

Far Apart but Close Together

A Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of the Career Structure and Organisational Culture of the Post-War British Diplomatic Service.

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Abstract

A good deal has been written about the organisation and structure of the British diplomatic establishment since 1945. This paper seeks to use detailed quantitative and qualitative data to help develop an understanding of the background and career trajectories of the most senior figures in the Diplomatic Service in 1975. By tracing their careers it is possible to identify more precisely than before the changing educational and social background of these individuals when compared with previous generations of diplomats. The paper also examines certain core features of the culture of the diplomatic establishment during the post-war decades, analysing how it both shaped and was shaped by particular structures and practices. The paper argues that, despite the existence of a peripatetic career structure that dispersed members of the diplomatic establishment around the globe, there were still numerous opportunities for the kinds of personal contact necessary to maintain an integrated culture.

During the three decades following the end of the War against the Axis powers, British governments faced a complex and evolving set of issues when managing their country's external relations. Although both the nature and extent of British 'decline' has been questioned by historians,¹ the unmistakeable shift in global hard power towards the two superpowers, when combined with the slow but inexorable end of Empire, meant that Britain increasingly became a 'major power of the second order'.² While elected politicians carried formal responsibility for the conduct of external relations, members of the British diplomatic community were important actors in the policy-making and policy-execution processes, a distinction that was often less clear in practice than in constitutional theory.³ Senior members of the diplomatic establishment played a significant role in shaping decisions on foreign policy, whether through offering direct advice to ministers, or by determining the flow of information in a way that structured perceptions of the international landscape among political decision-makers in London. And, because members of this self-contained bureaucracy staffed all the senior diplomatic positions both in London and overseas, they provided a strong element of continuity in the management of Britain's foreign relations, serving as permanent fixtures as their political masters came and went. Their tenure also provided them with a level of knowledge and experience which allowed them to ensure a degree of continuity in the substance of foreign policy as well.

This article is part of a larger project designed to develop a more textured understanding of the post-war diplomatic community than has hitherto been possible. It is not directly concerned with how particular diplomatic processes were undertaken, a subject well-covered elsewhere,⁴ while a number of scholars have already given valuable overviews of the organisation of the diplomatic establishment during this period.⁵ This paper by contrast focuses in detail on the social backgrounds and career progression of the individuals who

occupied the most senior positions in the British diplomatic establishment in 1975. It then goes on to explore how the development of a strong sense of shared identity among this cohort, fostered by a distinctive understanding of the nature of diplomatic expertise, countered the potentially fragmenting effects of a peripatetic career structure that continually moved officials to different postings around the world. The 45 individuals who form the focus of this study are those who in 1975 occupied the most senior grade 1 and grade 2 posts listed in table 1 below. In the FCO in London these posts included the Permanent Secretary (grade 1) and the 8 Deputy Secretaries (grade 2). Among the 144 diplomatic posts, the 14 most important had grade 1 heads, while the next 20 most ‘prestigious’ posts had heads at grade 2. There were also two additional grade 2 posts given to the second-in-commands in Washington and the United Nations in New York.⁶

Table 1: Diplomatic Roles at Grades 1 and 2 (1975)	
FCO	Permanent Secretary and eight Deputy Secretaries
Heads of Grade 1 Posts	Bonn, EEC (Brussels), NATO (Brussels), Cairo, Canberra, Lagos, Moscow, New Delhi, Ottawa, Paris, Rome, Tokyo, United Nations (New York), Washington
Heads of Grade 2 Posts	Ankara, Athens, Bangkok, Brasilia, Brussels, Buenos Aires, Cape Town and Pretoria, Copenhagen, Dublin, The Hague, Islamabad, Kuala Lumpur, Madrid, Nairobi, Stockholm, Tehran, Tel Aviv, Vienna, Wellington, United Nations (Geneva)
Grade 2 roles in Posts	Deputy Permanent Representatives United Nations (New York), Minister Washington

All of these posts were in 1975 filled by career diplomats, with the exception of the head of the delegation to the United Nations in New York. This latter position was held by a political appointee, the former MP Ivor Richard, who has not been included in the study. We have instead, in view of the growing geopolitical importance of the post, added the ambassador in Peking (Eddie Youde) to the group. A full list of the individuals is given in the Appendix.

The career pathways of this Leadership Cohort, as recorded in the *Diplomatic List* for 1975, have been mapped in a database that records, for each year, the location to which each individual was assigned along with their job title. A typical career path of 28 years for a diplomat joining the Foreign Office in 1947 is therefore described by 56 data-points, with the careers of the whole group of 45 leaders described by some 1,300 data-points in all. Since this material includes information both about geographical location and functional responsibility, it allows some tentative conclusions to be drawn about the development of networks within the diplomatic establishment, more specifically showing how iterated contacts between individuals helped to facilitate the development of a common identity and culture. This quantitative data has been supplemented by material that allows for a more qualitative analysis, including biographical details drawn from newspaper obituaries, memoirs, entries in reference sources including the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and *Who Was Who*, along with interviews given to the British Diplomatic Oral History Project.⁷ This qualitative and quantitative information can together provide new insights into the way in which the organisation and culture of the British diplomatic establishment shaped the outlook of the 1975 Leadership Cohort that forms the subject of this study.

The rest of this article starts by using material in the database to examine the social and educational background of the 1975 Leadership Cohort. The distinctive nature of recruitment in the immediate post-War years, when most of the Cohort first joined, meant that the profile

of new recruits to the Foreign Service was markedly different from their predecessors. They were nevertheless quickly inducted into a culture that emphasised the importance of developing a broad experience of international relations, rather than a specific expertise focused on a particular geographical region or functional specialisation. The article then goes on to examine how the organisational culture of the Foreign Service after 1945 *both* shaped *and* was shaped by the career paths of the individuals who belonged to it. It will be seen that this culture, in all its complex variety, was influenced by a distinct set of structural factors. Ruling assumptions did not simply descend from the ether. They were instead fostered by countless interactions between individuals. The culture of the British diplomatic establishment was founded on a set of tacit assumptions and norms which manifested themselves, among other ways, in a strong belief that effective diplomacy depended more on intelligence and *nous* than on a particular and easily-defined skill set. It was a culture that by the 1960s was increasingly seen by critics as outmoded and no longer fit for purpose.

The Backgrounds of the Leaders of the Diplomatic Service in 1975

Before considering in detail the personal backgrounds of the 1975 Leadership Cohort, it may be helpful to summarise the organisational evolution of the diplomatic establishment during the post-War period. In January 1943, the British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden published a White Paper setting out the Government's plans to reform the British diplomatic establishment at the conclusion of the War.⁸ These changes continued a process of reform stretching back over several decades, which had cumulatively sought *both* to reduce the functional divisions within Britain's diplomatic services *and* to widen the social base from

which new entrants would be drawn.⁹ The structural element of the reforms was achieved in 1943 by the amalgamation of the four organisational entities that had previously dealt with relations with foreign countries: the Foreign Office and the Diplomatic Service, which had been partially merged in 1919-21, and the Consular and the Commercial Diplomatic Services (which had remained entirely separate entities).¹⁰ This integration resulted in a Foreign Service that remained organisationally distinct from the Home Civil Service. It also eliminated functional demarcations, since all members of the new Service were expected to serve at home or abroad, and be prepared to undertake the full portfolio of tasks (diplomatic, consular and trade promotion) that had previously been reserved for the individual organisations.¹¹

In addition to these structural changes, the post-War reforms also aimed to facilitate the entry of qualified candidates from ‘any social sphere’ by eliminating the remaining financial barriers. Although the formal requirement for a private income had been abolished in 1919, in the inter-war years aspiring diplomats were still in practice often required to subsidise their careers, which restricted the field of possible entrants to the Diplomatic Service. As D.C.M. Platt noted in the *Cinderella Service*, ‘posts at the most expensive capitals were simply beyond the means of a man without a substantial private resource’.¹² From 1945, the introduction of improved salaries and allowances removed this impediment both in theory and (more importantly) in practice.¹³

Despite these changes, the newly created Foreign Service was still constrained in its remit in managing Britain’s overseas relations. In 1947, a Commonwealth Service was established to deal with relationships with Commonwealth countries, while the Colonial Office and associated Colonial Service continued to administer the remaining colonial Empire.¹⁴ In the 1960s, these separate strands in the management of Britain’s overseas relations were

consolidated in a series of organisational mergers. The Foreign and Commonwealth Services were amalgamated in 1965 into a single Diplomatic Service, which served both the Commonwealth Relations Office and the Foreign Office.¹⁵ The following year, recognising that most former colonies have gained their independence, the Colonial Office was merged with the Commonwealth Relations Office to form a single Commonwealth Office (with staff willing to serve abroad joining the Diplomatic Service). And in 1968, the administrative consolidation was completed with the merger of the two departments of state to form the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO).¹⁶

Although the Foreign Service (from 1965 the Diplomatic Service) formally eliminated functional barriers, it retained an almost rigid *internal* stratification among its staff (as indeed did the Home Civil Service).¹⁷ The most privileged group were the members of Branch A, later to be termed the administrative class, whose members formed an elite cadre selected against rigorous standards. All senior appointments were made from among their number. Members of the administrative class were subject to a grading system which, in 1975, varied from the entry level of third secretary at grade 8 to the highest level of grade 1 (reserved, as noted above, for the Permanent Secretary and the heads of the major diplomatic missions).¹⁸

Social and Educational Background of the 1975 Leadership Cohort

The 1975 Leadership Cohort formed a distinctive group. The majority (32 out of 45) had joined either the Foreign or the Commonwealth Services in 1945-8 as part of a special post-War recruitment process. These ‘Reconstruction Competitions’ were targeted mainly on those who had served in the armed forces during the war-time years, and all the future leaders

who entered by this route had undertaken extensive military service. As a consequence they had an average age of twenty eight (several were aged thirty or over).¹⁹ The post-War recruitment process to Branch A was rigorous. Although there was a requirement for a high level of intellectually ability, it was recognised that many candidates had interrupted their university studies to join the armed forces. The formal academic qualifications were therefore relaxed to evidence of the ‘intellectual ability necessary for a good honours degree at a university’, and candidates took a written exam that was ‘of necessity … very brief and simple’.²⁰ Those who passed this initial screening process were then taken in groups to a country house, where they undertook a range of intelligence tests, group exercises, interviews and presentations, which were designed to probe ‘their qualities of character (and intellect)’. The candidates were then finally subjected to a formal selection board.²¹

Although this process could have been used to maintain the traditional bias towards recruiting prospective diplomats from among a social elite, in practice a real effort seems to have been made to ensure that it remained objective. The process was run by the Civil Service Commissioners rather than the Foreign Office, and the final selection board was made up of senior civil servants, university academics and other members drawn from the professions and industry.²² The Foreign Office officials did, however, make efforts to ensure that the specific requirements of the Foreign Service were understood by the selectors. They arranged for the leaders of the country house assessment process to visit embassies in Washington, Paris, and Stockholm in order to observe diplomatic work at first hand, as well as producing a detailed description of the kind of personal qualities required for a diplomatic career. The attributes they identified included, naturally, the intellectual capacity to analyse issues and the literary skills to present their conclusions. They also sought more personal qualities, not least the ‘intimacy and good-will, which are essential for winning confidence,

obtaining information and exerting influence, and [which] can often best be built up through social contact'.²³

Many of the post-War recruits had impressive war records. Michael Wilford took part in the Normandy landings, while John Killick and Richard Sykes were part of the airborne assault at Arnhem. Of the sailors, Oliver Wright earned the DSC while a commander of motor torpedo boats, and Anthony Duff was awarded both the DSC and the DSO for his exploits in submarines, which included launching a mini-torpedo attack on the Tirpitz. Both David Hildyard and Charles Wiggin, who served in the RAF, won the DFC for their exploits. Laurence Pumphrey escaped from a German Prisoner-of War camp, before ending up in Colditz, while Edward Tomkins walked 500 miles after escaping from the Italians. Several recruits had been members of the Special Operations Executive that fostered resistance groups in occupied territory. Derek Dodson undertook missions behind enemy lines in Italy and Greece. Brooks Richards was involved in a guerrilla landing in North Africa. Many of the future diplomats reached high rank whilst serving in the military. John Barnes, Morrice James, David Muirhead and Peter Ramsbotham became Lieutenant-Colonels, David Hildyard became a Wing-Commander, and Frederick Warner obtained the rank of Lieutenant-Commander. It is not clear whether having a 'good war' in itself helped potential recruits in their quest to join the Foreign Service. It does seem reasonable to speculate that the qualities widely associated with making a good officer – resilience, leadership, determination – were likely to appeal to members of selection boards who were intensely conscious that they were recruiting the ambassadors and permanent secretaries of tomorrow.

13 members of the 1975 Leadership Cohort examined here did not join the diplomatic establishment through the special post-War recruitment scheme. Seven had already been members of the Foreign Office or Consular service prior to the commencement of hostilities,

and spent at least some of the war-years in diplomatic roles. They were joined by Nicholas Henderson, who had been unfit for military service, and became a diplomat in 1942. In contrast, Anthony Parsons did not join the Foreign Service until 1954 after a military career. The 1975 Leadership Cohort was completed by 4 members of the Colonial Service who transferred to the Commonwealth Service in the late 1950s and 1960s.

Perhaps the most surprising feature of the 1975 Leadership Cohort is that 4 members had started their careers in the pre-war Consular Service. These were the Permanent Under-Secretary, Thomas Brimelow, the ambassadors in Cairo and Moscow (Phillip Adams and Terence Garvey respectively) and the Permanent Representative at NATO (Edward Peck). Before the Second World War, the Consular Service had been entirely segregated from the Diplomatic Service and, unlike the Diplomatic Service, it could offer a career to those without a private income. Its members could not usually aspire to diplomatic roles even if, as in the case for Brimelow, Garvey, and Peck, they had first-class honours degrees from Oxford. The persistence of the ‘iron curtain’ between the Consular Service and the Diplomatic Service during the inter-war years reflected a lingering belief – at least among members of the latter – that high level diplomacy required the manners, style and *comme il faut* that was supposedly found most reliably among those from upper-class backgrounds. The fact that 4 of the grade one roles in 1975 were filled by former members of the Consular Service is testimony to the determination with which the post-war reforms were implemented against these deep-seated prejudices (as well, of course, as the abilities of the men themselves).²⁴

The schools and universities attended by members of the 1975 Leadership Cohort have in all cases been established during this research, while further information about family background has been identified for 37 out of the 45 individuals, albeit not always in great

detail. The evidence shows that they were recruited from a somewhat wider social base than previous leadership cohorts. During the inter-war period, the traditional preference for diplomats to be recruited from the aristocracy had already been considerably moderated, as an increasing number were drawn from professional families (defined by Steiner and Dockrill as the army, church, bar, and medicine), although there were still very few from the ‘business classes’.²⁵ These professional families also featured heavily in the backgrounds of the 1975 Leadership Cohort. Out of the 37 men for whom data is available, 27 had fathers who were members of the professional classes – including the armed forces (9), church (3), bar (3) and medicine (3) – or who worked in such professions as teaching, academia, and the civil and diplomatic services. One was the son of a farmer, whilst another was the son of an ennobled Conservative politician. The most striking change when compared with the inter-war years was the presence of a sizeable minority of men – 10 out of 37 – drawn from the ‘business classes’ (that is their fathers had engaged in various branches of industry and commerce). The father of the Permanent Under-Secretary in 1975, Thomas Brimelow, had been manager of a textile mill in Northern England. Among the Deputy Secretaries, Alan Campbell’s father was involved in the silk trade, Michael Wilford was the son of a New Zealand engineer, and Oliver Wright’s father worked in the catering industry. Among the ambassadors in 1975, Sam Falle’s father had owned a market garden, while Edward Youde’s father was a company secretary in a joinery business. Both Brooks Richards and Derick Ashe were the sons of engineers. The fathers of David Muirhead and Horace Phillips had worked in finance.

In a further contrast to the previous generation of inter-war recruits, at least 5 of the 1975 Leadership Cohort came from homes with limited incomes. John Johnston’s father was a Baptist clergyman on a limited stipend, whilst Sam Falle noted in his memoirs that his family ‘found it hard to make ends meet’. Andrew Stark is recorded as having ‘humble parents’.

David Muirhead's father lost money in the Great Depression, requiring his son to 'make his own way early in life', while Horace Phillips' father was a Jewish immigrant, whose premature death forced his son to take a job in the Inland Revenue at age 18.²⁶

The pattern of the schools attended by leaders provides additional evidence that the 1975 Leadership Cohort had been recruited from a wider social spectrum than their predecessors. In the period 1919-39, over 95% of the recruits to the Diplomatic Service had attended private school, with 60% being alumnae of the nine public schools identified in the mid-19th century as 'places of instruction for the wealthier classes' (a quarter of whom had been to Eton).²⁷ In contrast, only 75% (34 out of 45) of the diplomats considered in this study had attended private schools, and just 20% were drawn from the nine traditional public schools. Just two were old Etonians. Among the remainder, there were 9 grammar-school boys. Anthony Duff and Fredrick Warner attended the Royal Naval College.

Despite the disruptions caused by the war, 40 out of the 45 future leaders had been to University and, as with their pre-War counterparts, the great majority (34 out of 40) attended Oxford or Cambridge. Of the remaining five, three had joined the pre-war armed services, while (reflecting their difficult personal financial circumstances) both David Muirhead and Horace Phillips took jobs immediately on leaving school. The selection of these five men to Branch A reflects the unusual nature of the reconstruction selection process, in which distinguished wartime service could apparently compensate for the lack of a University education. Typical of the wider cultural norms in Civil Service, most of the 1975 Leadership Cohort had studied humanities subjects at University, but there were two, Michael Wilford and Andrew Stark, who had read engineering. The former was proud of this distinction, claiming that he was 'the only person in the service who knew that water did not flow uphill'.²⁸ The backgrounds of the diplomats who would later form the 1975 Leadership

Cohort therefore constituted a significant change compared with inter-war recruits to the old Diplomatic Service. Without the post-war reforms set in motion by Eden's White Paper, along with the sympathetic reconstruction recruitment process, a significant proportion of the 1975 Leadership Cohort would not have had the opportunity to undertake a diplomatic career. It is perhaps worth noting that this (moderately) increased diversity was carried through to the next generation of recruits once the post-war reconstruction process was over. Plowden noted that 71% of the individuals recruited to the administrative branch of the Foreign Service in the period 1953-63 had attended private school (compared with 75% of those considered in this study). 94% of the 1953-63 cohort attended Oxbridge.

The Careers of the 1975 Leadership

Young diplomats recruited during the years after the Second World War could expect to progress relatively smoothly through the Second and First Secretary levels (grades 7 and 5), but the pyramid began to narrow markedly at the level of Counsellor (grade 4). This was the grade applied to key 'middle-manger' positions such as Head of a Department in the FCO or Head of Chancery in an embassy. The number of these roles was strictly controlled, and good performance at Counsellor level was often critical for continued career success. The members of the 1975 Leadership Cohort had by definition been successful in progressing up this hierarchy. Their career pathways are considered below in two sections: first, their progression to Counsellor level and, second, their subsequent rise to the highest reaches of the Service. In assessing their early careers, we concentrate here on the 35 men who were members of the

Foreign Service in the post-war years (of the remaining 10, six had spent their early years in the Commonwealth Service and four had been members of the Colonial Service).²⁹

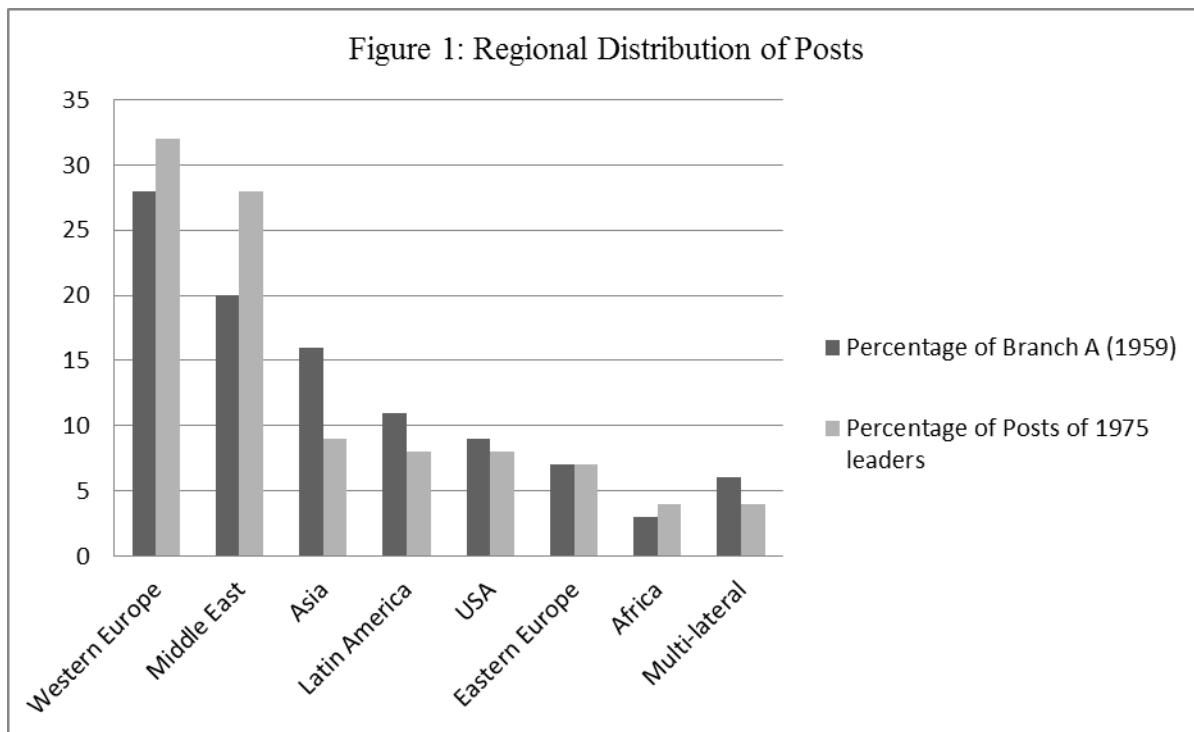
Careers to Counsellor

The 35 members of the Foreign Service who went on to leadership positions in 1975 took on average fifteen years to reach the rank of Counsellor. They were usually aged between forty and forty four when they reached this level. Although there were some exceptions, the pattern was one of a relatively uniform progression among members of the cohort, with little evidence of ‘high-flyers’ who received accelerated promotion compared with their peers.³⁰ This reflected a general tendency for advancement during the early years of careers to be based on length of service rather than intrinsic merit.³¹ One group that benefited from this policy was the 7 diplomats who had joined the Consular Service or the Foreign Office prior to hostilities. They had served in diplomatic roles for at least part of the war-time period, and this extra service allowed 5 of them to reach the rank of Counsellor in their thirties.³² These included 3 former member of the Consular Service (Thomas Brimelow, Terence Garvey and Edward Peck) whose former ‘inferior’ position proved no barrier to relatively rapid promotion.

The early careers of the future leaders followed a common pattern, as they were rotated through a number of assignments to diplomatic posts abroad, interspersed with spells in the Foreign Office. In their journey to Counsellor rank, these 35 diplomats undertook a total of 131 assignments to diplomatic posts in 42 countries, with each individual undertaking an average of four assignments.³³ Some posts were utilised more than others, and even the most frequent assignments, Washington and Paris, only accounted for 7 postings apiece. The importance of Germany during this period was reflected in the fact that 14 of the diplomats

considered here were assigned to the country (3 served with the Control Commission for the occupation zone, 5 were assigned to the embassy established in Bonn, and 6 spent time in Berlin). Other frequent postings were Athens, Cairo and Nanking/Peking (6 postings each) and Tehran and Ankara (with 5). In general, though, the assignments ranged throughout the globe, including such potential backwaters as LaPaz, Addis Ababa, and Rangoon. There is little evidence that specific posts were used to train the leaders of the future.

Despite the wide diversity of individual posts in which the future leaders served, there was rather greater concentration in terms of regional location. The regional distribution can be calibrated by comparing the pattern of posts occupied by members of the future 1975 Leadership Cohort with the distribution of all Branch A posts. This is done in Figure 1, using the distribution of Branch A postings in 1959 as the comparator, whilst making use of the regional definitions in the Duncan report.³⁴ As can be seen, Branch A postings were relatively concentrated in Western Europe (28%) and the Middle East (20%) and, as might be expected, the postings of the future leaders show a similar distribution. This was, however, even more skewed with Western Europe and the Middle East accounting for 60% of all postings. More specifically, the future leaders had 40% more postings to the Middle East than would be anticipated from the availability of posts. It may be that this region, so central to British diplomacy in the 1940s and 1950s, gave young diplomats a particular opportunities to impress (or, at least, to gain experience and visibility in an area of high importance). It is, however, striking that Washington D.C. saw no more than its fair share of future leaders despite its importance and prestige in post-war diplomacy.



Despite the high number of Branch A postings in certain areas, the pattern of individual postings still shows that young diplomats were rotated through different regions (table 2), precluding the development of real area specialists. Almost all members of the 1975 Leadership Cohort had experience of at least two regions before they acquired Counsellor rank, while half served in three or four. Some of the combinations were exotic, and seemed to defy any logic other than the assumption that an experienced diplomat should be able to operate in any setting. Oliver Wright combined postings in New York, Bucharest, Singapore and Pretoria. Charles Wiggins served in Stockholm, Washington, Santiago and Tehran. Derick Ashe was posted to the British occupation zone of Germany, La Paz, Madrid and Addis Ababa.

Table 2

Percentage of diplomats serving in several regions

One	Two	Three	Four	Five
17%	34%	37%	9%	3%

This career pattern was, of course, entirely consistent with the desire of the Foreign Service to develop ‘general purpose’ officers capable of serving in any part of the world. This approach is further illustrated by the length of the individual postings (table 3), which shows that over 70% of the assignments were 3 years or less in length. This pattern militated against individuals acquiring a depth of expertise and dense contacts in the country concerned. On the other hand, it also reduced the risk that a diplomat might ‘go native’, reflecting a perennial fear within the diplomatic establishment that its members might lose their ‘objectivity’ and flexibility for redeployment.

Table 3

Length of Postings				
1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years
15%	26%	31%	23%	5%

One partial exception to this career pattern was provided by the Arabists. As is well known, the Arabists formed a strong cadre within the Foreign Service, known colloquially as the Camel Corps. They were supported by a specialist training school in the Lebanon, and one member of the 1975 Leadership Cohort, Donald Maitland, served as Director of the School in 1956-9.³⁵ Plowden recorded that in 1964 there were 94 Arabic speakers in the Foreign Service compared with 27 who spoke Russian, 28 who had mastered Japanese, and

just 14 Chinese speakers.³⁶ Six members of the 1975 Leadership Cohort had received three or more postings to the Middle East and related areas. Philip Adams served in Beirut twice, as well as having postings to Cairo, Jeddah and Khartoum. Anthony Parsons had, by 1975, been posted to Baghdad, Ankara, Amman, Cairo, and Khartoum. The careers of the Arabists nevertheless remained exceptional: the dominant pattern of diplomatic careers was one of rotation between regions.

A key aim of the post-War reforms was to create an integrated Foreign Service in which officers were expected to undertake a full range of political, consular, and commercial duties. Although the *Diplomatic List* gives only generalised job-titles for junior diplomats, these demonstrate that a large number of the 1975 Leadership Cohort had at some stage taken on consular and commercial roles, rather than the political roles that were the exclusive preserve of the pre-War Diplomatic Service. The evidence suggest that 6 members of the cohort had been assigned to consular posts earlier in their career, while another 5 had received postings that combined political and consular duties in one of the smaller embassies. 4 of the future leaders had previously held roles as First Secretaries or Counsellors primarily concerned with commercial issues. These results seem to confirm the general observation by D.C.M. Platt that, by the 1950s, almost a third of Branch A members were undertaking consular or commercial roles.³⁷

Alternating overseas assignments with postings to London was one constant feature of the early career paths of the 1975 Leadership Cohort. New recruits typically spent an initial period in the Foreign Office before their first assignment to a foreign post, subsequently returning to London for one or two further spells during their early careers (that is before promotion above Counsellor level). This pattern is illustrated by the careers of the 35 diplomats included in this part of the study: they spent an average of 18 years from

recruitment to the end of their first post at Counsellor level, of which seven years (40%) was spent in the Foreign Office. There were, of course, significant variations in this pattern, but none of the diplomats reached the level of Counsellor without spending time in London. This approach was presumably designed to eliminate the last vestiges of an historic bifurcation between the Foreign Office and the Diplomatic Service. The reforms in the inter-war years had gone a long way towards integrating these two groups, at least among the younger officials,³⁸ but the process was only fully completed after 1945, when career progression was used to forge a cadre of diplomats adept at working both in London and overseas.

The periods spent in the Foreign Office were critical for an individual's career development, since it gave them opportunities to interact directly with the senior levels of the Office, as well as developing their understanding of how policy-making worked within the core executive. Two roles were of particular importance: a posting to a ministerial Private Office and a posting as Head of a Department. The ambassador in Bonn in 1975, Nicholas Henderson, gave a much-quoted account of his two spells in the Private Office of the Foreign Secretary, in which he described Private Secretaries as the 'impresarios of Whitehall', exercising exceptional influence by representing 'to the Minister the opinion of the office and to the latter the will of the Minister'.³⁹ The Departmental Heads were by contrast middle managers who, as William Strang observed, stood 'at the point where the flow of recommendations from below meets the flow of directions from above'.⁴⁰ This role was normally filled by diplomats undertaking their first or second role at Counsellor level (by which time they had 15-20 years of experience). Many diplomats have testified that their time as a Departmental Head was among the most testing yet rewarding of their career.⁴¹ It was a key proving ground for those seeking to rise to the most senior roles in the Service.

Many members of the 1975 Leadership Cohort who joined the Foreign Service after 1945 had, not surprisingly, held position in a Private Office or served as a Head of Department on their way to the top. 28 out of the 35 had served as Department Heads, 20 had been members of the Private Office, and 15 had undertaken both roles. Only two of the future leaders (Anthony Parsons and Horace Phillips) reached the highest levels without occupying either position.⁴² 5 of the men whose careers are reviewed here (Guy Millard, Michael Palliser, Laurence Pumphrey, Oliver Wright and Edward Youde) had served in the Prime Minister's Private Office, which provided a vital link between the two sides of Downing Street.

Careers After Reaching the Rank of Counsellor

It took on average 10 more years after promotion to Counsellor for the individuals studied here to reach the positions they occupied in 1975 (by which time most were in their mid-fifties). Members of the 1975 Leadership Cohort who were recruited immediately after the War had typically undertaken four further roles before reaching the most senior levels. Their careers continued to combine overseas postings with spells in London (on average 35% of their time was spent in London). In London, the grade 3 posts were as Assistant Secretaries which, after the formation of the FCO in 1968, became a somewhat problematic role. The merger of the Commonwealth and Foreign Offices resulted in an excess of Under Secretaries, leading to a convoluted structure in which departments were supervised by both a Deputy and an Assistant Secretary, adding a layer to the hierarchy. As Geoffrey Moorhouse noted in his 1977 book *The Diplomats*, 'nothing is more indistinct ... than the relationship between the Deputy Under-Secretaries and the Assistant Under-Secretaries'. He added that 'scarcely any

Under-Secretary is solely in charge of anything'.⁴³ This confusion was mirrored by the experience of the men included in this study. John Killick remarked that the role left him as 'a bit of a spare wheel'. Alan Campbell noted that as Assistant Under-Secretary, he was 'in many respects ... less involved in important work' than in his former role as Head of Department.⁴⁴

The grade 3 posts overseas often carried more definite responsibilities, whether as a second-in-command at one of the larger posts or as chief of a smaller post. Postings as Head of a grade 3 post could sometimes provide useful experience for later assignments. Philip Adams' period in Amman (1966-69) was doubtless of value in his subsequent posting as ambassador in Cairo. In most cases, though, assignments were unrelated. Derek Dodson was ambassador to Budapest and Brasilia. Bernard Ledwidge served as ambassador in Helsinki and Tel Aviv. Peter Ramsbotham headed up missions in Nicosia and Washington. There were no examples of an individual who had served as second-in-command at a post being immediately appointed as Head of Mission. Some Heads of grade 1 and 2 posts in 1975 had, though, worked in the same place earlier in their careers. The ambassador in Paris in 1975, Edward Tomkins, was previously Counsellor at the embassy in 1954-58. The ambassador in Athens, Brooks Richards, had previously been First Secretary there in 1952-53. And, in perhaps the best example of career planning, Edward Youde, the ambassador in Peking in 1975, had been posted to the country three times before (1948-50, 1953-5, and 1960-1). There is, however, little evidence to suggest that prior experience of a particular post was generally a significant factor in selecting grade 1 and 2 heads. Indeed, the reverse seems to have been true. The career patterns of the 1975 Leadership Cohort reflected an organisational culture committed to developing generalists who could service in a variety of regions and perform a range of functions.

Career Structures and Organisational Culture

The idea that developing generalists might represent ‘the apotheosis of the dilettante’, to use Thomas Balogh’s celebrated phrase, would have been complete anathema to members of the 1975 Leadership Cohort.⁴⁵ The ‘cult of the generalist’ was nevertheless already under assault in the 1960s, at a time when the individuals who form the focus of this study were beginning to occupy senior positions within the diplomatic establishment.⁴⁶ The 1964 Plowden Report, despite its fundamentally conservative character,⁴⁷ still favoured the development of greater specialisation among members of the Foreign Service, to be fostered by careful career planning and secondment to outside bodies.⁴⁸ It also explicitly emphasised ‘the importance of commercial work’. The 1969 Duncan Report on ‘The United Kingdom’s Overseas Representation’, which sought to reshape the British diplomatic establishment in response to a shrinking world role, was even more emphatic about the need to ensure ‘the clear precedence that belongs to the commercial objective in the day-to-day conduct of British relations with other countries’. As part of this process, Duncan believed that diplomats needed to build up a ‘real measure of regional and/or functional expertise’.⁴⁹ This focus on the need for greater specialisation within the diplomatic establishment was part of a more general shift in attitudes towards public administration. The 1964 Fabian Pamphlet *The Administrators* firmly linked change in the civil service with the wider modernisation of Britain’s economy and society, calling for an end to ‘amateurism’ and greater training to ensure that civil servants had the skills needed to cope with their work.⁵⁰ And, of course, the 1968 Fulton Report into the Home civil service recommended a ‘fundamental change’ in

organisation and culture designed to promote the virtues of professionalism (broadly understood as the possession of skills and knowledge that allowed the individual to tackle problems based on an expert knowledge of the difficulties involved and the best ways of overcoming them).⁵¹ The concern within these various reports about the socially elitist character of senior civil servants reflected not only a commitment to widening ‘access’, but also, and probably more importantly, a sense that such a structure actually reduced effectiveness by failing to exploit the widest possible pool of talented individuals.

The Fulton Report was rooted in the technocratic culture favoured by the then Prime Minister Harold Wilson, but it also reflected a sense that the wider world of business had long since abandoned ‘amateurism’. The same ethos can be detected in the Duncan Report (Sir Val Duncan had himself made his reputation as chairman of Rio Tinto Zinc). The Duncan Report’s emphasis on the need to promote British economic interests, both by focusing attention on regions of particular importance, and by ensuring that members of the Diplomatic Service had the skills to deal effectively with trade and financial issues, attracted considerable opprobrium from those opposed to such a strategy. A number of retired diplomats wrote to the press complaining that the focus on economic questions in effect reduced Britain to ‘a nation of shopkeepers’, and abandoned a centuries-old tradition in which diplomatic missions abroad ‘represented our mode of life, our standards, our political system, our interest in freedom and peace’.⁵² Duncan defended his Report, rightly pointing out that it had been widely misrepresented, but the debate did capture a genuine disagreement *both* about the scope of Britain’s overseas representation *and* the extent to which the diplomatic task could be reduced to a set of problems susceptible to technocratic solutions. It also reflected important questions about (to slip into scholarly jargon) institutional isomorphism – that is, the vexed question much debated by scholars about how

environmental pressures shape different institutions towards developing similar structures and cultures.⁵³ All foreign ministries by their very nature straddle the domestic and international spheres, with the result that they do not always sit easily within the organisational rules and cultural conventions that frame the development of ‘purely’ domestic ministries.⁵⁴ The question of whether the Foreign Office should be seen simply as another government ministry, susceptible to a universal language of reform, became in the 1960s and 1970s an issue *both* about the nature of diplomacy *as well as* the setting for conflict about who had the authority and knowledge to define how the Diplomatic Service should seek to carry out its work effectively.

It has long been recognised that the culture of a particular institution helps to determine all aspects of its *modus operandi*, even if it remains difficult to develop a precise understanding of a phenomenon that is by its nature elusive and hard to define. The culture of an organisation can, however, itself *be influenced* by formal structures and procedures. Organisational culture is typically created ‘from within’ rather than imposed from the outside (something that inevitably makes the task of reform very difficult). In the words of Edgar Schien, it represents ‘the pattern of basic assumptions that a particular group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration’. Mary Jo Hatch has used Schien’s work to develop a model based on four interactive components designed to explain how groups maintain and develop their culture. She suggests that the foundation of a particular organisation’s internal culture is to be located in a shared set of *assumptions* that support *values and behavioural norms*, which together form the ‘unwritten rules and common body of knowledge that allow members of a culture to know what is expected of them in a wide variety of situations’. These values and norms are in turn demonstrated through *artefacts*, which can be activities, verbal expressions

or physical objectives that act as ‘manifestations or expressions’ of the culture. Some of these artefacts in turn become *symbols*, invested with a ‘meaning and significance that goes beyond its intrinsic content’. Assumptions, values, artefacts and symbols are in constant interaction within the organisation, and it is this interaction that either reinforces the existing culture, or causes elements of it to develop and evolve.⁵⁵

It is always difficult to link abstract models of organisational theory to concrete day-to-day operations. The advantage of Hatch’s model for this study is that it acknowledges how artefacts and symbols can, when taken together, both reflect *and* reinforce values and norms. Or, to put it in terms directly relevant to this research, the distinctive career structure of the Diplomatic Service was both an ‘artefact’ that manifested underlying assumptions and values, as well as a symbolic expression of the idea that diplomacy could not be reduced to a set of functional skills or regional specialisations. Nor was it only the peripatetic career structure that could serve both as artefact and symbol. The following pages show how these theoretical insights can be combined with a reading of memoirs and other first-hand accounts to illuminate various aspects of the organisational culture of the administrative class of the Foreign and Diplomatic Services during the first thirty years of the post-war era. Such a process inevitably falls short of the kind of rigorous assessment demanded by ethnographic scholars, but it can go some way to meet the criteria set by Tony Watson, by giving an insight into ‘how things work[ed]’ within the senior branch of the diplomatic community.⁵⁶

The administrative class within the diplomatic establishment had a common identity rooted in a shared set of assumptions about its character and worth. It saw itself as the leadership of an elite Service dealing with a vital aspect of the nation’s affairs, in the process displaying a sense of collective superiority to other elements of the Civil Service that at times bordered on arrogance. Members of the administrative class were proud of their hard-won

skills and experience, which they believed made British diplomats among the best in the world.⁵⁷ It was a view neatly summed up in a valedictory dispatch written in 1983 by Percy Craddock, the ambassador to China, who wrote ‘[t]hough I have met, very occasionally, sharper minds at the bar and greater accumulation of learning at universities, for a general assemblage of intelligence and professional skills, flexibility and loyalty, the Diplomatic Service is surely unsurpassed’.⁵⁸ In John Dickie’s words, the Service had an ‘*esprit de corps* which imbues everyone … with a sense of mission unparalleled in any other branch of government’. They were ‘the *crème de la crème*: they know it, and rarely let an opportunity pass to ensure that other lesser beings realize it’.⁵⁹

Peter Hennessy has rightly noted that the Diplomatic Service ‘has never liked any institution interfering with its monopoly of dealing with “abroad” on behalf of Whitehall’.⁶⁰ The bureaucratic imperatives of this assumption were spelt out to young recruits in the 1970s, when they were told by their seniors that ‘a high priority of the FCO is not only to coordinate all other ministries in their dealings with foreigners, but to influence their relevant policies’.⁶¹ The same was true thirty years earlier, when most members of the 1975 Leadership Cohort were recruited, at a time when the monopoly of professional diplomats in managing Britain’s external relations was far more secure. There was a strong belief within the diplomatic establishment throughout the post-war decades that, in order to perform effectively, its members should continue to be administratively distinct from the Home Civil Service. This demarcation itself became a veritable symbol of the belief among members of the Diplomatic Service that they constituted a self-contained elite uniquely qualified to deal with international relations.⁶² Anthony Sampson noted in 1981 that Home civil servants often resented ‘the *hauteur* and extravagance of British diplomats’, who perpetuated ‘the image of an Establishment which alone understands the real problems of the world’, and proved adept

at frustrating any attempts to introduced reforms of the kind proposed by Plowden and Duncan.⁶³ Members of the Diplomatic Service genuinely believed that their need to navigate between the domestic and international environment meant they could not operate according to the same rules and conventions as their home counterparts if they were to perform their work effectively. It was a distinction that later became harder to maintain after entry into the European Economic Community began to fray the boundary between the ‘domestic’ and the ‘foreign’.

In the Victorian and Edwardian eras, the diplomatic community had shared a common aristocratic background that, as Thomas Otte writes, ‘created a special sense of “brotherhood”’.⁶⁴ The individuals recruited after 1945 were, as noted earlier, drawn from a wider set of social backgrounds than their predecessors. The sense of ‘brotherhood’ was not present from birth, so to speak, but instead created through formal education and within the Foreign (later Diplomatic) Service itself. For most members of the 1975 Leadership Cohort, this process of acculturation started with education at Oxford or Cambridge, which then as now commanded a privileged position within the national culture. The demanding nature of the selection process for the Foreign Service, repeatedly mentioned by many former diplomats in their memoirs, reinforced the perception among successful recruits that they were joining an elite organisation. The administrative grade itself operated as a meritocracy in which privileged backgrounds *per se* conferred no obvious advantages in terms of career progression. The emphasis on informality at the Foreign Office in London – where even the most junior recruits were expected to enter the offices of their seniors without knocking – was itself a paradoxical expression of this meritocracy.⁶⁵ Seniority was something that had been earned, rather than evidence of some form of inherent superiority, and was therefore open to any individual with the necessary qualities. Indeed, the first two post-war recruits to

the reach counsellor rank, after just 9 years, were Sam Falle and Horace Phillips, who both came from relatively humble backgrounds. There was, it seems, some truth in William Strang's much quoted remark that just as Napoleon's soldiers carried a Marshal's baton in their knapsacks, so it 'may be said of the Foreign Service, with much greater reason, that every Third Secretary carries an ambassador's credentials in his brief-case'.⁶⁶

To return once more to the language of Mary Jo Hatch, one of the most significant 'artefacts' that characterised the culture of the Service was the approach taken to developing the skills required for diplomatic roles. It was a matter of considerable pride, mentioned in many diplomatic memoirs, that British diplomats developed their skills by practical experience rather than formal training.⁶⁷ Most of them would have happily agreed with Christopher Meyer's later remark that the British diplomatic tradition is 'not to be overly abstract or intellectual' but rather to 'learn by example'.⁶⁸ The scepticism about formal training itself became a symbol of an organisational culture that believed effective diplomacy was less a matter of definite knowledge and skills than a subtle mixture of *nous* and aptitude. All those who entered the Foreign Service in the post-war period went through a process of practical training that began from their earliest days in the Foreign Office. New recruits were quickly assigned a specific area of responsibility, and seated in the 'third room', the common office shared by the junior members of a department. Here the aspiring diplomat learnt the tools of his trade from the more experienced occupants. John Killick recalled that when assigned to the Japan and Pacific Department, in 1946, he was expected 'to learn the ropes' by 'force of example'.⁶⁹

This process of acquiring diplomatic expertise through undertaking 'real' roles, under the guidance of more senior colleagues, continued throughout the careers of the 1975 Leadership Cohort. Formal training, except perhaps in languages, was the exception rather than the rule

(something that a later generation of senior diplomats, immersed in the language of management consultancy and KPIs, doubtless look back at with nostalgia). The handing down of experience from one generation to the next helped to buttress the strong sense of shared identity still so visible among senior members of the Diplomatic Service in the 1970s. Critics of the ‘cult of the generalist’, like Sir Val Duncan and his colleagues, believed that Britain’s changing role in the world needed a fundamental reorientation in the objectives of diplomacy – something that would in turn demand greater professionalism and specialist knowledge among its practitioners. These arguments found little traction among members of the diplomatic establishment. Such resistance was not, though, simply a self-interested defence of the status quo. It was also rooted in the strong conviction that diplomatic expertise could not be reduced to a discrete set of functional skills and knowledge. This sense of common identity – of being members of an intellectually elite profession united by a shared understanding of complex matters opaque to outside observers – can easily be dismissed as a self-interested delusion on the part of ‘intelligent, urbane but managerially innocent mandarins’.⁷⁰ It may, though, be possible to take a more benign view.

Much of the criticism directed against civil servants during the 1960s and 1970s, including members of the British diplomatic establishment, was rooted in a view of professional knowledge that itself now seems increasingly archaic. The idea of such knowledge as a distinct *corpus*, capable of being taught in a formal setting, has in most professions given way to a recognition of the power of ‘situated learning’: in other words, it has come to be widely accepted that the development of professional knowledge is profoundly shaped by the social and organisational setting in which it operates. Much criticism of the administrative ‘generalist’ in the 1960s and 1970s was rooted in a belief that they had not been taught the right things: hence the proposals in reports such as the Duncan Report and the Fulton Report

for more training and specialisation to overcome this shortcoming. And yet, if professional knowledge and skills are both deeply embedded in particular contexts, then a defence of expertise focusing on tacit knowledge and the informal transmission of experiential ‘wisdom’ from one generation to another begins to appear in a different light. The idea of a diplomatic expertise characterised by a fluid set of experiences and insights, inculcated over time by exposure to a range of situations, can be seen less as a defence of parochial interests and more as a genuine insight into the knowledge and aptitudes needed by those responsible for the conduct of Britain’s relations with other countries.⁷¹

The peripatetic career pattern of the 1975 Leadership Cohort played a critical role, then, in creating and sustaining the culture of the Diplomatic Service sketched out above. It ensured that all diplomats had a relatively uniform career experience that helped bind them together into a single coherent group. The constant rotation through different posts did, however, pose one potential obstacle to the process of acculturation. The development of an integrative culture is greatly facilitated when the members of the group are *personally* acquainted. This raises the question of whether members of the 1975 Leadership Cohort were able to develop close face-to-face personal relationships with their peers during their rise to the top of the Service, *despite* the existence of a career structure that emphasised mobility both from place to place and role to role. The database developed as part of this research project makes it possible to pursue a quantitative analysis of this issue (albeit one that needs to be supplemented by more qualitative judgements). It seems logical to assume that when a pair of diplomats was posted to the same location they had numerous opportunities to become acquainted. The extent of such co-locations can serve as at least a rough proxy for members of the 1975 cohort to have developed a network of personal relationships in the course of their career.

Of the 45 men who belonged to the 1975 Leadership Cohort, 35 had been members of the post-war Foreign Service (the other ten, as noted earlier, belonged to the Commonwealth or Commercial services). Each individual member of this group therefore had 34 other members with whom they could form a pair (which, when aggregated, gives 595 possible pairs of diplomats). The database has been used to analyse these 595 pairs to see on how many occasions two diplomats were in the same location at the same time. The results of this analysis are given in Table 4.

Table 4: Number of occasions on which a pair of diplomats were co-located				
None	One	Two	Three	Four and Five
8%	28%	37%	21%	6%

The statistics suggest that there were ample opportunities for members of the 1975 Leadership Cohort who belonged to the Foreign (later Diplomatic) Service to develop a dense network of personal interactions. 550 out of the possible 595 pairs (92%) were co-located on at least one occasion, whilst 381 of the pairs (64%) were together on more than one occasion. All but two of the 35 diplomats had been in the same geographical location at one time or another with three quarters or more of their future colleagues in the 1975 Leadership Cohort. The other two had shared locations with half or more of the other leaders.

Although 51 of the pairs of the future leaders had worked side-by-side in overseas posts, the key meeting place was the Foreign Office. In the twenty years between 1947 and 1967, in any given year at least 20% of the 35 were located in London; in some periods, such as the early 1950s, more than 40% were posted to the Foreign Office at the same time. While the size of the diplomatic establishment in London may have diluted the significance of such co-location, not least given the functional boundaries between different departments, it still seems reasonable to assume that proximity provided opportunities for individuals to develop knowledge of one another's character and abilities. A more personal insight into the phenomenon can be illustrated by the case of Alan Campbell, who served as a Deputy Secretary in 1975, and later became an assiduous author of obituaries. Campbell wrote obituaries for eight of his colleagues in the 1975 Leadership Cohort, in the process noting that he had got to know seven of them when they had worked together in London (he had worked with the eighth, Bernard Ledwige, when they served together in Paris).⁷²

The constant cycling of diplomats through roles in the Foreign Office as part of their career paths had a double advantage in influencing the organisational culture of the diplomatic establishment. Not only did it eliminate the former distinction between the Foreign Office clerks and the overseas diplomats. It also allowed individuals to become personally acquainted with one another, thereby facilitating the formation and reinforcement of shared values and norms. The peripatetic career path was not simply an expression of an organisation culture that was sceptical of the idea of the 'expert' (or, rather, which defined 'expertise' somewhat paradoxically by the ability to master a wide range of roles). It also facilitated the transmission of this culture by ensuring an almost constant flow of personal interactions between individuals. The data shows that it was possible to maintain a highly

integrated organisational culture despite the fact that members of the Diplomatic Service were often geographically dispersed and engaged on radically different work.

Conclusions and Perspectives

The previous pages have shown how the peripatetic career pattern of the post-war diplomatic community helped to develop generalist diplomats within an institution characterised by an integrated organisational culture. Such a career pattern was designed to achieve the ‘standardisation of skills’ described by Henry Mitzberg as the hallmark of a ‘professional bureaucracy’ (that is one in which skilled individuals work with a high degree of autonomy within a geographically and/or functionally dispersed environment).⁷³ Members of the administrative grade of the British diplomatic establishment shared a core set of skills and aptitudes, developed through practical experience, and were part of an organisation in which many were acquainted on a personal basis – characteristics which together helped ensure a high level of coordination of the complex portfolio of diplomatic tasks. The Service had well developed bureaucratic mechanisms to coordinate activity, with a constant flow of instructions from London defining goals and negotiating lines, but the effectiveness of these processes was greatly enhanced by a shared understanding of accepted diplomatic practice and personal familiarity between many of the key players.

We conclude this article by identifying three broad areas for future research that can build on some of its insights. The first of these is the need to place the developments viewed here in the context of the *longue durée*. The development of the institutions responsible for managing Britain’s foreign relations before 1945 has generally been well-covered by

scholars.⁷⁴ There is, however, space for a more detailed consideration of how some of the trends discussed in this article developed during the decades after the retirement of members of the 1975 Leadership Cohort. Most of its members were still in place during the turbulent period leading up to the publication of the Central Policy Review Staff's 1977 *Review of Overseas Representation Report*, which recommended a weakening of the division between the Home Civil Service and the Foreign Service, as well as a restructuring focused on the promotion of trade.⁷⁵ The diplomatic community was remarkably successful in mobilising sections of the Establishment against the proposals. It became harder in the following decades to defend the autonomy of the FCO against the strictures that its officials were too extravagant and unaccountable. In 1989, ten years after Margaret Thatcher came to power, a report commissioned by the FCO revealed a massive slump in staff morale, partly rooted in concerns about internal division and poor career management. The endless public sector reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, designed to promote the organisational and cultural change needed to promote greater efficiency, also played a key role in damaging sentiment within the FCO (as they did across Whitehall).⁷⁶ So, too, did the conduct of foreign affairs under the Labour governments of 1997-2010, which saw decision-making still further concentrated in Number 10.⁷⁷ The continual development of the European Union greatly eroded the boundary between domestic and foreign affairs and *de facto* challenged the boundary between the Foreign and Home services. Even William Hague's subsequent efforts to restore the place of the FCO to 'its rightful place in the Whitehall sun',⁷⁸ albeit in a context that still placed great emphasis on its role in fostering Britain's economic fortunes,⁷⁹ did not ameliorate the continued focus on improving performance by constant measurement of performance against defined criteria. It would be valuable to develop greater knowledge of whether and how the earlier *intra*-FCO conception of diplomatic expertise as a fluid combination of practice and

tacit knowledge survived in a political and administrative environment focused on measuring tangible achievement. It would also be helpful to examine further whether attempts by FCO staff to block reforms were rooted not simply in a defence of personal and departmental interest, but also in a conviction that local practices that might seem irrational or inefficient to outsiders can have a real value in securing institutional objectives. In other words, to return to an earlier point, is resistance to a form of coercive isomorphism, rooted in the centralising tendency of government, sometimes a rational defence of the virtues of heterogeneity as a mechanism for maximising the effectiveness of a particular institution?

The second area where future research could be helpful is the need to develop a more comparative perspective on the development of diplomatic establishments over time. The previous pages have focused on the careers of the few dozen men who occupied the most senior positions in the British diplomatic community in 1975. Even the briefest comparison with developments across the Atlantic shows, however, striking similarities between the evolution of the US Foreign Service and its British counterpart despite the huge differences in the domestic political and administrative environments (evidence, perhaps, that pressures towards institutional isomorphism have an international character).⁸⁰ There was throughout the post-war period almost continuous debate in the USA both about the structure of the Foreign Service and the skills needed by its members. The ACCORD project set in motion in the 1960s by William Crockett, a veteran State Department official, produced a series of proposals for changes in both institutional structure and personnel development. In 1970 a new report, *Diplomacy for the 1970s*, issues a series of recommendations including the development of more specialists within the Foreign Service with specific geographical or functional expertise. Nor, of course, are transatlantic comparisons alone of value. During the 1960s, many of those who campaigned for civil service reform looked across the channel,

admiring the French Civil Service for its emphasis on scientific training and the pervasive influence of the technocratic *énarques*. Whether this culture produced more effective diplomats is a matter of debate. Ruth Dudley Edwards suggested in 1994 that the advantage was with the FCO, since ‘the British [diplomatic] culture shares information while the French tend to hug it to themselves’.⁸¹ More recently, the FCO has used a series of KPIs developed under the Diplomatic Excellence initiative to suggest that it is the second highest performing diplomatic service in the world *behind* its French counterpart (assigning itself the unfeasibly precise mark of 6.8/10).⁸² More systematic comparison between different diplomatic establishments over time would facilitate new perspectives on how diplomatic expertise has been understood in different countries at different times, as well as identifying whether its development (in whatever form) has been shaped primarily by domestic cultures and traditions, or instead as a response to the demands of the international environment. It might also help to provide the foundations for a more sustained analysis of diplomatic expertise as an amalgam of practice and embedded knowledge.⁸³ Do claims to such expertise reflect a genuine possession of a clear-sighted understanding of the subtleties of global politics and economics? Is it really the case that a defence of idiosyncratic cultures and organisational structures can be grounded in a sophisticated situational understanding of issues and problems invisible to the overly-uniform perspective of a rationalising centre? Or does the evidence suggest that those who make such claims are merely victims of the curse of bounded rationality, prisoners in an iron cage that determines their analysis of the world, and may represent little more than a demand for autonomy and influence against other competing institutions?

This last point raises a third possible area for future research: the need for a detailed empirical analysis that seeks to examine how the quality of a particular diplomatic

establishment affected its performance in securing favourable outcomes. The FCO today employs a rather unconvincing methodology for measuring its performance that assigns 50% to ‘policy’ defined as making a difference to ‘British interests, businesses and people’.⁸⁴ In reality, as senior officials in the Department have repeatedly argued, it is difficult to identify definite metrics for measuring something as uncertain as foreign policy outcomes. And, from the historian’s perspective, any attempt to examine the performance of the British Diplomatic Service at a particular moment in time necessarily tends to push one towards a counterfactual history which speculates about how outcomes could have been different. It would nevertheless be helpful to consider historical case-studies that can illuminate, if only in somewhat speculative terms, how the uncertain variable of diplomatic excellence can play out in the real world of international politics.

Even in the absence of such detailed studies, though, it is still reasonable to conclude that if the British Diplomatic Service had in the three decades after 1945 abandoned its emphasis on the value of the generalist, instead promoting high levels of functional or regional specialisation, then the coherence of the diplomatic process would have been significantly disrupted. Such an approach would in all probability have produced competing sets of sub-cultures rooted in specific tasks or regions. If such regional and functional sub-groupings had been the norm, then it would have made the overall management and direction of the diplomatic effort more difficult. There would have been a need for greater central direction from London to arbitrate between competing factions who lacked a shared orientation to the Service as a whole. The greater depth of specialist knowledge might have given some compensation for this loss of coherence among the diplomatic establishment. On balance, though, it seems likely that increased specialisation would have inhibited rather than

facilitated the task of responding to the ever-changing kaleidoscope of Britain's international relations.

Appendix: The Diplomats included in this study

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Brimelow, Thomas	(Permanent Secretary)	Ashe, Derick	(Buenos Aires)
Arthur, Geoffrey	(Deputy Secretary)	Barnes, John	(The Hague)
Campbell, Alan	(Deputy Secretary)	Bottomley, James	(Pretoria/Cape Town)
Killick, John	(Deputy Secretary)	Cole, David	(Bangkok)
Maitland, Donald	(Deputy Secretary)	Dodson, Derrick	(Brasilia)
Tebbit, Donald	(Deputy Secretary)	Duff, Anthony	(Nairobi)
Watson, Duncan	(Deputy Secretary)	Falle, Sam	(Stockholm)
Wilford, Michael	(Deputy Secretary)	Galsworthy, Arthur	(Dublin)
Wright, Oliver	(Deputy Secretary)	Hildeyard, David	(UN, Geneva)
		Laskey, Denis	(Vienna)
		Le Quesne, Martin	(Lagos)

Heads of Grade 1 posts

Adams, Philip	(Cairo)	Norris, George	(Kuala Lumpur)
Garvey, Terrance	(Moscow)	Parsons, Anthony	(Tehran)
Henderson, Nicholas	(Bonn)	Phillips, Horace	(Ankara)
James, Morrice	(Canberra)	Pumphrey, Laurence	(Islamabad)
Johnson, John	(Ottawa)	Richards, Brooks	(Athens)
Le Quesne, Martin	(Lagos)	Scott, David	(Wellington)
Millard, Guy	(Rome)	Stark, Andrew	(Copenhagen)
Palliser, Michael	(EEC, Brussels)	Wiggin, Charles	(Madrid)
Peck Edwards	(NATO, Brussels)		
Ramsbotham, Peter	(Washington)	Others	
Tomkins, Edward	(Paris)	Moreton, John	(UN New York)*
Walker, Michael	(New Dehli)	Sykes, Richard	(Washington)**
Warner, Fredrick	(Tokyo)	Youde, Edward	(Peking, Ambassador)

* Deputy Permanent Representative ** Minister

¹ For a classic critique of the declinist argument see Jim Tomlinson, ‘Inventing “Decline”: The Falling Behind of the British Economy in the Post-War Years’, *Economic History Review*, 49, 4 (1996), 731-57.

² For general overviews of British foreign policy in the period 1945-75 see, David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled; British Policy and World Power in the 20th Century*, 2 edn. (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2000); David Saunders, *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role: British Foreign Policy since 1945* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1990); Robert Self, *British Foreign and Defence Policy Since 1945: Challenges and Dilemmas in a Changing World* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). The quotation is from Command 4107, ‘The United Kingdom’s Overseas Representation, August 1968-1969, Chairman: Sir Val Duncan’, <<http://parlipapers.chadwyck.co.uk>>, accessed 2012, (hereafter Duncan), para 9, p. 23.

³ For a classic statement on the correct constitutional role of civil servants, particularly in relation to the Foreign Office, see Ivor Jennings, *The British Constitution* 5th edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 132 ff. For an effort to rethink the boundary between ministers and civil servants, which emphasise the inherent fluidity of the policy-making process, see Patrick Dunleavy and R.A.W. Rhodes, ‘Core Executive Studies in Britain’, *Public Administration* 68, 1 (1990), 3-28.

⁴ John Young has given a perceptive overview of British diplomatic practice during 1963-1976 in John W. Young, *Twentieth-Century Diplomacy: A Case Study of British Diplomatic Practice 1963-1976* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁵ See, for example, John Dickie, *Inside the Foreign Office* (London: Chapmans, 1992) and *The New Mandarins: How British Foreign Policy Works* (London, I. B. Tauris, 2004); Ruth Dudley Edwards, *True Brits: Inside the Foreign Office* (London: BBC Books, 1994); Geoffrey Moorhouse, *The Diplomats: The Foreign Office Today* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977); Zara Steiner, ‘The Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Resistance and Adaptation to Changing Times’ in Gaynor Johnson ed. *The Foreign Office and British Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Abingdon UK: Routledge, 2005); William Strang, *The Foreign Office and The Diplomatic Career* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1962).

⁶ The definition of grade 1 and 2 posts is taken from Moorhouse, *The Diplomats*, pp. 41-2, with the ambassador in Vienna also acting as head of the delegation to the United Nations in Vienna.

⁷ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>> [accessed, 2012]; *Who Was Who*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012), <<http://www.ukwhoswho.com>>, [accessed, 2012]; Churchill Archive Centre, Cambridge, British Diplomatic Oral History Project, interviews by Campbell, Henderson, Killick, Maitland, Parsons, Phillips, Ramsbotham and Wright. The published memoirs include Alan Campbell, *Colleagues and Friends* (Salisbury UK: Michael Russell, 1988); Sam Falle, *My Lucky Life: In War, Revolution, Peace and Diplomacy* (large print edition Oxford: Isis, 2004); Nicholas Henderson, *Mandarin: The Diaries of an Ambassador 1969-72* (London: Weindenfeld & Nicolson, 1994) and *The Private Office Revised* (London: Profile Books, 2001); Donald Maitland, *Diverse Times, Sundry Places* (Brighton UK: Alpha Press, 1996); Horace Phillips, *Envoy Extraordinary, A Most Unlikely Ambassador* (London: Radcliffe, 1995).

⁸ Command 6420, ‘Proposals for the Reform of the Foreign Service’, January 1943, reproduced in William (Baron) Strang, *The Foreign Office* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955), pp. 214-22.

⁹ Christina Larner, ‘The Amalgamation of the Diplomatic Service with the Foreign Office’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 7 (1972), 107-126 and Zara Steiner and M. L. Dockrill, ‘The Foreign Office Reforms’, *The Historical Journal*, 17 (1974), 131-156.

¹⁰ Command 2276, ‘Report of the Committee on Representational Services Overseas appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Plowden’, February 1964 (hereafter Plowden), para. 2.

¹¹ Strang, *The Foreign Office*, pp. 68-9.

¹² Larner, ‘Amalgamation’, p. 118; Strang, *Foreign Office*, pp. 69-70; quotes are taken from D.C.M. Platt, *The Cinderella Service: British Consuls since 1825* (London: Longman, 1971), p. 114.

¹³ Strang, *The Diplomatic Career*, p. 40; The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), FO 366/1502, Howard to Mallet and enclosure, 6 January 1945. The language requirements were also simplified eliminating the need for candidates to fund an extensive period of private study abroad.

¹⁴ Plowden, para. 3.

¹⁵ This integration also included the Trade Commission Service that focused on commercial issues in Commonwealth countries. Plowden, para. 44-50 and 51-165; *The Foreign Office List and Diplomatic and Consular Year Book: 1965* (London: Harrison and Son, 1965).

¹⁶ Joe Garner, *The Commonwealth Office* (London: Heinemann, 1978), pp. 406-21; Young, *Twentieth Century Diplomacy*, pp. 35-40.

¹⁷ Plowden, paras. 94-5.

¹⁸ Duncan, Annex F, p. 175.

¹⁹ TNA, FO 366/1502, Command 6567, 'Recruitment to Civil Service during the Reconstruction Period: Statement of Government Policy and Civil Service National Whitley Council Report', November 1944; Howard to Mallet, 6 March 1945.

²⁰ TNA, FO 366/1502, Howard to Mallet and enclosure, 6 January 1945.

²¹ TNA, FO 366/1502, Scott to Halifax, 7 March 1945; Strang, *The Diplomatic Career*, pp.37-39.

²² TNA, FO 366/1502, Waterfield to Scott, 22 February 1945; Strang, *The Diplomatic Career*, p. 39.

²³ TNA, FO 366/1502, Scott to Halifax, Mallet and Cooper, 7 March 1945; 'The Foreign Service (Senior Branch)', February 1945.

²⁴ Platt, *Cinderella Service*, pp. 68-124.

²⁵ Steiner, 'The Foreign and Commonwealth Office', p. 21; Steiner and Dockrill, 'The Foreign Office Reforms', pp. 131-56; Valerie Cromwell, 'The United Kingdom', in Zara Steiner ed., *The Times Survey of Foreign Ministries of the World* (London: Times Books, 1982), p. 559.

²⁶ Quotes from Falle, *My Lucky Life*, p.10; *The Times*, 10 February 1999, 'Sir David Muirhead'.

²⁷ Steiner and Dockrill, 'Foreign Office Reforms', pp. 152-4; T. G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind: The Making of British Foreign Policy, 1865-1914* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 9.

²⁸ *The Guardian*, 18 July 2006, Sydney Giffard, 'Obituary: Sir Michael Wilford'.

²⁹ The six who had been recruited to Commonwealth Service followed similar career paths to the rank of counsellor as their contemporaries in the Foreign Service, combining overseas assignments in Commonwealth countries with spells in London.

³⁰ Falle, Phillips and Phumprey were promoted most quickly reaching counsellor in their late 30s after only 9-10 years in the Service.

³¹ Moorhouse, *Diplomats*, p. 92. This tendency was also highlighted in Duncan, pp. 24-26.

³² The five were Brimelow, Garvey, Laskey, Peck and Tomkins.

³³ These figures include the first role at counsellor.

³⁴ *The Foreign Office List for 1959*, pp. 1-13; Duncan, p. 173.

³⁵ Matthew Parris and Andrew Bryson, *Parting Shots* (London: Penguin edn, 2011), pp. 224-7; Edwards, *True Brits*, pp. 120-3.

³⁶ Plowden, para. 185.

³⁷ Platt, *The Cinderella Service*, p. 235.

³⁸ Larner, 'Amalgamation'; Steiner and Dockrill, 'Foreign Office Reforms'.

³⁹ Henderson, *The Private Office*, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Strang, *The Diplomatic Career*, pp. 91-2.

⁴¹ For example, Campbell, Colleagues and Friends, p. 65 and James Cable, 'Foreign Policy making: Planning or reflex?', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 3 (1992), pp. 357-381, pp. 357-8.

⁴² The *Diplomatic List* refers to Garvey and Peck as 'counsellor' in the Foreign Office in 1951-3 and 1953-4 respectively. It has been assumed that they were in fact departmental heads. The private offices include that of the PUS and the Prime Minister in addition to Foreign Office ministers.

⁴³ Moorhouse, *The Diplomats*, p. 119.

⁴⁴ Young, *Twentieth Century Diplomacy*, pp. 39-40.

⁴⁵ Thomas Balogh, 'The Apotheosis of the Dilettante: The Establishment of the Mandarins', in Hugh Thomas, *The Establishment: A Symposium* (London, 1959).

⁴⁶ For a useful analysis of the 'cult of the generalist' see Peter Kellner and Lord Crowther-Hunt, *The Civil Servants: An Inquiry into Britain's Ruling Class* (London: Macdonald and James, 1980), pp. 23-45.

⁴⁷ Max Beloff, 'Another Plowden Report: The Foreign and Commonwealth Services', *Public Administration* 42, 4 (1964), pp. 415-9.

⁴⁸ Plowden, paras 178-92.

⁴⁹ Duncan, para. 1, p. 34; paras 30-2, pp. 31-2.

⁵⁰ *The Administrators: The Reform of the Civil Service* (London: Fabian Society, 1964).

⁵¹ For a valuable account of the Fulton Report and its later influence, see Rodney Lowe, *The Official History of the British Civil Service, Reforming the Civil Service, Vol. 1: The Fulton Years*, pp. 114-28; pp. 131-55.

⁵² *Times* 30 July 1969 (letter by Sir Hughe Knatchfull-Hugessen).

⁵³ For the classic paper which inaugurated much of the debate on this topic, see Paul J DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, 'The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organisational Fields', *American Sociological Review*, 48, 2 (1983), pp. 147-60.

⁵⁴ We have found particularly useful when reflecting on this theme Brian Hocking, *Foreign Ministries: Change and Adaptation* (Basingstoke UK: Macmillan, 1999) and Brian Hocking and David Spence (eds.), *Foreign Ministries in the European Union Integrating Diplomats* (Basingstoke UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). It is striking and unsurprising that much of the best work on the adaptation of foreign ministries has focused on adaptation to the new international environment created by the development of the European Union, but much of the work retains broader applicability).

⁵⁵ Mary Jo Hatch and Ann L. Cunliffe, *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Post Modern Perspectives*, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 158-174; Mary Jo Hatch, 'The Dynamics of organisational Culture, *Academy of Management Review* (1993) 18.4, 657-693, quotations for Hatch and Cunliffe.

⁵⁶ A general overview of the role of ethnography in organisational studies is given in Tony J Watson, 'Ethnography, Reality, and Truth: The Vital need for Studies of 'How Things Work' in Organisation and Management', *Journal of Management Studies* 48 (2011) pp. 201-2017.

⁵⁷ Dickie, *Inside the Foreign Office*, pp. 11-12; Steiner, 'The Foreign and Commonwealth Office', pp.19-23; Carne Ross, *Independent Diplomats: Dispatches from an Unaccountable Elite* (London: C. Hurst, 2007), p. 92; Candida Slater, *Good Manners and Bad Behaviour: The Unofficial Rules of Diplomacy* (Leicester UK: Matador, 2008), pp. 33-5; William Wallace, *The Foreign Policy Process in Britain* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1975), p. 8.

⁵⁸ Parris and Bryson, *Parting Shots*, p. 360.

⁵⁹ Dickie, *Inside the Foreign Office*, p. 12.

⁶⁰ Peter Hennessy, *Whitehall* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1989), p. 405.

⁶¹ Moorhouse, *The Diplomats*, p.131.

⁶² Zara Steiner, 'Decision-making in American and British foreign policy: an open and shut case', *Review of International Studies* 13 (1987) pp. 1-18 (esp. p. 10).

⁶³ Anthony Sampson, *The Changing Anatomy of Britain* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), pp. 230-1.

⁶⁴ Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind*, p. 7.

⁶⁵ Douglas Hurd, *Memoirs* (London: Little Brown, 2003), p. 104; Meyer, *Getting our Way*, p. 10; Slater, *Good Manners and Bad Behaviour*, p. 33.

⁶⁶ Strang, *The Diplomatic Career*, p. 50.

⁶⁷ The one exception to this generalisation was the provision of language training, especially for 'hard languages', Strang, *The Foreign Office*, pp. 82-3.

⁶⁸ Meyer, *Getting our Way*, p. 9-10.

⁶⁹ BDOHP, interview with John Killick, pp. 2-3.

⁷⁰ Sampson, *Changing Anatomy of Britain*, p. 165.

⁷¹ The ideas in this paragraph are largely drawn from Jason Hughes, Nick Jewson and Laura Unwin, *Communities of Practice: Critical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2007). For a more sustained discussion see one of the 'foundational' texts of the literature, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁷² The obituaries are from *The Guardian* (Brimelow, 9 August 1995; Killick, 16 February 2004; Maitland 27 August 2010; Richards, 18 September 2002; Tomkins, 27 September 2007; and Wright, 10 September 2009) and *The Independent* (Ledwidge, 26 February 1998; Warner, 3 October 1995).

⁷³ Henry Mintzberg, *Structure in Fives: Designing Effective Organisations* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), pp. 7 and pp. 189-213.

⁷⁴ Among the large literature see Larner, 'Amalgamation'; Platt, 'Cinderella Service'; Steiner and Dockrill, 'Foreign Office Reforms'.

⁷⁵ For a useful summary see Hennessy, *Whitehall*, pp. 266-73.

⁷⁶ On the vast literature on the New Public Management, see the classic essay by Christopher Hood, 'A Public Management for all Seasons', *Public Administration*, 69, 1 (1991), pp. 3-19; also see Christopher Pollitt, *Managerialism and the Public Services*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993). For a recent useful collection of essays see Tom Christensen and Per Laegraed, *The Ashgate Research Companion to New Public Management* (Farnham UK: Ashgate, 2011).

⁷⁷ For a useful recent discussion see Ian Hall, ‘Building the Global Network: The Reform of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office under New Labour’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 15, 2 (2013), pp. 228-45.

⁷⁸ The quotation is from Peter Hennessy’s testimony before the Foreign Affairs Select Committee in 2010 available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmfaff/c665-i/c66501.htm> (accessed 5 August 2014). For an interesting brief review of Hague’s views see Colin Freeman, ‘What did William Hague do for Britain’s Foreign Policy’, *Daily Telegraph*, 15 July 2014.

⁷⁹ See, for example, the list of FCO priorities for 2012 set down at

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmfaff/665/66506.htm (accessed 6 August 2014)

⁸⁰ For a useful summary of organisational reform in the US Foreign Service see Elmer Plischke, *US Department of State: A Reference History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), p. 436 ff.

⁸¹ Edwards, *True Brits*, p. 76.

⁸² <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2012-09-07b.119654.h>.

⁸³ For a valuable new work that begins to look at some of these issues, albeit from a rather different perspective from the one used here, see Merje Kuus, *Geopolitics and Expertise: Knowledge and Authority in European Diplomacy* (Hoboken NJ: Wiley, 2013).

⁸⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/diplomatic-excellence-briefing> (accessed 5 August 2014).