

WHAT CAN I EXPECT?

WORKING FOR THE FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE AS AN EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT



FIONA FRASER - PERSONAL ASSISTANT - TEL AVIV

I joined the FCO in March 2002 and spent my two years in London firstly in HR and then as one of two PAs in the Foreign Secretary's Private Office. Working in Private Office gave me valuable experience as I got to view the Foreign Office as a whole, not just from one Department. It also gave me the opportunity to travel, accompanying the Private Secretary on overseas visits with the Foreign Secretary. As with most new entrants, living in London is the hard part but knowing that in two years I would be living and working in a foreign country was the incentive to keep going!

Currently I'm working at the Embassy in Tel Aviv as personal assistant to the Deputy Head of Mission (DHM). My job is varied but my prime task is looking after the DHM. It involves managing the diary, taking minutes at the various Embassy committee meetings (Housing, Management, Security), liaising with other missions and the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, doing ad hoc work for the Chancery section and cover for the Ambassador's PA. The Middle East Peace Process is a strategic priority for the Foreign Office. Work here is fast paced and never boring. The Embassy is medium sized with about 20 UK-based Officers (single and families).

I'm almost half way through my time here in Tel Aviv and looking forward to another overseas posting before my return to London. That's the great thing about the Foreign Office - there is always another set of challenges on the horizon, new friends to make and new places to see!



LAWRENCE JENKINS - RESOURCE LIAISON OFFICER - LONDON

My name is Lawrence Jenkins. I joined the FCO in March 2004 and am currently working in the Resource Management Team (RMT) in Human Resources Directorate.

Our primary role in the RMT is budget monitoring. At the start of the financial year each team within the Directorate bids for an allocation of funds. The RMT then monitor how this money is spent and provide each department with details on whether they are likely to incur an over/under spend.

In April 2004 the FCO implemented a new procurement and finance package. This was a particularly busy time for my colleague and myself as our role was expanded to include the purchasing for the Directorate. This gave me the opportunity to mix with a wide range of staff from other departments, as I was the initial point of contact for any arising queries.

My daily duties include the processing of invoices, the running of financial reports and dealing with general team enquiries. I am also responsible for maintaining the accounts spreadsheets for the department and I have regular contact with the Payments Unit and the Resource Accounts Department.

Prior to the FCO I worked for an advertising consultants but I was attracted to the Diplomatic Service as I was looking for a more varied and interesting career. As an Executive Assistant you are employed as a generalist and although you may not have previous experience in a particular field, such as finance, you are actively encouraged to attend all the necessary training courses to build up your knowledge.

Like many of the new entrants to the FCO I was attracted to living and working abroad and I am currently bidding for my first Overseas Posting. Very few careers can provide you with the opportunity to travel and experience a variety of cultures. Two years in London can seem like a long time before you go abroad but I have been told by other colleagues that it's worth the wait!



WHAT CAN I EXPECT?

WORKING FOR THE FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE AS AN OPERATIONAL OFFICER



TRICIA CARLIN - GENERALIST - ISTANBUL

I joined the FCO in February 2003 spending my first 18 months in Human Resources Directorate. My work in HR covered assisting with diversity initiatives and attending careers events to promote job opportunities in the FCO. Early on I realised that, for me, the best aspect of working with the FCO is the possibility of moving into new and perhaps completely different areas of work every couple of years. Since I enjoy facing fresh challenges this is a fantastic prospect. Admittedly, working in London was tough financially but the move overseas has lifted the burden.

I am now eight months into my three-year posting in Istanbul and love it! The bulk of my job is managing the Registry (the Consulate's central filing system) and being the administrator for our IT and communication systems. There are a few more interesting elements to my job, including the running of language immersion training for staff preparing to work in Turkey and even heading a staff committee looking into earthquake preparedness! To make any posting work, I think you need to be an outgoing person and take the initiative to shape your own experience.

Istanbul is a vibrant city and a fantastic place to live and work. It's also a great jumping off point for destinations in Europe and Asia, so I plan to make the most of my travel package. The people I work with are great and I've heard some amazing stories of their experiences while working with the FCO overseas. Probably the biggest challenge I have faced in Turkey has been the language barrier, but this is something I can tackle as the FCO offers up to 250 hours of language training. I have an excellent tutor here and should get much more out of my posting in just a few months time.

At the back of my mind I'm beginning to think about the next move in my career: Either taking another overseas posting or sitting the assessment for the next grade up and returning to London. But there's plenty of time to decide as I am really enjoying my job!



NATALIE TURNER - PERSONAL ASSISTANT - LONDON

I joined the FCO in October 2003 spending my first 7 months as personal assistant to the two deputy heads of the Counter-Proliferation Department (CPD). In June 2004 I took over the role of Personal Assistant to the head of the same department.

CPD has been a good first department to work in and I have enjoyed my time here despite the financial restraints of living in London. It has been a good mix of people and the subject matter has been particularly interesting and topical. The work I do usually includes organising meetings, typing minutes, faxing, photocopying and IT administration. I also work closely with other government departments and we even have bowling competitions with the MOD and DTI.

What particularly attracted me to the Foreign Office was the opportunity to travel and promote British interests abroad. I am currently preparing for my first posting to Baghdad where I will be working as the PA to the Deputy Head of Mission. After this posting I will return to London before heading off on another posting to Grand Turk, in the Turks & Caicos Islands, as PA to the Governor.

