of improvements in performance have been noted since the survey in 2006.

One of the key objectives of the study is to assess how the FCO’s performance has changed since 2006. Figure 13 shows that just under half (45%) of the stakeholders feel that the service they receive from the FCO has improved over the last two years and around two-fifths (38%) feel that it is the same.

There is a reasonable level of consistency across the stakeholder groups. While the stakeholders from Parliament appear slightly less positive about recent changes, their overall ratings were the most positive overall.

Figure 13: Change in the FCO’s Service over the Last Couple of Years



Base: All Main Stakeholders dealing with the FCO for more than a year (n=128), PAGs (n=42), Parliament (n=10), Business (n=23), Faith groups (n=9), Media (n=10), NGOs (n=19) Think Tanks / Academics (n=15)

It is notable that those that have been dealing with the FCO for ten or more years are less likely to have seen improvements than those dealing with the FCO for less time; the figures seeing improvement are 33% and 59% respectively. As noted earlier, the stakeholders that have been in contact with the FCO for longer tend to refer back to how the FCO was in years gone by and this historic view may well be colouring the way in which they assess more recent change.

When the same question was asked in 2006, 48% of stakeholders felt that the service had improved since 2002. It is therefore encouraging to see that service improvements have been noted over a six-year period for the FCO.

The ongoing improvements noted often centre around the FCO being a more modern and outward facing organisation; in particular, the FCO is seen as less stuffy, arrogant and old fashioned than it was in the past. There is also seen to be recognition within the FCO that business and economic issues need to be at the heart of foreign policy. The trend of the FCO being more commercial in its outlook and attuned to the needs of business is seen to have started when Robin Cook was Foreign Secretary and continued over time.

While the FCO is still viewed as a predominantly white, middle class institution, there is an acknowledgement that the FCO is becoming increasingly diverse, and is achieving this without

compromising the quality of new recruits. There is still seen to be work to do here, particularly by some of the faith groups who would like to see more of those working in the posts being drawn from an appropriate ethnic or religious background. There is also seen to be a lack of women in senior positions, although it is recognised that these changes take time to come through. The FCO is also praised for being less hierarchical than it was in the past, giving responsibility to bright people early on.

There is a sense that over recent years the FCO has improved the services offered to the general public and is taking the responsibility of consular work more seriously.

***Changes over the Last Year*** Since the last survey (and over the course of the last year in particular) there is the recognition that the FCO is becoming increasingly open, accessible and committed to working with others than it was traditionally. This is reflected in the improvements in the perception of stakeholder engagements since 2006 noted previously.

*“They make more effort to reach out to stakeholders, to be more modern and less stuffy.”*  
(NGO)

*“They are less reserved and have a greater desire to engage with business.”* (Business)

The arrival of David Miliband as Foreign Secretary is welcomed by most stakeholders. The impression is that he has brought with him a more outward looking and modern way of thinking to the FCO. There are mixed views on the recent open gathering; the sentiment of openness was applauded and some would like more of them - ideally longer and fuller; while others considered the sessions too large in scale to be useful. During this period, the FCO is also considered to be more confident in dealing with the media with less ‘spin’ and desire to control what is being said.

Some Parliamentary stakeholders and PAGs believe that the FCO has a more strategic focus and clearer leadership than it had previously. This is seen to have resulted in a greater emphasis on delivery rather than just policymaking. There is also a sense of the FCO being increasingly committed to working with others in Whitehall as part of a team and having a clearer understanding of the FCO’s areas of activity and what these mean to others. For PAGs, these are all areas that are seen to be moving in the right direction, however, there is a feeling that more can be done going forward.

The FCO is also seen to have acknowledged the need to respond more quickly to events that can flare up around the world.

Budget cuts are felt to have forced the FCO to become more efficient as an organisation, leading to improved professionalism of its financial management and more streamlined operations. More recently, the FCO is seen to be making better use of technology with part of this being its updated website with improved and more user-friendly information available for those travelling overseas. It is notable that both internal IT and back office systems were mentioned as issues in the 2006 stakeholder survey. These areas they did not emerge as issues in the current survey suggesting there has been improvement since 2006.

With regard to online communications, stakeholders are generally happy with the channels available to them to communicate with the FCO and the increasing use of email is another area where the FCO is seen to have improved and modernised.

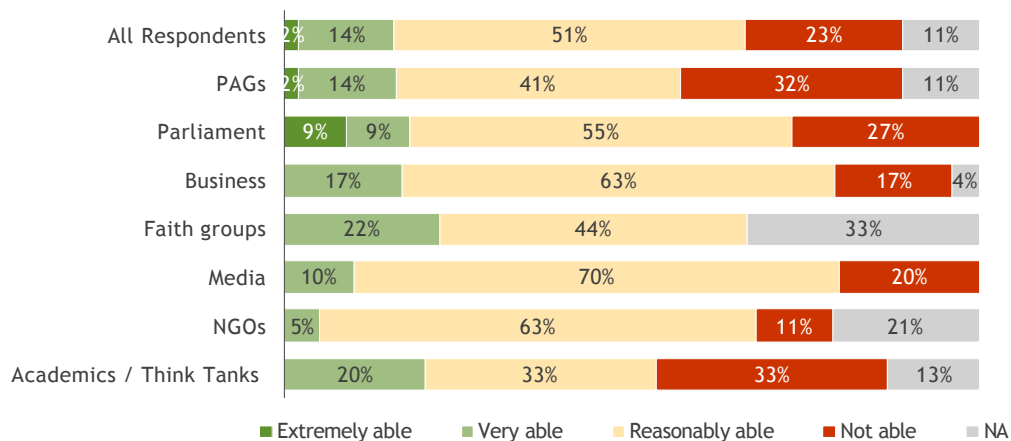
**Modernisation Programme - Awareness of Programme and Perceived Ability to Change**

Stakeholders were asked to comment on whether the modernisation programme that is in place has improved operations. The data shows that at this point in time a high proportion (44%) feel unable to comment on this question, although those giving a response tended to be positive, with four times as many stakeholders noticing an improvement (33%) as opposed to a worsening of operations (8%).

While a high proportion could not comment on whether the programme of modernisation and change had improved operations, most stakeholders were able to provide an assessment of whether or not they thought the FCO was an organisation that was able to implement such a programme of change. Many stakeholders felt that the history and heritage of the FCO makes it a challenge to change and modernise. This appears to be reflected in the data shown in figure 14, which suggests that stakeholders have some reservations as to the FCO’s ability in this area.

At an overall level, around two-thirds feel that the FCO is at least reasonably able to change and modernise, but only one in six feel they are extremely or very able to do so. The data also shows, however, that a significant minority (23%) do not feel the FCO is well placed to implement change and with the exception of the faith groups, this is relatively consistent across the stakeholder groups. These stakeholders do not necessarily see this as a criticism of the FCO, more a comment on the nature of the organisation.

Figure 14: Perceptions of the FCO’s Ability to Change and Modernise



Base: All Main Stakeholders (n=132), PAGs (n=44), Parliament (n=11), Business (n=24), Faith groups (n=9), Media (n=10), NGOs (n=19) Think Tanks / Academics (n=15)

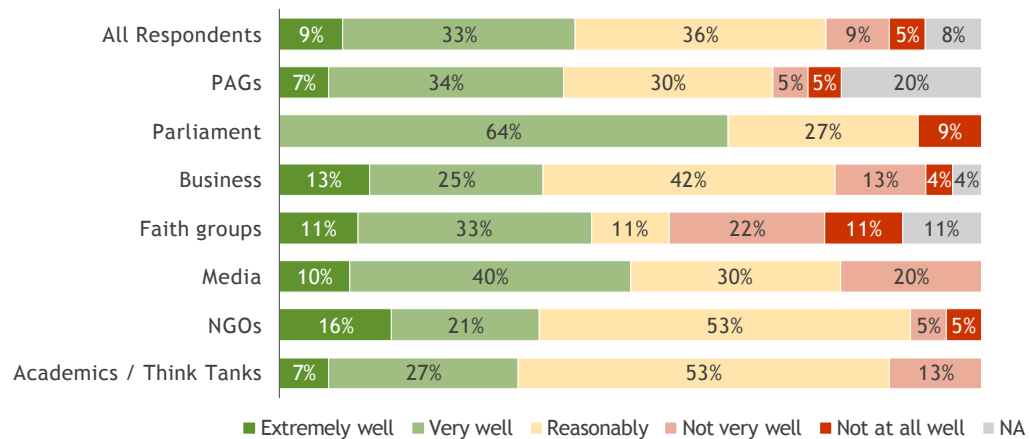
## 5.4. Stakeholder Engagement and Communication

Stakeholders are reasonably positive about their engagements with the FCO and this is an area where the FCO is seen to have improved since 2006.

Stakeholders felt relatively well engaged in helping to shape the FCO’s priorities, with over three-quarters (78%) feeling reasonably well engaged and 42% feeling either extremely or very well engaged as shown in figure 15 below.

The overall proportion feeling engaged is broadly in line with that seen in 2006 when 79% felt at least reasonably well engaged. However in 2006 only 20% felt very well engaged, whereas we are now seeing over 40% feeling extremely or very well engaged (we added the additional point on the scale this year), thus suggesting that while a consistent proportion remain unengaged, the overall level or strength of engagement has shown a marked improvement.

Figure 15: How Well Does the FCO Engage with Stakeholders in Relation to Priorities



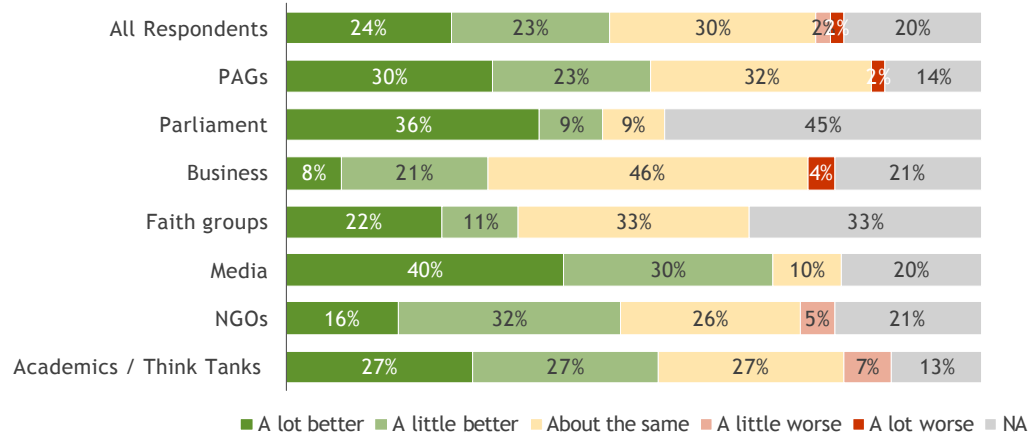
Base: All Main Stakeholders (n=132), PAGs (n=44), Parliament (n=11), Business (n=24), Faith groups (n=9), Media (n=10), NGOs (n=19) Think Tanks / Academics (n=15)

The proportion of stakeholders not feeling particularly well engaged with by the FCO is higher among the faith groups, where three out of the nine faith groups interviewed do not feel that the FCO engages with them very well. The feedback from some of the qualitative interviews indicates a feeling among some faith groups that the FCO does not understand them as well, which can lead to them feeling more detached than other groups. There are certain faith groups outside the Abrahamic community that would like to see a greater degree of engagement with the FCO going forward as they see the FCO focusing on the Muslim communities.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the level of engagement is better for those where the relationship with the FCO is either critical or very important; 49% of this group feel extremely/very well engaged with compared to 27% among those where the relationship is less important.

The generally positive view in relation to engagement carries across into the view stakeholders have in comparing the FCO with other Government departments on this issue. Just under half (47%) feel that engagement with the FCO is better than with other departments and only 3% feel it is worse.

Figure 16: FCO Engagement Compared to Other Government Departments



Base: All Main Stakeholders (n=132), PAGs (n=44), Parliament (n=11), Business (n=24), Faith groups (n=9), Media (n=10), NGOs (n=19) Think Tanks / Academics (n=15)

Figure 16 shows a high degree of variation across the stakeholder groups, much of this driven by the proportion that felt unable to give a rating. However, the data does suggest that businesses feel slightly less positive in this area, although this is at least in part likely to reflect the fact that other Government departments they have dealings with are likely to focus more specifically on businesses and their issues e.g. BERR.

Stakeholders were asked to provide feedback on how engagements with them could be improved, but it is apparent that many stakeholders are simply happy with their current engagements and want things to continue along current lines. Engagements are seen to work particularly well where there are formalised structures and processes in place for engaging with the FCO. As a result this should be seen as best practice.

### *Improvements to Stakeholder Engagements*

While the improvements to engagements and dialogue with stakeholders are noted and valued, there is a desire to continue with this trend going forward.

While many did not suggest future change in this area, the areas that were cited centred on:

- More regular, proactive and structured engagement processes with some stakeholders, particularly some members of the business community, NGOs and some faith groups.
  - NGOs and faith groups are looking for more opportunities for real input. There is a desire for the FCO to be more proactive with their action plans for engagements with them, clarifying how they can input into decisions and consistently engage with them. Ideally, engagements would be with smaller, more focused groups to enable more targeted consultations to ensure all parties are interested and are able to engage in frank discussion.
  - There is a general desire to work more co-operatively with business, with an understanding that ultimately the FCO and business often share the same goals and issues.
  - There are also requests from some faith groups for the FCO to develop a better understanding of the specifics of their religion so that advice and support can be delivered appropriately.
- Greater clarity on who manages key relationships and who works where in the organisation to enable stakeholders to have a better understanding of whom to contact within the FCO about a particular issue.
- While media stakeholders tend to feel the FCO engages with them better than other Whitehall departments, there are those that would like more extensive background briefings, more detailed briefings on a confidential basis (such as that at Chatham House), and more access to working diplomats and the Foreign Secretary. There are also specific requests designed to make their jobs easier, principally greater notice of upcoming events and the avoidance of briefings late in the afternoon, which make it difficult to meet publishing deadlines.
- For some stakeholders, in particular certain stakeholders within Parliament, there is a requirement for an improved degree of responsiveness, namely having more resource available to them, quicker follow-up of requests and ideally an acknowledgement that issues are being dealt with.
- While the current outreach programme is applauded, there are those that would like the FCO to 'think out of the box' more to broaden the exchanges it conducts to include more diverse groups.
- There is also a desire to be brought into consultations earlier, and to receive feedback on how their specific contributions have been used. It is not that stakeholders expect the FCO to take on board their advice all the time, but they are looking for the FCO to demonstrate that they have been listened to and reassure them that the consultation is more than mere 'window dressing'.

### *Online Communications*

There are a small number of suggestions made for improving communications through online media:

- Put information on the website faster. In addition, make the website more interactive and easier to navigate in certain areas. The Travel Advisory Service area of the website is cited as best practice.
- Make transcripts of all briefings and meetings available online.
- Provide regular email updates of FCO activities and who is responsible (along the lines of the email produced by DFID), including changes to ambassadors and key staff within the FCO
- Use of specialist blogs - providing dedicated channels for specialists within the FCO and those outside.