A Course designed to develop high-level skills in effective communication, and handling of press, television, radio and telephone interviews

For Heads of Missions, Deputy Heads of Missions, and Senior Press Officers

Strategic Communications and Media Skills for Senior Managers
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Gerry McCrudden:</th>
<th>Allan King:</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>t:</strong> 01273 323 522</td>
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<tr>
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Introduction

Welcome to this two-day course for Heads of Missions, Deputy Heads of Missions, and Senior Press Officers. The purpose is to enable you to:

- Understand the importance of effective communication in delivering the International Strategic Priorities and Post Objectives;
- Understand the role of senior staff in communication work at Post;
- Develop high-level media skills to handle press, television, radio and telephone interviews.

The course is run by a team of experts from public relations, print journalism and broadcasting. Brief biographies appear at the end of these notes.

After completing the course participants will:

- Understand how communication contributes to achieving policy objectives and the role of senior staff in communication work;
- Be aware of the need for strategic communication planning;
- Appreciate the importance of engaging foreign public on policy issues;
- Understand the rules of engagement with the media;
- Thrive in a wide range of different and challenging interview situations, including newsprint and broadcasting (covering studio, telephone, “down the line” and “doorstep” scenarios.)
## Course Programme

### Day 1 (Thursday) OAB Room G/67

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Presenter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09.00</td>
<td>Start</td>
<td>Housekeeping, Objectives, Programme, Introductions:</td>
<td>Gerry McCrudden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.30</td>
<td>Comms in the FCO</td>
<td>New structure for Comms Dir; Comms in FCO; FS view on Comms</td>
<td>Adam Rutland Communications and Engagement Dept</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.30</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.45</td>
<td>Strategic Communications</td>
<td>An overview of current major FCO/HMG strategic comms campaigns (GREAT, Olympics); Comms planning</td>
<td>Ruairi O’Connell 2012/GREAT Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.45</td>
<td>Digital Diplomacy</td>
<td>How Digital Diplomacy works; what’s expected from you; what to demand from a comms team at Post; how London can help you</td>
<td>Adrian Chapman, Digital Diplomacy Team</td>
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<td>12.45</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.15</td>
<td>Internal Communications</td>
<td>Best practice in Internal Communications; your role as leaders in engaging staff at Post; top tips from HoMs</td>
<td>Catherine Morris, Deputy Head of Communications and Engagement Department</td>
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<td>14.15</td>
<td>Working with The Media</td>
<td>How best to engage and work with the Media. Top tips</td>
<td>Gerry McCrudden,</td>
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<td>17.30</td>
<td>End</td>
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### Day 2 (Friday) OAB Room G/67 and Westminster Live Studio

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Group A</th>
<th>Group B</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>08.30</td>
<td>Westminster Live Studios with Allan King</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Objectives, Programme</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Broadcast Interview technique</td>
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<td>09.00</td>
<td>Radio phone-in - studio</td>
<td>OAB with Frank Partridge.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>TV – door step</td>
<td>Objectives, Programme.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>TV – studio</td>
<td>Media landscape overview.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>TV – Down the line</td>
<td>Print media interview technique.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interview practice and feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.30</td>
<td>Lunch. Group A moves to OAB</td>
<td>Lunch. Group B to Westminster Live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.30</td>
<td>OAB with Frank Partridge.</td>
<td>Westminster Live Studios with Allan King.</td>
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<td>Objectives, Programme</td>
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<td>TV – Down the line</td>
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<td>17.00</td>
<td>End for Group A</td>
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<td>End for Group B</td>
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Working with the Media

Building a Constructive two-way relationship

Democratic Governments have a duty to explain their proposals and actions. This places effective communication at the heart of the Government agenda.

Within this context, Government and press affairs officers - working in the UK and overseas - sit at the interface between:

- the media - which applauds and rewards its employees for inquisitiveness and disclosure;

and

- government - which demands discretion from civil servants.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the relationship between Government and the media can often be difficult, but experience has shown that this tension can be a creative force that can work to the advantage of both parties.

At the heart of the relationship should be mutual recognition that Government has information it wishes to convey to the public and the media. The latter has a need for information, and possess unrivalled means to communicate with the general public and specific interest groups.

For press and public affairs officers, the primary task is to communicate news and policies in a clear and informative manner. They must also seek to build constructive relationships with media representatives so that there is a two-way respect for their different, but complementary, functions.
Press Office Objectives

• **Presenting** British Foreign Policy effectively, explaining the rationale and defending them where necessary against criticism;

• **Contributing** fully to formulation, development and implementation of policies, advising on presentational and media matters;

• **Reacting** quickly and authoritatively to news stories, capitalising on good news stories where possible, dealing with bad ones, and correcting misleading coverage;

• **Enhancing** the understanding of the work of the FCO at home and abroad – placing favourable stories where possible and rebutting criticism where necessary;

• **Sustaining** a wide range of media contacts, including local media, especially on consular cases;

• **Maintaining** close and effective liaison with colleagues, including those in London and overseas – the Number 10 Press Office, other Whitehall Departments and the Palace;

• **Remembering** all the while that the Press Office is there to advise and guide Posts abroad.
What is ‘News’?

News is what the media decides it is - and there is as much point protesting against that as there is in protesting at the weather.

**News is anything which is “New” “Informative” or “Innovative.”**

Bad news can be defined as an inconvenient combination of uncomfortable events, fuelled by unguarded comments.

News does not just happen. Much of it is predictable. Most events can be anticipated and prepared for, not by magic, but by method. Some even say you can predict up to 90% of news coverage. (See Forward Planning and Monitoring pages.)

In a well-run organisation like the FCO the unexpected should be rare. When it happens we should not have to rely on instinct alone, but on well-honed routines for responding to media crises. The Press Office and No. 10 Grids are useful planning tools in predicting much of the news coverage.

There is a difference between reacting decisively and coolly under pressure to unfolding events, as in consular and other unexpected events abroad, and planning for the handling of matters that can be anticipated.

However, in both, the managing of news means being realistic. Never say: “This doesn’t matter because it isn’t news ... it happened weeks ago ... it’s already been in the papers...”

An old story - something which a Minister said three times last year without a word of coverage - can and does go to the top of the bulletins or onto the front page; sometimes on an editor’s whim; sometimes because linked events resurrect the issue and give it new importance.

*One of the biggest mistakes we can make is to assume something will not be a problem because it has been around for a while.*

Content and context:

News is as much to do with context as with content. A speech, a quote, an initiative, a mistake, can all go unnoticed one week but make the front page the next.

News is a 24-7 commodity. It never stops. It happens at all times of the day and night; hence a round-the-clock duty presence in the Press Office, and the need for such cover in Posts.
It breaks in the papers, on TV, on the web or the radio. It suddenly runs on PA, Reuters and the other news agencies. They never sleep.

News is perverse, demanding, inconvenient, often downright frustrating. But it can also be enjoyable, especially when a difficult story is handled well or you make an impact with an event or initiative.
Attribution

Always establish the “terms” in which you are speaking at the beginning of the conversation. Always be explicit. Whatever the basis on which you brief, always make sure both sides are clear. Even then assume that what is being said may still be published, or the official identified by the media.

Not for use (clearer than “off the record”): I am telling you this so you can understand it, but you must not use it.

In confidence: I am telling you this but it is between us and you cannot use it.

Unattributable: I am telling you this and you can use the information but do not identify me as the source or allow it to be traced back to me.

Danger

Never say you are “speaking off the cuff;” if anything it means you are thinking aloud without thought to the consequences!!!

Off the record: Do Not use this term. Use of the expression “off the record” is meaningless and open to various interpretations. It should be avoided and certainly the briefing should not swing from “off the record” to “on the record” statements alternately. If any “off the record” remarks are to be made these should be kept to the end in one place so that risk of confusion is lessened. Ensure agreement from all concerned before going “off the record” or some may not feel bound by it later. “Non-attributable” and “attributable” are, in any case, clearer terms to use. If there is a “non-attributable” briefing it is better to be done at editor or senior correspondent level.

Concentrate instead on what can be published. If asked how much an initiative costs it is better to say positively “it runs well into eight figures” rather than “sorry, I can’t tell you that.” Whenever policy dictates that something cannot be given out you should seek publishable alternatives that will satisfy the press and will not clash with policy.

No Comment: Likewise “no comment” is an unhelpful phrase and should be avoided. There are always alternative forms of words that are less likely to irritate the audience. “No comment” is usually viewed as having something to hide or lying. “No comment and could not be contacted” means “He’s lying and has gone into hiding.”
Will ‘Stalin” jibe actually help Brown?

JAMES KIRKUP POLITICAL EDITOR (jkirkup@scotsman.com)

STRONG leader or ruthless despot? That was the question gripping Westminster yesterday as supporters of Gordon Brown tried to make a virtue of a scathing attack from a former civil service chief who likened the Chancellor to Joseph Stalin, the former Soviet dictator.

Lord Turnbull, the former Cabinet Secretary who worked with Mr Brown for four years, accused him of ruthlessly crushing dissent from fellow ministers and expanding the power of the Treasury within Whitehall at the expense of good government.

In remarks to the Financial Times, Lord Turnbull said Mr Brown has a “very cynical view of mankind and his colleagues – he cannot allow them any serious discussion about priorities. His view is that it is just not worth it and ‘they will get what I decide’.”

He went on: “Do those ends justify the means? It has enhanced Treasury control, but at the expense of any government cohesion and any assessment of strategy.”

He concluded: “You can choose whether you are impressed or depressed by that, but you cannot help admire the sheer Stalinist ruthlessness of it all.”

Downing Street, meanwhile, expressed Tony Blair’s “admiration for the Chancellor’s record as Chancellor”.

Even in retirement, senior civil servants are traditionally extremely discreet about government ministers, and Lord Turnbull’s explosive comparison of Mr Brown with an autocrat whose regime killed more than 20 million people stunned Whitehall yesterday.

Lord Turnbull later claimed he had not intended his words to become public, but he did not deny using them.

The potentially devastating assessment of Mr Brown’s personality was endorsed by Sir Stephen Wall, a former senior civil servant in Downing Street. “I do recognize these characteristics,” he said.
The Ten Commandments of Press Work

The Press Officer’s ‘bible’ includes the Ten Commandments. They amount to a common sense guide in handling relations with the media, but are as often breached as the originals. (With acknowledgements to Sir Christopher Meyer)

1) **Be accessible:** return calls as soon as possible, even if you have no real information or guidance to offer. Reporters attach great importance to this, which may be difficult for those outside the profession to understand, but which is primarily explained by being kicked by their news editor to produce;

2) **Be helpful:** give the best, most detailed and up to date guidance possible. If you cannot help at least sound helpful; the trick being to leave the reporter in good humour even when you can tell them nothing;

3) **Be friendly:** but recognise that friendship has limits;

4) **Do not waffle:** if you do not know the answer or cannot give it, say so. It will rarely be held against you but NEVER say no comment. It’s like a red rag and only serves to stimulate the juices of speculation;

5) **Do not lie:** if you do, or knowingly give a wrong steer, the chances are that you will be found out and your credibility destroyed forever. If you mislead inadvertently, try to correct the story before it goes out. If you are too late make a clean breast to the journalist. Be prepared to explain to his or her editor that you were responsible for them getting it wrong;

6) **Do not have favourites:** the disfavoured will seek to get even - and will do sooner or later;

7) **Take journalists seriously:** understand the pressures they work under and try to anticipate their needs. Above all keep in mind the tyranny of the deadline and the greedy appetite of editors for fresh copy;

8) **If you want coverage make news.** If you cannot make news then make irresistible phrases. A dull product will not make the news just because it is coming from a Government department;

9) **Do not waste time remonstrating** with reporters when they have failed to write it as you would have wished. Only gross acts of bad faith, inaccuracy and unfairness merit a complaint;

10) **Ensure the basis on which you are briefing is understood.** Agree it at the outset. Even then take care because your assumption should be that everything you say may be reported.
Some useful Tips when working with the Media
(Please also see the “Ten Commandments” above)

Face the fact that – like us – the media aren’t perfect

They are not without guile. Nor on occasion are they without bias. They get things wrong sometimes - and when they do they can show a reluctance to admit it and publish a correction. They tend to sensationalise - and to trivialise - and often mix comment with fact so that the reading/listening/viewing public cannot readily tell which is which.

Be accessible and respond as promptly as you can to media enquiries

Remember that the media have tight and immovable deadlines; weekly, daily - and in the case of broadcasters and news agencies - hourly. Don’t hesitate to tell them if you feel that the short notice they are giving you is unreasonable (e.g. if the enquiry is about something they were aware of for some time and could have been acted upon earlier in the day or week.) A polite but firm protest in these circumstances can work wonders in improving their performance in the future. Nevertheless, the aim must be to remain as helpful as possible in providing the best and most up to date guidance.

Always return a telephone call if you have promised to do so

The temptation not to do so - especially if it is an “awkward” question - can be very strong, but resist it. It is good manners to return the call, even if it is to say “I can’t help you.” Your courtesy will help to maintain a relationship of trust with the journalist. If you need more time to find information, explain this to the journalist and make a further promise to ring back.

In handling media queries bear in mind the following;

- Always prepare your answer
- Take Name
- Take media outlet
- Take telephone number
- Check deadline
- Promise to ring back
- CHECK! RING BACK!

Always share new information with your colleagues, both with Posts and in the FCO press office.

If you happen to pick up some important information - from a journalist or other source - which affects others, don’t keep it to yourself.
Don’t play “favourites” among the media when you are making a news announcement

When you have news to release, you should normally give it as wide a circulation as the subject demands, and ensure as far as possible that it arrives on all news desks simultaneously. If you favour one or two journalists over the others you will, by definition, end up with more enemies than friends. However, this does not preclude sometimes giving a more detailed briefing or access to a particular journalist when you think this might give valuable feature or higher profile coverage.

Embargoes

Only use an embargo when essential; never for your own convenience. Overuse is an irritation and can work against you. Use your judgement to set an embargo to maximise publicity. Don’t set an embargo time just after the airtime of a radio/TV bulletin. Don’t use loose embargoes such as “For morning newspapers.” Give a specific time and date.

Be as helpful and informative as you can

In dealing with media requests for factual information (unclassified of course!) and interpretation. After all, it is in your interests as well as the media’s that they “get it right.”

Never guess and try not to waffle

Always check your facts before briefing a journalist. Never talk to the media on something you know nothing about, simply be helpful.

Never lie to the media

This hardly needs saying perhaps, but there may be times when the temptation to bend the truth a little or to play with words, in order to conceal an embarrassment or to avoid a controversy, floats tantalisingly before you. Don’t succumb. Sooner or later the facts will come out and your office’s reputation - and your credibility as a spokesperson - would be in tatters. If a journalist comes to you with an awkward story that you know to be true but you cannot, for good reasons, confirm at that stage, then don’t confirm it. But don’t deny it either. Do not fall back on a “no comment” response. Journalists can use it against you as a suggestion that you are hiding something - lying or at least unwilling to comment.

If you unintentionally give wrong or misleading information, admit it and correct it as soon as possible. Do not wait for the journalist to complain. Be prepared to explain to an editor that it was your fault that a journalist got something wrong.

Media structures

The pecking order of media organisations usually follows a similar structure:
Newspapers

- Editor
- News Editor
- Features Editor
- Sub-Editor
- Reporter/Writer

Radio / TV Stations

- Station Manager
- Programme organiser/controller
- Producer (responsible for content)
- Presenter
- Journalists / researchers
- Freelancers / Stringers
Press Office: Guidance to Press Officers

Press Office is a part of the Communications Directorate. It works as a key contact with and between Ministers and Directorates. Its job is to present British Foreign Policy effectively, and to contribute to its formulation and development; to react quickly and authoritatively to news stories; and to enhance understanding of the work of the Diplomatic Service at home and abroad.

This involves a broad range of tasks. These fall under three main headings:

- The public face
- Role within the Office
- Making and maintaining contacts

The Public Face

Members of Press Office speak for the Government. British constitutional arrangements, which make Ministers accountable to Parliament, mean that within the UK only Ministers can be quoted by name. Ambassadors and their staff abroad are allowed more leeway with the agreement of Press Office. Comment should not therefore be attributed to Press Officers by name, though the foreign press will often do so. But selling Government Policy, whether by means of on-the-record statements or background briefing, is the central part of the job. The tools at your disposal (briefings, press conferences, press releases, etc.) and the opportunities to deploy them are covered in more detail below.

Policy is not always news. Where it is news, it is often because the policy is controversial or unpopular. If you are plugged in, up to speed with developments in your area, and assuming no leaks, you should be aware of any policy change before the media. This should give you time, in consultation with departments and Ministers, to draw up a presentational strategy which promotes the positive and limits the negative.

You will also often find yourself in the position of having to sell a worthy but unexciting product. The days when the media would give publicity to any statement simply because it came from the Government are gone, at least in this country. Try in these cases to find a nugget of news, and put it up front using active rather than passive verbs. If there is no real news, try to identify a new angle or tie it to a related event. If there is no news, and no helpful new angle, don't waste your time (or fritter away your credibility) trying to sell it.

If not all policy is news, it is also true that not all news is policy. The Government is called upon to react and respond to a range of events overseas from the relatively routine (changes of government) to the dramatic (wars, tsunami, natural disasters, and acts of terrorism.) Some of these are foreseeable, some are not. In all cases, it is important that Press Office is in a position to respond quickly and authoritatively to breaking news stories.

Speed is essential. Stories themselves move on quickly. The longer we take to push our view out, the less chance there is of its being reported, and the greater the possibility that we will
be criticised for not having a reaction or policy. This does not mean that we need to take a public position on everything, everywhere. But if we do have a message, get it out quickly. Authority and credibility are equally essential. If it’s clear that you don’t know the facts, a journalist will have no confidence in you or in the line you’re trying to sell. If you lose your clients’ confidence they will go elsewhere for their comment, and analysis and future opportunities to get our view across will have been compromised. So if you don’t know, don’t waffle. Get in touch with the relevant people in the Department or at Post to establish the facts. Put yourself in the journalist’s shoes. Try to think of the questions they are likely to ask, and get the answers to them too. Having established the facts, agree a line to take. Then get back to the journalist. In all this keep the Press Secretary, Deputy Press Secretary and Head of Newsroom posted and ensure they are happy with your approach.

**Press Office’s role within the Office**

Press Office has a particular responsibility for advising on the presentation of policy or our public line in reaction to an event. Policy submissions should all contain a paragraph or more on presentation, cleared with Press Office. More generally, lines to take should be drafted by the relevant department, but cleared with Press Office. Do not hesitate to go back to departments, posts or senior officials if you think the line is inadequate: it will be you (or Minister’s, on your advice) not them, who need to deploy and defend it. If you want us there when it crashes - we have to be there for the take off.

But Press Office’s role goes well beyond presentation. We are involved at all stages in the policy formation process. Our position, between the Office and the outside world, gives us a different perspective on policy. We are an important pressure-point for policies to be developed and projected in a media-friendly and positive way. We are also best placed to advise whether a proposed policy or course of action is likely to be sustainable publicly. This can be an unpopular message around the Office: departments don’t like the idea of policy being ‘driven by public opinion’.

But policy is driven by Ministers. Ministers govern by public consent. It is Ministers, not officials, who will come under immediate pressure from the press and public if a policy is perceived as wrong-headed, unfair or inconsistent. They will want to know why a negative public reaction was not foreseen. Overall our role should be pro-active - spotting opportunities; looking round policy corners; nudging and encouraging the machine. We should also be agents for greater openness within the FCO, not only in relation to the media but also in terms of our wider public image.

Direct support for Ministers (setting up and sitting in on interviews, doorsteps and briefings; acting as liaison officers) forms an important part of our role.

**Contacts**

To fulfill the role effectively, we depend on our contacts within the FCO and with posts; with OGDs, Number 10 and Buckingham Palace; and with the media (UK regional and national, and London-based foreign media.) The ‘Ten Commandments’ (see above) set out the rules you should apply to maintain good contacts with the media.
You rely on contacts within FCO departments for much of your information and for draft lines and press releases. Visibility with your departments is important. The more aware they are of you, the more aware they will be of Press Office, and consequently of the need to bring us into the loop. Get to know them and establish trust between you.

Attending regular departmental meetings is one way to make your face known, and to get across some general points to a wider audience. But departmental meetings are time-consuming and their value, from our point of view, can be limited. Directorate level meetings chaired by Directors, which concentrate of necessity on a smaller number of key issues, can be more useful fora us. But not all Directors have regular meetings. You should try, in any event, to establish good relations with the Directors in your areas of responsibility, and with other senior officials, and attend relevant meetings when it looks useful to do so. Do not sit back and wait for these to happen. Far more important is to establish good individual contact with key Desk Officers and relevant senior officials, and contact them (usually by telephone) when you need advice or a line.

If a meeting is likely to last longer than 30 minutes, think very seriously before you attend it. Long absences from the Press Office, particularly on busy days when there are a number of stories running, mean that hard-pressed colleagues have to take your calls. It also means mounting frustration for journalists, up against deadlines, who are unable to reach you (and possibly missed opportunities for us to get the UK point of view on the record.)

It should in many cases be possible to feed in any Press Office points by speaking before the meeting to the chairman or to the department’s representative and seeking a read-out afterwards. If it is vital that Press Office be represented (where we have an important point to argue) try to arrange with the chairman that media aspects will be covered first (or last) and attend that part of the meeting only.

It is important to keep contacts with OGDs, with Number 10, and, when necessary, Buckingham Palace, in good order too. In press work, it is even more essential than elsewhere to clear your lines rapidly with others with an interest, and, in particular, Number 10.

[All broadcasting bids for Ministers are handled centrally so that output is co-ordinated properly, internally and with Number 10. It is essential to keep Number 10 informed of all media activity but important not to subcontract our judgement to Downing Street.]

Without an agreed line, there is a risk that different departments will say different things. The substance of the issue is then quickly forgotten, and the story becomes “FCO and Number 10 clash on...”

Get to know the relevant people in other press offices you deal with fairly early on. Do the same with Press officers in your Posts. Number 10 are the ones we have most frequent contact with. You should try quickly to become familiar with their timetable.
Working with Other Government Department Press Offices: Some Top Tips

One of the joys and sometimes the frustrations of being a press officer overseas is being responsible for a wide range of subjects. You represent not just the FCO but also the wider Whitehall machine. But where to look? Help is at hand in the guise of a crucial tool. It is now called the ‘White Book’. Older hands will remember it as the IPO Directory. If you do not have a copy I suggest that you get your hands on one. It will make your life a lot easier and perhaps help lower the blood pressure.

Being able to know who to speak to and to develop a good working relationship with Whitehall press offices can be critical in getting the messages right and getting them out to key contacts and audiences. And of course to your credibility as a press officer who journalists will listen to.

The FCO Press Office will do what they can to help, but many of the subjects are not the direct responsibility of the FCO. The range of issues of importance to the Government such the ethic communities, defence, environment, policing, terrorism, immigration, trade and health have little to do with the FCO press office brief.

When working at Posts overseas I was frequently asked by journalists for information on these subjects, ones on which initially I was not well briefed. Or even worse, lifting the morning paper to read that the Government had announced a change in the Immigration rules. Not funny when the relevant Whitehall press office had not thought to either inform posts or even the FCO Press Office in advance. You do feel rather silly when you are completely unsighted and the telephone is ringing off the hook.

Some Whitehall press offices could do better but increasingly many now realise the importance of keeping key Posts in the loop and will alert you to key announcements and press lines. If they do not then the White List can help. It gives the names and contact details of every press officer in the system from The Queen's Press Secretary through to the National Patent Safety Agency. Give them a call. Another tip: sometimes all a journalist needs is the name of a good contact - you do not need do the work. Just give them the contact details of that excellent Press Officer in the “Ministry of interesting issues”!

To get a copy of the White List contact: The White List, PO Box 2004, Burgess Hill, RH15 8WU, England, Telephone number +44 14444 243691.

You can also download a copy. Ask them for details. But in my view the hard copy is better.
Dealing with journalists: Advice for Officers from outside Press Office

Summary

It is in our interests to be open and honest with the media, and to sell the FCO to them, but there are pitfalls and important rules to be observed.

Introduction

These guidelines are not intended to inhibit useful contact between officials and journalists. Indeed, there is a recognition that properly informed comment by experts can help the media.

However, this should always be done with care, co-ordination and clarity to ensure that we embarrass neither ourselves, colleagues, Ministers or wider Government. As regards the UK media the rule is simple: contact with them must be cleared in advance with the Press Office, except (for those at Post) where the need to comment at once on a consular issue or emergency makes this impossible.

As regards the foreign media those at Post have complete discretion to talk to local media from their host country (though they can always consult Press Office if they wish.) For officers based in the UK, contacts with the foreign media should be cleared in the same way as contacts for the UK media.

Why clear contacts with the Press Office? Because the Press Office is responsible for advising Ministers and departments. They will be aware of all the relevant considerations: for example, the journalist may be pursuing parallel enquiries with more than one official or more than one department, or playing one off against another. Indeed, a Minister may be about to speak on the issue.

In London discussion between an official and a journalist should take place with due preparation and, if at all possible, with a Press Officer present. Where it is not possible then do give Press Office a full account of such briefing as soon as practicable.

The basis on which the official is speaking should be agreed at the outset. Journalists invariably wish to source information, but the usual form is for briefing to be ascribed to "FCO sources” or "Government sources.”

It will be noted that there are slightly different guidelines governing media contact at Home and at Post.
Groundrules

In addition to the need to keep Press Office in the loop:

- Officials must be mindful that they should not trespass on the responsibilities of Ministers and that at all times they preserve the political neutrality of the Civil Service. They should also be alert to the possible need to consult colleagues, including those in other departments. Much inevitably depends on the discretion and judgement of the individual.

- With prior permission, officials may explain Government policy and give the factual background to it. They may also discuss the balance of considerations (apart from party political considerations) which has led to the Government's choice of policy, from a range of options.

- They should at all times be conscious of the dividing line between discussing matters on which Government policy has already been announced and those on which no pronouncement has yet been made.

- In the latter case they should avoid involvement in any discussion which might adversely affect such a pronouncement. Nor should they be drawn into the expression of personal views, being especially mindful of the risks of mischief, misinterpretation and embarrassment inherent in any discussion of politically controversial matters or current or forthcoming Ministerial policies.

- Officials should bear in mind the importance of preserving the relationship of the Civil Service both with existing Ministers and with possible future Administrations, and should ensure that no suspicion can arise that civil servants are seeking to influence policy by briefing the media.

- They should not discuss relationships between Parliament and Ministers, or between Ministers and other Ministers or officials, or the relationship of their department with another department, except where these require nothing more than reference to public statements made or endorsed by the Government.

- Specific Ministerial authority may be needed for some contacts with the media. In other cases, the Minister might give a general delegation in respect of particular areas or set a general understanding about the basis on which discussions are held.

- In all cases senior officials should ensure (through Press Office) that Ministers are made aware of any set piece and significant discussions with journalists.

- Self evidently, officials must never pass classified information to journalists.
Profiles

Journalists occasionally seek interviews with officials with a view to writing "profiles" of them. These can be valuable in enhancing the image of the Service but, clearly, agreement to them is a matter of particularly fine judgement and the relevant Minister should be consulted in advance. For the UK media, as always, clear the idea in advance with Press Office, and if possible, have a Press Officer, or failing that, another member of staff, present.

Informal telephone conversations with journalists have particular pitfalls and should be avoided. So, too, do contacts of a personal or social nature. It is best to put the discussion of official matters on a formal basis. In any event discussion should be in accordance with the precepts above.

Officials should be particularly careful that informality, apparent confidentiality, or hospitality afforded does not, for example, by creating a feeling of obligation, encourage attempts to glean official information that would not otherwise be made available.

Contact with journalists in London

The Press Office is the authorised FCO official source for speaking to the media on behalf of Ministers. The reasoning is partly constitutional because in principle it is for Ministers, not officials, to expound policy in the UK. It is also practical and sheer common sense.

The timing or content of comments may pose problems of which the individual is unaware and on which Ministers or other parts of the Office or Whitehall need to be consulted. Ministers may be about to speak publicly themselves.

It follows that the Press Office is therefore responsible for the coherent presentation of British foreign policy to journalists and that they must always know what is said elsewhere in the Office and should always be consulted before any media briefing is undertaken by others.

It can be extremely dangerous for someone to deal with a journalist without knowing what other parallel enquiries they may be pursuing. It may lead to embarrassment for Ministers, who ultimately must answer for anything said on their behalf. It can undermine the credibility and standing of the Press Office - with considerable damage to the wider interests of the FCO - if an official goes further than the carefully agreed Office line which the Press Office is offering, unless it is clear that this is with Press Office’s blessing.

Remember

• The Press Office must be regarded as the normal point of contact with journalists, with all media calls referred to them.

• Where a caller requests briefing over the telephone, officers should consult the Press Office before agreeing.
• In cases where face-to-face briefing is requested any arrangements should be made through them. A Press Officer should be present so that they are fully aware of the line being used.

Hospitality

Officers, particularly in the UK, should be cautious in accepting such invitations from journalists, who will usually be seeking something in return. Officers should consult their superiors and (for UK media) inform the Press Office of such offers. It is important, for instance, to know if the journalist is pursuing a particular story. Where such a meeting takes place the Press Office must always be informed immediately if anything touching on current news stories emerge.

Contact with journalists abroad

Heads of Mission have the discretion to decide whether they or their staff should give interviews etc to the local media. Good relations between a Post abroad and resident or visiting British journalists are to be encouraged. They are essential to an effective reporting and representational operation. But do keep Press Office in the loop if you think that your contacts may find their way to the UK via overseas freelances or international broadcasters, or touch on current or controversial matters of which Ministers should be aware.

Posts should report promptly contacts with journalists that are likely to have policy implications at home, or foreshadow new lines of enquiry of which the Press Office should be warned.

Broadcasts

Permission for interviews in the UK and international media (CNN etc) must be sought in advance from the Press Office.

Clearance for interviews abroad for UK radio and TV (as for the written press) can usually be given very quickly, if necessary by telephone through the Press office's round-the-clock Duty Officer (available on FTN 8008 3100.)

There may be occasions when it is not practicable to seek clearance: for example when immediate reactions are sought on emergencies, revolutions or natural disasters.

There is clearly much to be said for members of the Diplomatic Service being seen by viewers and listeners in the UK to be on the ball and coping effectively with the situation on the spot. In those circumstances Heads of Mission have discretion to respond without prior consultation.

Having an Ambassador on the spot during a consular crisis, with his or her sleeves rolled up, can have a very positive impact.
Special Risks in Emergency Situations

Fast-moving situations create particular risks. For instance Posts may find themselves giving out information for use in the UK media before they have had time to report to the FCO; Ministers may not thank you for leaving them with less to say in interviews or in Parliament than their officials are saying at Post; and once one interview is given it is hard - and usually inadvisable - to discriminate against other British media organisations. Please also read the Consular media handling pages.

It is sensible, particularly if there is a lot of media interest, to designate one person to speak to the media, if necessary via a group briefing. In a crisis the media will create stories out of differences between what is said by one member of the Embassy and another, or between the Embassy Spokesman and London.

As soon as the situation allows tell Press Office what you have said.

Policy presentation

It is important for everyone to give high attention to the presentational aspects of policy being recommended at home. All submissions are required to address the public presentation implications. All Ministerial briefs should also be copied to the Press Office so that they can advise or brief confidently and effectively.

Posts abroad are showing a welcome readiness to consult regularly with the Press Office about the handling of visitors, speeches and so on. The Press Office is ready to help and advise on the handling of British journalists. The advent of satellites, 24-hour news programmes and increasing competition amongst the writing press, all mean that the public presentation of our policies acquires ever more constant and assiduous attention.

And finally...

Journalists are perennially fascinated by stories about relations between No. 10 and the FCO, particularly if they think they detect signs of a rift. Please do not, on any account, get drawn into this kind of speculation, or into reminiscences about the respective merit of present and previous Ministers. There is absolutely nothing to be gained by this - and maybe a great deal to be lost.
Top Tips for TV Interviews and Radio Interviews

TV Interviews

- The FCO now has a range of good media skills and techniques courses to help prepare you for TV and radio interviews.

- If you expect a tough grilling consider having your press officer do a mock interview beforehand. The tougher the better.

- **Know your subject** thoroughly and be honest – and if you cannot speak with knowledge and conviction then do not agree to appear.

- Always ask the interviewer before you go on air what the first question will be. This allows you time to collect your thoughts.

- Look at the Interviewer not at the camera.

- **Take charge** and don’t be cowed by the interviewer’s knowledge – you are the expert and should know far more than them.

- Using the interviewers name may mean that the interview may not be carried on other news bulletins later in the day when another anchor might be in the chair. So try to avoid using it.

- Decide on your messages and get your key points over at a very early stage in the interview. Seize the opportunity to answer – and work in the information that you want to get across.

- **Listen very carefully** to what is being asked – the phraseology .... is there an ulterior motive behind the question; any inaccuracy in it? (if so, correct it immediately and move on with the rest of your answer)

- **Use language your audience will understand** – no abbreviations, acronyms or ‘in’ phrases which they will not comprehend.

- **Do your best to make this a conversation** rather than a grilling – maintaining an equable attitude throughout, relaxing (while maintaining your guard) in direct proportion to the interviewer’s attempts at provocation.

- If you are being interviewed from the site of a Consular disaster do not be afraid of ‘dressing down’. Suits are not always appropriate.

- **Do not be ashamed to say ‘no’** if it is a legitimate answer – especially if you can qualify it with a good reason for not responding to the question.
• **Don’t let the interviewer dominate** and continually interrupt – insist on making your point .... “please let me finish my point” .... “you’ve asked me the question, please let me give you the answer” .... et cetera.

• **Try not to be distracted** by cameras and other equipment of which the viewer will probably be unaware.

• Don’t distract the viewer yourself by wearing inappropriate or loud clothes or mannerisms; men should avoid sharp contrasting colours such as a white shirt with a black suit. Women should avoid large dangling earrings.

• If doing a down the line TV interview be careful not to wear colours which are normally used for Chromo key backdrops – usually green and to a lesser extent blue.

• **And beware the final question** designed to catch you unawares or give you so little time to answer that it would be irrelevant or ridiculous to do so – if you have no time to reply properly, say so with grace, and if necessary decline and offer to come back again to finish the conversation!

#### Radio Interviews

The usual rules for TV also apply to radio, but there are some additional do’s and don’ts to bear in mind:

• **Conduct** the interview in a quiet room so that there is no distracting noise or echoes at the back;

• **Avoid** jargon – on the radio jargon sounds even worse than when you see it on the television;

• **Engage** the interviewer not the microphone;
USEFUL TIPS FOR YOU AND YOUR TEAM FOR DOING THE JOB

Read the 10 Commandments of press work

Your Press Office
  • it should feel and look like a media office and should have a buzz to it

Have the right equipment
  • Digital camera (for website, intranet, New and Views and Annual report)
  • Handheld recorder

Consular - get the stories right and get to the scene quickly

Press Club - go and visit it and brief there

Press Conferences - they are not always appropriate. Sometimes briefings are better. Maybe using the Residence rather than the office.

Attribution - Get it right at the beginning of a briefing/interview

Legs - be careful of giving a story ‘legs’

Mark the spot
  • use of good signage, backdrops, nomadics and pop ups

Ministerial and other major visits
  - always have your media team do a recce for every aspect of the visits and walk through the venues
  - have them keep touch with Private offices and press Offices
  - always ensure you give a lot of attention to visiting journalists accompanying the Minister;
  - remember the Bus
  - laminated contact cards for all members of the party
  - remember the needs of the local media

Interviews
  • keep to a few key messages – use the ‘bridge’
  • have your staff ‘interview’ you before difficult interviews and encourage them to be tough.

Think regional
  - themed visits, regional groupings, help each other etc
Working with other key officials
- Make sure your press team has a close working relationship with all other teams in the Mission - Consular in particular. They should be informed of all issues which might attract press attention or have a presentational dimension
- They should know who the key host government Press officers are; MFA, Presidency, PMs offices, Palace etc. You should include these contacts on your guest lists.
- it is key that the Head of press office as direct and unfettered access to Head of Post

Post Website – make sure your team keep it current and update daily if possible. Let them know you access it. Get your stats on it such as trade figures etc.

The White Book
- Team should always have a copy of the IPO Directory (The White Book) close to hand. They represent all of Whitehall not just the FCO

Chevenings and other alumni
- Media team should keep closely involved in the Chevening selection responsibilities. Should not abdicate responsibilities and Chair/attend any boards which involve media scholarships
- keep in touch with returned Chevenings and use them in your regional visits. Embassy should have own database

Keep in Close touch with the FCO Press Office
  • And also think of developing specific press strategies for particular issues

Getting the message out
• Review your faxing , emailing, texting services to journalists – Goldfax etc. Follow FCO guidance on Blogs etc
• Press releases – keep short, avoid bureaucratic language – they are not egrams or Notes verbale, strike out acronyms and honorifics .it should look as if written by a journalist.
• Economist Style Guide; How good journalists write
• Remember the regional media which might influential

The Look of the Embassy
- prints and pictures. Get rid of the dated

Training
- There are good centres for journalist training including BBCWS Trust and the Thomson Foundation
- Encourage colleagues to attend relevant FCO training courses
- There is a range of useful documents on the fconet
Day Two

The Broadcast Media
Radio and Television

Much of the difficulty for anyone faced with a radio or television interview is the factor of uncertainty - what will the studio be like; how will the producer and interviewer treat their guest; how does it feel to speak while wearing headphones; what's it like under bright lights; how should I deal with questions which I would rather they hadn't asked? These are just a few of the areas to face someone who has not been in a broadcast environment before.

Familiarity

The situation for someone who has been interviewed before is a little different. He or she will be familiar with the technicalities, but may still feel that on-air performance could be improved. After all, any interviewee is dealing with a professional interviewer so even a relatively small amount of studio training can be a distinct advantage.

It is also surprising just how many areas for improvement can be identified by an impartial observer.

The purpose of today is to give key personnel in the Foreign & Commonwealth Office an awareness of the techniques involved in ensuring effective and professional performances in radio and television interviews.

Technique - Do's And Don'ts

There are many do's and don'ts in broadcasting, just as there are in any business. We presented some earlier in these notes but it would not be possible - or desirable - to list them all, as trying to memorise too long a list would be more of a hindrance than a help. However, here are a few more important points worth keeping to hand and using. The first Do and the first Don't quite deliberately make the same point!
Do:

• **ALWAYS be on time!**

• Ask what the first question will be, and ask for a general outline of questioning. But do not expect a list of questions (if you do get one, consider it as gold dust!)

• Thoroughly prepare and plan for the broadcast.

• Look for and use the good points of any piece of news - whether the news itself is good or bad.

• Use examples, analogies, stories. Paint a word picture.

• Be bright, sincere, interested - that way you will also be interesting.

• Be positive.

• Speak on your voice test as you will for the transmission.
Don't:

• Be late - EVER!

• Read from written answers.

• Expect a long time for each answer.

• Use "on-going meaningful situation" language.

• Use jargon – what does HMG mean to your audience?

• Ask for edits. Treat recordings as live broadcasts.

• Rustle notes.

• Hit the desk or make noises.

• Lean to and from the microphone.

• Be defensive.

• Get angry (or if you do, don't show it!)

• Drink alcohol before a broadcast or recording.
Technique - A Few Hints

Before you are even asked to appear, get to know the programming of all the stations you can see and hear in your area. Listen to them and watch them, particularly talk and news programmes. Listen to other spokespeople and judge their performance for yourself. Listen to the interviewers - how do they treat their guests?

No Comment?

Should I agree to appear? Yes, if at all possible. Broadcasting gives you the opportunity to enter many thousands of homes and offices, and yet speak on a one to one basis. A good personality can seem to be in the room with you. If you refuse to appear on a newsworthy issue and the programme mentions this, it will be taken by the viewer or listener as a sure sign of guilt.

What is the Angle

When you are asked to give an interview or present your case, make certain you know exactly why they want you. Is there a news story? Is it good or bad? What is their "angle"? If they have a report from a News Agency, make sure you see it in plenty of time. When and where will the programme take place and how long will it last? What kind of programme - if panel discussion, who else will be on the panel? What kind of interview - phone-in with open line, face to face?
Be an Expert

Know your subject back to front, inside out and upside down. Do not leave any chance of being caught out. When making explanations, remember that what may seem obvious to you, may not even dawn on the viewer or listener unless told. Never assume knowledge.

Look around your subject. Approach it from every possible angle and try to work out what could be asked. The interviewer will be acting for the listener or viewer, and trying to find out what he or she wants to know. Do the same yourself beforehand - what would the man in the street like to know about this story? Can you tell him effectively?

Being Friendly

The needs of broadcasters are very different from those of the press. But the results can be very rewarding. With a good broadcasting technique, a human being can be projected across the air and give a feeling of friendliness to the most faceless organisation. Listening and practising can help to perfect that technique.

Make-Up

There are three analogue television systems in use worldwide, all of which have different technical requirements, influencing the amount and type of make-up used. Digital systems will ultimately take over, but at present analogue dominates.

Please don’t be worried about make-up ... men often are! You will not look made up on screen, but your appearance will simply be as it is in reality, or slightly enhanced.
NTSC

Stands for *National Television System Committee*. Known by British engineers as *Never Twice the Same Colour!* Invented in America in the 1950’s. Picture built up from 525 horizontal lines. Quality and definition below European standards. A heavy make-up base (foundation) or Panstick often used.

PAL

Phased Alternate Line. Known in America as *Picture Always Lousy*. Invented in Germany in the early 60’s. Derived from NTSC but vastly superior. Picture built up from 625 horizontal lines. Less make-up required, possibly just powder.

SECAM

Sequential and Memory. Known to everyone as *Something Entirely Contrary to the American Method*. French system; similar to PAL but incompatible.
Affiliations

The system in use in a particular country often follows geo-political affiliations. All of Western Europe, apart from France, uses PAL. PAL is also found in former British colonies. China uses PAL, but Taiwan is on NTSC, thus making it very difficult for either country to receive the other’s transmissions. A similar situation exists in North and South Korea, with the South on NTSC and the North using a mixture of SECAM and PAL. Many Arab countries use SECAM, as do parts of Russia and a number of former Eastern Bloc states.

NTSC will be found in Canada, Japan, the Caribbean and a handful of other regions as well as the USA.

Clothes

The television camera is not as clever as the human eye. It can’t cope with too much contrast – in technical terms a high dynamic range. Compared to the eye, or even to film, the camera’s dynamic range is severely limited.

In practice, this means we can light for black. Or light for white. But we can’t light for black and white together.

So, for men a white shirt with a black suit is not a good idea. If the lighting is right for the suit, the shirt will flare, looking far too bright. Light for the shirt, and the lapels of the suit will disappear. A blue, pink or off-white shirt is a good choice, with a mid-tone suit.

For the ladies, pastel shades are preferable to primary colours. Plain and simple designs are better than anything fussy or overly floral, which can be distracting.

Checks or close parallel lines should be avoided as they can lead to a moiré pattern of extraneous colour overlaying the design, an effect known as strobing.
Chromakey

Often used for down-the-line interviews, or to create a virtual set, when the “studio” is actually a computer-generated image.

You will be positioned in front of a green or blue screen. It is vital that you don’t wear any item of clothing that includes the screen colour. If you do, you will become the invisible man or woman! The BBC refers to chromakey as ‘Colour Separation Overlay’. It is identical.
Ministerial Visits and the Media: some top tips

A Ministerial visit is one of the most high profile and useful weapons in the Communication Manager’s armoury. A successful visit can help buttress the reputation of UK plc in country, highlight key political messages, and help achieve our strategic communication objectives.

But planning and executing the media elements of such visits is rarely straightforward, takes a lot of effort, and is easy to get wrong: a dropped ball or an unfortunate photo can ruin the coverage of a visit.

The key to getting it right lies in the early planning and engagement of Press Office in London. These are my ten key tips:

1. Press Officers/Comms Officers need to be a full part of the visit planning process, and invited to every meeting. Media work is an integral part of all Ministerial visits overseas: it is not an add-on. Press Office needs to be fully involved in London. Any suggestions for visit programmes should be sent to Press Office as well as Private Office.

2. Heads of Post need to recognise the importance of media in visits from the outset. When programmes get squeezed, don't cut the media slots first (because London will put them back in.)

3. Posts and Press Office need to reach an early view about how big a story a visit will be, not just locally, but more widely, and tailor media plans accordingly. This includes being realistic: an FS visit to Ruritania may be front page news in country, but have little UK or international resonance.

4. Posts own their media plans. Press Office can and will help, as will the Senior Regional Communicators. But you need to engage in strategic terms, providing options and arguments for your recommendations. Be clear about who their target audiences and key messages are, and how they support policy delivery. A good visit plan includes all the Minister should need to know about the media aspects of the trip; a good media plan should be a detailed annex to the visit plan, primarily for Press Office's use. A list of events is not a media plan: it's a list of events.

5. Posts need to understand their local media environment. What is the readership and coverage of print media? Who watches which TV channel? How influential are "new media"? Who are the top commentators? Which international media are in-country and how good are they? What international broadcast media are around (AP TV, Reuters, BBC, US networks)? At what level and with what capability (a stringer will have little if any high-quality broadcast capability, as opposed to a full bureau)? Who has syndication and rebroadcasting agreements with whom? Who can organise a pool, and on what notice? If you can't answer those questions, you need to find out the answers well in advance of starting planning a Ministerial visit.
6. Interesting sells. Good pictures sell. We're not looking for gimmicks (which can backfire.) And we recognise that in some countries local protocol and practice or security may limit opportunities beyond standard-issue press conferences with the opposite numbers. But we are more likely to get good coverage if the media are able to film and photograph Ministers out and about in interesting places - eg at refugee/IDP camps, visiting civil society organisations, schools, hospitals, and so on. The media's appetite for pictures of men in suits meeting each other in government buildings is small. At the planning stage, we'd rather shoot down your left-field suggestions than not see them.

7. Many Ministers, including the FS, like meeting and engaging with ordinary people in fairly informal environments. Discussions with students, for example. Work to get them online, podcasted, and so on. Invite bloggers as well as more conventional journalists. These can be good media ops.

8. Make the most of the web. Make sure that you factor in content for the FCO website and the relevant post website during the visit. Speak to the FCO website news editors and post web managers to make sure they are aware of the visit - and its objectives. Keep them updated and involved so they can be ready to add news articles to the website ideally with photos, transcripts and videos on the day. If there is an opportunity for a web-based engagement, speak to them - they can help you.

9. Each public/media event should have its own story. Why is the Minister doing this, and what is the message we are sending, in two sentences of plain English? Focus on the message, not the medium.

10. Don’t default to the obvious traditional tools (a press conference, a press release), without having thought through the options and consciously chosen them as the best medium to influence your target audience(s).

We realise this is a lot of effort; and we’re here to help. And we also appreciate that the best-laid plans often go awry due to unforeseen events. We’ll always need to be flexible – it’s the business we are in. But this doesn’t mean we don’t need to plan. Getting the planning right gives us the best chance – though no guarantee – of a successful visit. Good luck!

Carl Newns
Head of News
**News Evaluation Exercise**

Below are some examples of news stories. Study them and select from each pair the event that you think would gain the most coverage. Be prepared to justify your choices.

1. (a) Four sets of twins are born within a week at a city hospital.  
(b) Quintuplets are born in private maternity hospital.

2. (a) Minister dies at football match.  
(b) Minister's body found floating in river.

3. (a) Fifty lives lost in flood.  
(b) Rain ruins annual harvest.

4. (a) Truck kills mother hurrying to phone doctor for dying daughter.  
(b) Truck kills MP's mother hurrying to beauty parlour for an appointment.

5. (a) Government plans to ban the use of pesticides on crops.  
(b) Scientists discover serum to extend human lifespan by 12 years.

6. (a) Six teenagers arrested for use of hard drugs.  
(b) Pop star loses driving licence for drinking and driving.

7. (a) Government praises police commissioner for department's efficiency.  
(b) Police chief runs away with charity money and vicar's wife.

8. (a) Twelve cases of polio reported in London during week.  
(b) Plague kills 500 in China.

9. (a) Six joyriders injured in local car crash.  
(b) Four people killed in local hotel when dining room ceiling collapses.

10. (a) Overall crime figures in inner cities have reduced by 25% in past year.  
     (b) Burglary has increased by 15% in the past year.
How to Deal with the Press

Wendy Cope

She'll urge you to confide. Resist.
Be careful, courteous, and cool.
Never trust a journalist.

'We're off the record,' she'll insist.
If you believe her, you're a fool.
She'll urge you to confide. Resist.

Should you tell her who you've kissed,
You'll see it all in print, and you'll
Never trust a journalist

Again. The words are hers to twist,
And yours the risk of ridicule.
She'll urge you to confide. Resist.

'But X is nice,' the publicist
Will tell you. 'We were friends at school.'
Never trust a journalist,

Hostile, friendly, sober, pissed,
Male or female - that's the rule.
When tempted to confide, resist.
Never trust a journalist.
MOST SHAMELESS PHOTO OPPORTUNITY EVER SEIZED:

Kent Gavin, the Mirror's royal photographer, was sent to photograph Doris Day in her eighth-floor Manhattan apartment. Kent was left with her beloved pet dog while she answered the phone, and started throwing a ball for it to fetch. He slightly overthrew it, the dog raced to fetch it, and Kent realised to his horror that the window was open; End of Doris Day’s dog.

When she came back into the room, a shocked Kent said: I’m terribly sorry but here's been a dreadful accident – your dog has fallen out of the window."

Minutes later, a sobbing Doris was cradling her dead, mangled pet in her arms. And what was the killer doing? "I thought I may as well take a few pictures while I was there," he confessed. The Next day’s Daily Mirror carried:

DORIS DAY WEEPS FOR DEAD DOG - World Exclusive
-Pictures by Kent Gavin.

‘The Insider' by Piers Morgan
A Day in the Life of a Busy Press Officer in a Post overseas; an ‘indicative’ Day

- Have the major newspapers delivered to you at home and read them, and monitor broadcast media before you get into the office. Check major news websites from your home PC
- On arrival at the office, meet your team to discuss what is running in the local language media
- Check e-grams
- Brief Ambassador/office meeting on what the media are saying and how running stories are being handled
- Contact FCO press office to discuss any issues and agree lines to take
- Draft press release
- Work the phones with key journalists
- Brief colleagues in subordinate posts on press lines
- Agree with your webmaster revisions on the Embassy webpage
- Discuss with Consul the breaking news of a Consular incident involving British citizens and agree lines and handling with FCO press office. Brief Consul on interview that they will give to Sky News on the story
- Liaise with major PD partners such as the British Council on PD initiatives. Set date for meeting of the PD strategy committee and agree agenda
- Check with DFID office on any media implications for their projects which you can help with
- Liaise with key Heads of Dept’s such as Political, Visa and UKTI on their activities and media implications
- Lunch with Editor of the Daily Whatnot
- Discuss media implications of forthcoming FCO ministerial visit with lead visits officer. Run through ideas with FCO press office
- Speak to Press Office of a Whitehall Dept on media arrangements on the forthcoming visit of their Minister
• Chair meeting on proposals to apply for Public Diplomacy Fund application and draft

• Meet the Embassy FCO programme budget officer and discuss media/PD element in GOF bid

• Arrange for Ambassador to brief the media and agree attribution for the briefing

• Chair media journalists Chevening selection process

• Draft PD strategy on key issue of interest

• Handle the calls coming in from the media on a breaking story

• Accompany Ambassador to TV Studios for an interview on the story. Make sure he reads the lines to take and bring a copy with you. Do a mock interview with him on the difficult policy areas before you leave for the studio

• Agree with Ambassador to do a doorstep interview with local BBC TV bureau on the breaking story

• Discuss with FCO Visits the plans for a sponsored visit of some key journalists to the UK

• Agree the design and text of a promotional booklet on UK policy supporting Human Rights strategy

• Have a drink with Hacks at the local press club

• Check evening bulletins in case any horrors in the making

• Go to bed!
Engaging with the Press

*Top Tips*

1. The Media Mentality

All journalists, be they broadcasters, writers, editors, cub reporters or senior correspondents, have certain characteristics in common.

They’re natural **story-tellers**. They want to make sense of the world, and to convey their take on it as compellingly as possible, but they can’t allow themselves any flights of fancy. They’re bound by the strict rule that each story must answer the six ‘W’ questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? and With What Result?

For that reason, journalists like **simplicity, clarity, hard facts and precise figures**. Their skill is to boil down a large amount of information into an easily-digestible format. This means they often have to cut corners to turn diverse, complex and confusing pieces of information into a short and simple narrative.

Journalists are not an especially cuddly breed; they’re not hot on discretion; but for the most part they adhere to the principles of **honesty** and **decency**. There are exceptions to this, but it’s in a journalist’s interests to get the story right. They’re not out to stitch you up or make a fool of you – unless you deserve it!

What journalists **do** tend to be guilty of is misrepresentation. In order to achieve that short, simple narrative reporters go through transcripts of long interviews, stripping out a few words, junking all context and balance, often to misleading effect. Their main sin is usually exaggeration – if there’s a medical doubt about something, they cry ‘plague’. If there are questions about a politician’s motives, personal behaviour or honesty, they tend to treat him (or her) as the moral equivalent of a serial killer and turn to the facts later.

If Woodward and Bernstein, workaday reporters at the Washington Post in the early 70s, hadn’t had the gift of **curiosity**, asking questions about things that didn’t quite add up, and refusing to accept “No comment” as an answer, President Nixon would never have been impeached. Journalists see it as their birthright to ask questions: they feel that **nothing** is none of their business.

To this end, journalists readily go beyond what you might feel are the limits of polite behaviour in order to get to the bottom of a story. They can be rude, direct in a distinctly un-English way, and a pain in the neck. But evasiveness on your part will only encourage them to dig deeper.

Many journalists cultivate a faintly disreputable image, and they have an **irreverent** approach to authority. Few of them espouse the establishment, and they enjoy the quintessentially British sport of felling tall poppies. The government and civil service are directly in their line of fire, along with big business, the City, the monarchy, the rich and the famous. A healthy exercise in democracy, or a cynical form of anti-excellence? You decide! But that’s how they view the world.
Journalists are sceptical and sharp – so if you tell them anything short of the truth, or obfuscate, or evade the question, you’re almost certain to be found out.

Most journalists start out as general reporters who are expected to be able to cover anything – often at short notice. So they develop a good working knowledge of many subjects. But they tend to have short attention spans and become easily bored. You need to bear this in mind when you’re engaging with them. There are occasions when being boring has its advantages!

The exceptions to this rule are the specialist reporters and correspondents, who will know their subject in great detail. Foreign correspondents might well been based in an overseas bureau for many years – much longer than you – and they’re likely to know the local issues inside out and will have a wide range of contacts and experience, so there’s potential for a useful trade-off between you, because their expertise can be useful.

You might well be on first-name terms with them, meeting them at social engagements and the like, but the same principles apply to all journalists, be they specialists or generalists: they’re still on the hunt for ‘good stories’ that have to be written at speed with a combination of flair, insight and accuracy. They are not your friend when they’re on duty, and good journalists are never off duty.

They’re also extremely sensitive to being manipulated, and keen to preserve their independence and integrity. They don’t like being told what to write, so it’s not a good idea to suggest: ‘put that in’, or ‘take that out’. You can help them produce an interesting story, but it’s up to them whether they use it, and how.

The general reporter, as opposed to the specialist, is likely to know next to nothing about your specialist subject. To them, you’re merely one of their assignments of that particular day, and they neither know nor care that you’ve been working on your latest initiative for months.

Lastly, because they’re up against tight deadlines and have to work at great speed, journalists are always in a hurry … and therefore prone to error. Journalists have always worked with too little time and too little certainty, and in the electronic era, the pressures on them to deliver a story quickly are greater than ever.

Crudely estimated, typical national print journalists are producing about three times as many words as they did in 1985. In other words, they have much less time than they once did to make their calls, gather the information, check the facts and write the story. The consequence of this is that much of what we read in the newspaper is recycled, poorly researched, and originates from different sorts of PR machines. It’s become known as the “churn” – hence the new term, churnalism, not journalism.

The clearest evidence of this was when it was revealed that the Daily Star had on their books a fictional reporter by the name of Tony Leonard, whose name was attached to all kinds of stories to cover up the fact that the paper hadn’t actually sent a real reporter to the scene. In 2003 “Tony Leonard” reported from the Soham murder trial, Westminster, the City, and anywhere else where the news was happening but the Star didn’t have the
resources or inclination to actually send anyone. He became the most prolific reporter in the history of Fleet Street (until he was ‘outed’ by an investigative reporter from the Daily Telegraph!)

But Tony Leonard has many ‘imaginary friends’ who work for so-called respectable papers too, equally adept at churnalism as they sit in front of their screens churning out repetitive stories lifted from rival papers, the internet or press agencies, and massaged to fit their particular readership.

Two years ago, journalism students at Cardiff University carried out a comprehensive survey of the demands facing regional journalists, whose newsrooms have been slimmed even more savagely than on the national titles.

A reporter for a daily paper in Birmingham kept a diary of her working week throughout a whole year, noting the hours she worked and the stories she filed. Astonishingly, the survey showed that, on average, she wrote 48 stories per week. To achieve that, she spoke to an average of only 26 people (or just over half a person per story), of which she met only four face to face. In a typical working week of 45½ hours, she spent only three hours out of the office.

The Cardiff students went on to survey more than 2,000 UK news stories from the four quality dailies and the Daily Mail.

They found that:

- only 12% of stories were wholly composed of material researched by reporters
- with 8% they couldn’t be sure
- the remaining 80%, they found, were wholly, mainly or partially constructed from second-hand material, provided either by news agencies or the PR industry.

This is all regrettable, but in a sense it plays into your hands ... it makes journalists dependent on PR machines, special interest groups, and – this is where you come in – organisations who can provide reliable, water-tight source material: People Who Know Things are in great demand.

If, over time, your information is consistently reliable, informative, clearly focused and promptly delivered, you’ll gain the media’s trust. Journalists know they won’t have to waste valuable time checking and correcting the facts, or making sense of the message, because half their work’s been done for them. Now more than ever before, the Foreign Office’s slant on certain stories has a greater chance than it ever did of being published pretty much as you’d like to see it.

But you still have to deliver the message properly!
2. Rules of Engagement

*The Practicalities of Dealing with the Press*

Once upon a time, newspaper reporters spent a large proportion of their working lives out of the office, on the move, foraging for stories.

As we’ve seen, tighter budgets, vastly improved telecommunications and the arrival of the internet mean they now do most of their work perched in front of a computer screen, rarely having the time to conduct interviews face-to-face.

So most of your contact with press reporters is likely to be over the phone.

• Because the reporter tends to be in a hurry, don’t expect more than the basic pleasantries
• Expect to be abruptly hurried along if you’re not getting to the point
• They’re demanding: impatient with waffle, jargon, imprecision, signs of shoddy research, poor time-keeping
• Be mindful of the journalist’s deadline. If you say you’ll get back with a piece of information you didn’t have to hand during the interview, try to do so in good time.

**The Press Interview**

The key difference between a print interview and a broadcast interview is that the former is like a normal conversation, while the latter has to be neat and tidy for transmission.

The conversation with the press reporter can be full of interruptions, stumblings, repetitions etc … it doesn’t have a linear development. Something you say in the 18th minute of a 20-minute interview will instantly make it to the top line of the story that’s written, if you’re unwary enough and the reporter is sufficiently alert. This is much less likely to happen on radio and TV, where the parameters of the interview are usually set up in advance.

But there are certain things you can do to gain a measure of control over what’s eventually printed.

First of all, establish the **rules of engagement**.

Are you prepared to be quoted directly, or are you providing information that you would prefer not to be attributed to yourself, that will steer the journalist in the direction you’d like?

This is sometimes referred to as “off the record”, but such arrangements really only exist in Hollywood movies. In the real world, nothing that you say is truly off the record. If it’s spicy, it will surface somewhere.

The way to decide whether it’s sensible or unwise to say something is whether you’d be happy to see it appear in print.
If you wouldn’t feel comfortable, don’t say it.

Once you’ve established the terms of engagement, find out all you can about an interview before you give one.

- What publication is it for? (which will tell you who the readers are likely to be)
- Is it for a wide-ranging feature or a simple news report?
- When will it be published and what’s the deadline?
- What areas and issues will be covered?
- What information do you already have?
- Who else are you talking to?
- Do you have an angle or line that you’re pursuing?

The newspaper reporter is more likely to seek detail: dates, statistics etc. So you MUST ensure your facts and figures are right. If you’re not sure of something, ring the reporter back when you’ve verified the details.

- Avoid being too relaxed about a telephone interview. There’s a temptation to treat it like any other phone call, but it’s not. Treat it like a live broadcast. Ensure you’re speaking from a quiet room where you’re not going to be interrupted.

- One way of injecting more energy and impact into your responses is to stand up and walk around while having the conversation.

Bridging – or how to get out of tight corners

Don’t evade or ignore the unwelcome/hostile/half-baked question, but neither need you answer it exactly in the way it was put, or dwell unduly on it.

- A for Address the Question

  Deal with it quickly, then TAKE THE INITIATIVE and …

- B for Bridge

  … to your own message, with a form of words such as:

  “But what we would say is …”
  “That’s not our experience. What we’re finding is …”
  “But that was then. What matters now is …”

If the question is outrageous and untrue or unproveable, then the A-B may simply be a “No!” or “Nonsense!” followed by …
• **C for Communicate**

Your key messages – which may or may not be relevant to the question, but should be strong enough to enable you to move the interview on to safer ground. There should be no more than three key messages, and they should be delivered in their order of importance.

For added sophistication, you can also add a:

• **D for Dangle**

... by finishing the answer with a tantalisingly brief allusion to what the interviewer should be asking next.

### 3. Tricks and Traps

#### HYPOTHETICALS

One trick used by journalists in search of a spicy quote is to pose the hypothetical question: “Imagine if such and such a disaster were to happen?” or “How close did we come to meltdown?”

Such questions can lead you into dangerous areas if you attempt to answer them. Once you grace them with a response, not only will the follow-up questions become more lurid, but your comments may also be removed from the context of the interview and printed or broadcast as stand-alone remarks – as an apparent summation of your position. This could be disastrous.

*Scotch the hypothetical question at birth.*

#### PARAPHRASES

Watch out for the journalist summarising what you’ve said in their own words: “So what you’re really saying is ...”

If it’s a fair summary, fine, but if it’s too simplistic, or in any way inaccurate, you must NOT allow an incorrect statement to go unchallenged, otherwise, if you agree to it, the reporter is entitled to put your quotation marks around his words.

#### CRITICS and HEARSAY

Some interviewers use the technique of hiding behind phrases such as “your critics say” to get away with making a negative suggestion that they’re afraid to attribute to themselves. If
you’ve never heard the criticism cited, ask for more detail about the source and the precise critical comment allegedly made: “I’m sorry, but I haven’t heard that said about us ...”

Thatcher: “Critics? CRITICS? Who are these ‘critics’? GIVE ME THEIR NAMES!”

As a general rule, don’t respond to hearsay.

BLOCKBUSTERS

These are questions that are actually statements, designed to wind you up by impugning your or the FCO’s integrity ... known in the trade as the Paxman Technique. To a banker, for example: “Well, you’re all just on the make, aren’t you.” To a British diplomat: “We’re just America’s poodles, aren’t we?”

Dismiss the blockbuster as firmly as it was put.

THE FREE LUNCH

Just like ‘off the record’ there’s no such thing as a free lunch. Some interviews are organised over a drink or meal that may be at the newspaper’s expense. Remember that the reporter (particularly in the current climate) is going to have to justify his expenses by coming back from the meeting with something he can use. Don’t flatter yourself that you’ve been invited out for your sparkling wit and repartee. It’s a trade-off, and if you feel that your tongue’s in danger of being loosened by that extra glass of wine, decline it.

THE CLOSED NOTEBOOK

At the end of the interview, it’s perfectly permissible to ask the reporter to read back his shorthand note and tell you which quotes he’s likely to use.

• If you want to change anything you’ve said, negotiate the report with them until you’re happy with it.
• Assuming the deadline is not too tight, it’s also perfectly acceptable for you to ring back after the call has finished to clarify or correct something you’re not happy with.

When the reporter closes the notebook, or starts making small-talk to indicate the phone call’s almost over, it doesn’t mean his antennae have stopped twitching for the day. You can be sure that an unguarded, controversial comment made during the closing pleasantries (as well as the opening ones) will find its way into print.

Dwell for a moment on the reflections of Andrew Marr:

“On rare occasions, the story is so good, with so much detail or such strong quotes, that a short visit to the loo to jot notes down on a paper napkin is needed. Few pleasures on this
“little green planet are so glorious as tucking a real story into your breast pocket and returning for some cheese and a final glass of claret.”

AFTERWARDS

If the reporter has written a fair story, which has balance, background, insight, accuracy and has painted the FCO in a favourable light, it can be worth following up with a phone call or email.

If you’ve been helpful and informative, provided good quotes and responded quickly enough to enable the story to be written to deadline, it could be the beginning of a beautiful relationship, in which you’re every bit as useful to the journalist as they are to you.
The Group K Team

Gerry McCrudden - Course Administrator

Gerry McCrudden is a media training consultant specialising in advising government officials and others in the best ways of dealing with the media. Gerry has wide experience of press and public affairs work and has a wide range of contacts within the FCO, government and the media.

Prior to leaving HM Diplomatic Service in early 2006, Gerry was Head of the Middle East and South Asian Media Team in the FCO Press Office as well as the FCO Middle East Public Diplomacy Co-ordinator. He previously led the Foreign Office’s two largest press and public affairs operations overseas – in the USA and India.

In 2006 Gerry formed PGM media specialising in training government and other public sector press officers in the UK and overseas. He has helped develop media courses for Ambassadors and other senior officials. He has conducted specialist training modules in Istanbul, Barbados, Moscow, Lusaka, Hong Kong, Amman, Belgrade, Dublin, Paris, Dubai, Baghdad and Croatia.

He has also facilitated courses for other UK Government Departments and for community spokespersons such as the British Muslim ‘New Voices’ to help them develop media skills. He has trained Saudi, Croatian and Iraqi officials. He has given presentations on media work to foreign diplomats attending the Foreign Service Centre at Oxford University and to young British Diplomats at the National School of Government.

Gerry created for the FCO, along with specialist Arab media professionals, media training courses in Arabic suitable for those who need to communicate their messages to the key and important Arabic speaking world.

As well as serving as Press Secretary in New Delhi he was also Director of British Information Services and Deputy Consul General New York. In 2005 he returned to the United States as Interim Head of the Public Affairs team in the British Embassy in Washington DC.

In addition Gerry has also worked in the following British Diplomatic missions abroad: Saigon, Mexico City, Bahrain, Tristan da Cunha, Brussels 1981, Pretoria, Barbados and Nairobi. In the latter post he dealt with UK’s humanitarian efforts in Kenya, Somalia and the southern Sudan and was concurrently Deputy Permanent UK Representative to the United Nations Environment Program.

Gerry also works with the Washington DC consultancy DDP Global in providing training to Washington based Embassies and others, helping them understand how the US Administration and Congress works – especially in the foreign policy field.

In 2006 Gerry also served as interim Director of the Foreign Press Association in London.
Frank Partridge - Journalist

Frank is a freelance journalist and media trainer, having spent 25 years as a news and current affairs presenter and correspondent in radio and television.

His first national posting, in 1978, was at Radio One’s trailblazing Newsbeat programme, which he presented for much of the 1980s. During this period he developed a second speciality in sport, reporting and presenting for a variety of BBC programmes, including the World Service.

In 1988, he became the BBC’s first Sports News correspondent, covering the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul and the 1990 World Cup in Italy. The following year, he was on assignment in South Africa when Nelson Mandela was unexpectedly released from prison, and this piece of good fortune led to his return to permanent news presenting a few months later, when he joined PM on Radio 4.

In 1993, Frank switched channels – and media – to join the emerging Sky News as one of their prime-time anchors, specialising in world news and interactive programmes. By the time he left Sky in 2002, he was writing regularly for the Independent, and he now combines feature writing with media training and part-time lecturing on journalism at the University of the Arts in London.
Allan King - Broadcaster

Allan King has been in broadcasting for more than thirty five years and was a main presenter, or anchor, with Sky News, Europe's first 24-hour TV news channel, from 1993 to 2008. Sky News has an audience of up to 80 million people in over 90 countries, and in 2008 a programme Allan presented on the terrorist attack on Glasgow airport won a BAFTA.

Allan is Chief Executive of Group K Broadcasting Ltd, a media consultancy and provider of news services to radio and television. The company operated the newsroom for Melody FM 105.4, an easy listening commercial station serving London and the Home Counties from 1991 to 1998.

His experience includes: LBC Radio where he presented a wide range of programmes as well as training the station's newsreaders and presenters; Independent Radio News; Independent Television News; Channel 4; and radio and television work in Germany and Vienna. His interviewing background ranges from diplomats to pop stars.

Allan obtained the first television interview with Gerry Adams after the London Docklands bombing broke the IRA ceasefire in 1996. He was also on air at the time of the Queen Mother’s death in 2002 and received praise in several newspapers for his sensitive handling of this sad event; please see king.co.uk/press.htm

In 2008 the Gibraltar Government appointed Allan to carry out an in-depth review of the publicly-funded Gibraltar Broadcasting Corporation (GBC). The review was aimed at completely revamping the organisation to bring it in line with modern broadcasting practices. Allan became Chief Executive of GBC in April 2010.

Examples of Allan’s on-air work can be seen online at king.co.uk/video_demos.htm