

About the Oxford University Foreign Service Programme

History of the Foreign Service Programme, 1969-2016

The Foreign Service Programme is one of Oxford's longstanding windows on the international scene. Its members are mainly Foreign Service officers from all over the world. FSP provides vital insights into today's world of multinational issues and organizations.

Oxford launched its first regular programme designed exclusively for overseas diplomats in October 1969. These came for the most part from then newly-independent states. The venture was called the Oxford University Foreign Service Programme (OUFSP). Today Foreign Services around the world count over 1,000 FSP graduates among their members. Diplomats from over one hundred and forty countries, more than two-thirds of the member states of the United Nations, have attended the FSP. Many have attained ambassadorial or ministerial rank and at least one has become Head of Government.

This contribution to the education of serving diplomats extends an older Oxford tradition, rooted in the University's dedication to the formation of Britain's public service cadres. Starting from the Northcote-Trevelyan Civil Service reforms of 1854 and the progressive abolition of patronage, the University of Oxford, inspired by the enthusiasm of Benjamin Jowett, Senior Tutor and then Master of Balliol College (1870-1893), initiated a specialist programme for new entrants to the Indian Civil Service. Jowett's vision was "To inoculate the world with Balliol".

Fresh impetus to the professionalization of Britain's overseas civil services came in 1926 when Oxford and Cambridge agreed to run a Tropical African Services Course on behalf of the British Colonial Office. Thirty-two students began in Michaelmas Term and fifteen in the following Hilary Term - twenty-one of them fresh Oxford graduates. This programme, the direct ancestor of the FSP, continued in varying forms and under different names for another forty-three years, as the Colonial Administrative Service Course (1934), the Devonshire Course (1945), Course 'A' and 'B' (1953), the Overseas Service Course (1962) and, finally, the Overseas Course in Government and Development (1964). This last paved the way for the FSP in 1969.

As many Commonwealth states approached independence, their governments realized their need for diplomats to staff their Foreign Services. Accordingly, in the 1960s the Overseas Service Course was adapted to allow for a small Foreign Service component - in some years half a dozen, in others none - and to arrange tuition for them in international relations in addition to the core subjects of their programme. In 1964, it became possible to assemble a small group, seven students from five countries, into a coherent and more integrated Foreign Service Training Course under the auspices of the Overseas Service Course. Examinations were instituted in 1966, and in addition to the study of international affairs, opportunities were created for the teaching of foreign languages, at first French but soon including German, Russian, Dutch, Arabic and Italian. The principal countries to take

advantage of these early training courses were Afghanistan, Iran, Jamaica, Jordan, Malta, Mauritius, Nigeria, the Philippines and Swaziland. Seventy-one students from twenty-three different countries (including two Americans in 1960) had taken advantage of this opportunity for some degree of Foreign Service instruction between 1958 and 1968. The Commonwealth Studies Committee had also sponsored special seminars for single country groups of diplomats in the early 1960s, which had brought small groups from Ceylon (1958), Ghana (1959), Nigeria (1960), Kuwait (1961) and Northern Rhodesia - now Zambia - (1962) to Oxford for special programmes of instruction.

From 1966, Dr. Freddie Madden, one of the Academic Advisers to the Overseas Course, planned an experimental Foreign Service course, based on the reservoir of experience described above. When the then Ministry of Overseas Development in 1969 withdrew from funding the Overseas Service Course, Oxford was ready to offer a viable alternative. The redesigned Foreign Service element in the former Overseas Service Course was transformed into the Foreign Service Programme, based in Queen Elizabeth House. Above all, there was available in Mr. Ralph Feltham an ideal Director of Studies for the new programme. He had held a consular post in Mozambique and a diplomatic post in Lisbon, taught Foreign Service trainees on an ad hoc Northern Rhodesia course in 1962, and organized a six-week programme for trainee diplomats for Basutoland - now Lesotho - in 1965. He had also been Bursar of Rhodes House, Secretary to the Committee of Commonwealth Studies and Sub-Warden of Queen Elizabeth House. FSP No. 1 opened in October 1969.

The Evolution of FSP

From 1969 until 1986 the FSP was supervised by the Committee for Commonwealth Studies, chaired by Wilfred Knapp. When the Committee for Commonwealth Studies was abolished in 1985/86, the FSP became responsible to the new Committee for Queen Elizabeth House. In 1990, an FSP Advisory Committee was set up, chaired by the Master of St. Cross College, with representatives from other Colleges, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the University administration. In 1981, the then Overseas Development Administration decided to reshape its direct financing of the FSP by offering instead a guarantee of scholarships on a reducing basis, with fifteen in 1981/82 decreasing to eight in 1983/84. Faced with this prospect of the loss of the FSP, some 85% of whose annual intake had received scholarships from the British Government, the Committee for Commonwealth Studies agreed that the Director of the FSP should embark on a campaign of positive marketing among governments able to finance their own students, mostly in the Middle East and Latin America and to a lesser extent Asia. They also persuaded the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to offer support for the FSP. As a result, record numbers of thirty-six attended the FSP in 1984/85 and forty-one in 1985/86, an all-time high, including eleven from francophone Africa. Numbers have since stabilized at around 25.

The founding Director retired in 1986, to be succeeded by Anthony Kirk-Greene and then by a former British diplomat, Philip McKearney. In 1988, Mr. McKearney resigned after a year in office. Anthony Kirk-Greene again took over on an interim basis. His tenure lasted until the appointment of Sir John Johnson, the first of a further series of former British diplomats, in 1990. In 1995 Sir Robin Fearn and in 1999 Christopher Long in turn took on the Director's post. In 2003, the post was divided into two: the Diplomatic Director, Alan Hunt, a retired British diplomat, and the Academic Director, Dr Rodney Bruce Hall, an American scholar in International Relations. Following the introduction in 2006 of the Master of Science in Global Governance and Diplomacy (see below), the position of Academic Director lapsed. Dr Hall continued as course Director of the MSc, while Mr Hunt became Director of the Foreign Service Programme. He was succeeded in 2010 by Jeremy

Cresswell, also a former British diplomat, who sadly died in 2015. The current Director is Mrs Kate Jones, a former diplomat and legal adviser.

Two major shifts in the latter part of the 20th century demonstrated the flexibility of the FSP. First, in 1989 a proposal to admit one or two Mid-Career Fellows to pursue their own research projects under academic supervision was approved by the University. The first Mid-Career Fellows arrived in 1990/91, one from Czechoslovakia and one from the United Kingdom: two more, from the Republic of Korea and Lithuania, followed in 1992/93. Because of a combination of funding difficulties and the problem that many Ministries of Foreign Affairs/External Relations find it difficult to release staff of this seniority, this promising extension of the FSP has never exceeded two members a year, normally one or none. Secondly, although the FSP was not in a position to respond to the FCO request in 1991 to provide special courses in the UK for diplomats from former Communist countries, it was able to support this exercise by offering places on FSP to diplomats from Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and during the rest of the 1990s and subsequently others from Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Mongolia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine.

Over the years, positive relations have developed between the Directors and British missions overseas as a by-product of the selection process. The brochure outlining the Programme is sent each year to Ministries of Foreign Affairs and to British Ambassadors and High Commissioners.

Development of the Curriculum

International Politics, Public International Law and International Trade and Finance had been core subjects from the outset.

The fourth core subject, Diplomatic Practice, has been formally examined since 1990/91. Variants such as "Diplomatic Practice and Protocol", and for a number of years "Political Reporting", featured in earlier programmes. Sometimes "Practical Courses in Diplomatic Method" took place in the vacations, and occasional simulation exercises were held. Since 1990, the whole range of diplomatic practice has been included. Political, economic, commercial, administration, consular, public diplomacy and protocol are covered in lectures and seminars and simulations of multilateral negotiation and crisis management and latterly "e-diplomacy" held. Today Diplomatic Practice has taken its place among the core subjects formally recognised by the University for the award of its Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma in Diplomatic Studies.

The strikingly international mix of the FSP means that the University's regional studies centres (Latin America, Middle East, Japan, South Asia, Africa, etc.) have much to offer to FSP members and also to derive from their contributions.

From the mid-1980s, facilities were provided for FSP members who so wished to volunteer to undertake independent research under academic supervision into a subject of interest to them. In 2002/03 this was formally recognised as the core of a new Postgraduate Diploma in Diplomatic Studies, offered alongside the traditional Postgraduate Certificate in Diplomatic Studies. Diploma candidates are required to sit all four papers for the Postgraduate Certificate and additionally to produce a dissertation of 10-12,000 words. A further significant step was taken in 2010/11 with the introduction of a Master of Studies option open to successful Postgraduate Diploma students. Those selected for the MSt prepare a 15,000 word dissertation under academic supervision from Oxford but at-distance and on a part-time basis. The first cohort of successful MSt students graduated in 2012.

In 2006/07 a Master of Science in Global Governance and Diplomacy had been introduced to run in parallel to the existing programme. In 2007/08 the MSc became one of the mainstream courses offered by Queen Elizabeth House and Diplomatic Practice was one of the two choices of foundation course during the first four years of the MSc's existence. With the FSP's move to Rewley House in 2010 the relationship with the MSc programme ceased.

From the inception of the FSP, a key element in its make-up was cultural and social interaction. With over twenty members drawn from as many countries the potential gain from this was enormous. To build up an "esprit de corps" has always been a primary aim of the FSP. Friendships made here have a high chance of being renewed later as members meet at conferences or are posted to the same capital. Thus, stress is laid on their participation at formal dinners and regular luncheons for visiting speakers, on individual 'My Country' talks by members, and visits to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Houses of Parliament, and media, business houses and missions in London.

Highlights among the annual extramural activities are the European Study Tour in the Easter vacation to Brussels, Strasbourg, Geneva and Paris, taking in international organizations like the EU, NATO, Council of Europe, ICRC, WTO, UNHCR and UNCTAD; and the two-day international negotiation seminar in the Christmas vacation. Over recent years a three-day visit to Northern Ireland has become a regular feature of the Programme.

The FSP and the Wider World

FSP has been able to project its image and reputation outside Oxford through academic conferences and consultancies and through links established with sister institutions devoted to training for the Foreign Service. The most influential link has been through the Conference of Directors and Deans of Diplomatic Academies and Institutes of International Relations, now the "International Forum on Diplomatic Training". Each year this brings together those involved in Foreign Service training at institutions from around the world. Among the founding members in 1973 was Ralph Feltham, to whom a silver medal was awarded in 1989 for his contribution to the Conference. The Oxford experience has also been called upon by other similar institutions. Mr. Feltham acted as consultant to a number of Foreign Service Institutes round the world. He and Anthony Kirk-Greene were members of a three-man team commissioned by Saudi Arabia to report on work in Riyadh. Mr. Kirk-Greene took part in a conference organized by the Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies at Nairobi to mark "Thirty Years of African Diplomacy". Sir John Johnson was asked to advise the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on training proposals for Eastern European diplomats, and later for diplomats-to-be from the ANC. With such a network in place, and so many members in so many Diplomatic Services around the globe, it is not hard to believe an anecdote from a senior former member. He tells how he went to a bilateral conference to negotiate a knotty problem and noticed that his opposite number was, like him, wearing an FSP tie. The meeting was over in an unexpectedly short time. Other diplomats on both sides are said to be still puzzled by how quickly agreement was reached.

Conclusion: The Way Forward

With our 1,200 alumni and a reputation in over 140 diplomatic services, the FSP has a proud legacy. But flexibility and change are necessary, as in the past, as the surest way to flourish. From its home at Rewley House the Programme will continue to develop in order to address modern challenges and

changing techniques and technologies, while also respecting the historical lessons and useful traditions of diplomacy.

Oxford has a proud history of encouraging those who in the words of Cecil Rhodes "esteem the performance of public duties as their highest aim". Its public service landmarks include the approval of a programme for Indian Civil Servants in 1875, the opening of the Indian Institute in 1896, its formalization of the Colonial Service Course in 1926, and the development of the Overseas Service Courses from 1945. It is fair to add to this list the establishment of the Foreign Service Programme in 1969 and its success since. With such a pedigree to live up to, the FSP can take pride in its past and sustain its faith for the future.