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The Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence

Inquiry on

SOFT POWER AND THE UK’S INFLUENCE

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Witnesses: Conrad Bird and Alex Aiken
Members present:

Lord Howell of Guildford (The Chairman)
Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top
Lord Forsyth of Drumlean
Lord Foulkes of Cumnock
Baroness Goudie
Lord Janvrin
Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne
Lord Ramsbotham

Examination of Witnesses

Conrad Bird, Director of GREAT Britain Campaign in the Prime Minister’s Office, and
Alex Aiken, Executive Director for Government Communications, Cabinet Office

Q310 The Chairman: Gentlemen, we are grateful to you for being with us. I ought to begin by saying just as a formality that you have in front of you a list of the interests that have been declared, which should give you a flavour of the interests of the members of this Committee. I should also say that if a Division is called, we will have to adjourn for a few minutes. Let us hope that that does not happen. Thank you very much again for agreeing to be with us. We are coming towards the end of a long series of hearings on an immensely wide range of related topics in relation to the remit of this Committee, which is Britain’s influence overseas and the deployment of its so-called soft power. I have put in the word “so-called” deliberately because the concept is a broad one and goes out into many other fields of soft, smart and hard power. That is our scene, and we would be extremely grateful if you could fill us in on your views, particularly of how the GREAT campaign fits into this broader scene. However, to start at a more general level, how do you see the whole campaign relating to public diplomacy’s efforts? We have had evidence from one expert saying that it is not what you say but what you do. We have had evidence, which we will come to towards the end of our discussion, that there is always a problem of credibility—of how much one blows one’s own trumpet. There are also problems of strategy. We will come to all that, but perhaps we can start by directing the question to Mr Bird, who is in charge of the GREAT campaign, and if Mr Aiken would care to give us some background or chip in, he should do so. The question is: how does the GREAT campaign fit in with the broader aims of our diplomacy?

Alex Aiken: Thank you very much. You are absolutely right that Conrad leads the GREAT campaign, although it may be helpful to explain to the Committee that as the director of Government Communications, I have the responsibility of overseeing the strategy, management and professional leadership over the whole of government communications. The GREAT campaign is a flagship campaign in terms of its impact, which I hope we will be able to demonstrate to you over the next hour or so. What you have heard from the Foreign Office in writing and from Hugh Elliott, who is the director of communications at the Foreign Office, will help to set the context to that. In terms of public diplomacy, Conrad is best placed to respond to the Committee.

Conrad Bird: In terms of how the GREAT campaign fits with the broader aims of the UK’s public diplomacy effort, while it fits, it is more focused than the entire public diplomacy campaign. It has much more measurable economic outcomes and it is aimed at specific
audiences in specific countries. The target audience has mainly been tourists and travel agents, potential investors and potential students. It carries many of the same assets as a public diplomacy campaign but it is more targeted at certain audiences in certain countries in order to get a demonstrable and measurable effect, which is more jobs and growth for the UK.

The Chairman: And why now? Why do we feel we need this sort of operation? Has something changed in the world that was not the case under previous Governments?

Conrad Bird: Certainly the GREAT campaign is part of the Government’s prosperity agenda, which for those who know the Foreign Office is now one-third of its objectives. It has come from the economic crisis that has underlined the need for Britain to export more and to be able to bring in more foreign direct investment, tourists and students. But also we had a strategic opportunity in 2012 in the form of the Olympics and the Diamond Jubilee, which gave us a global platform and a once in a generation time when the eyes of the world were looking at us. The combination of the opportunity in 2012 and issues around the need to export more generally actually brought about the GREAT campaign.

The Chairman: What I am getting at behind my question is really whether there is a new audience, a new context in which Britain has to put forward its case in order to persuade people to invest in Britain, buy British, and regard this country as an attractive place to come to. Have things changed in some fundamental way?

Alex Aiken: I think it is worth noting something that we are all aware of, which is that the world has changed. As some of your previous witnesses have said, we live in a social networked world and therefore the growth in and the power of marketing communications is such that it makes sense to develop those tools in order to create digital, evaluated campaigns that help to support the traditional sources of public and international influence and power.

Q311 The Chairman: That is very helpful indeed. You would both accept, would you not, that this is not the totality of the Government’s soft power story and that it is not confined to the Cabinet Office or to the Foreign Office? We have had people connected with other departments talking about their interface with the changing nature of the wider world.

Conrad Bird: It is certainly part of, but not the entire story, of the Government’s soft power assets. I have seen in previous evidence the value of the English language and our cultural institutions. There are so many aspects to British soft power and influence. This campaign sometimes showcases some of our soft power assets. We are very strong on our cultural heritage as a tourist destination and we are very strong on our education assets to attract more students. We talk about our innovation and the tax regime in the UK in order to attract investors. So, yes, it overlaps with some of the soft power activities, but with the discernible aim to showcase the best that Britain has to offer in order to try and drive the measurable delivery of more jobs and growth into the UK.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: I am a bit unsighted about it. Can you explain whose idea it was and who decided on the title?

Conrad Bird: It came about probably in January and February 2011 when we were looking at 2012 as an opportunity. We very much saw the need for a combined strategy to see if we could pull together all the Government’s international promotional efforts under one brand or umbrella.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Was that in the run-up to the Olympics?
**Conrad Bird:** Yes, in the run-up to the Olympics and looking forward to the opportunity that we would have. A team of cross-government people looked at the merits of a variety of alternatives to try to create a brand that we could use to maximise the economic legacy of the Olympics and take advantage of that moment in time. That was how the idea of the GREAT Britain campaign was born. I have seen some of your notes, which suggested alternative titles. We were very keen not to try and present this as a kind of Cool Britannia because we wanted to stress—

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** That was too Blairite, was it?

**Conrad Bird:** No, it was because we wanted to stress the strengths of Britain’s heritage. We did not want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. We wanted to show everything: modern Britain when it was relevant and ancient Britain when that was relevant. That was done in order to attract people to this country. That was the idea behind the campaign.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** We will be asking some questions in detail later about the nature of the campaign. When you were discussing what the title should be, was it thought that it might sound a bit too imperialistic?

**Conrad Bird:** Given the way the campaign is constructed, very often you do not see Great Britain. The message we are trying to promote is this: heritage is great in Britain, culture is great in Britain, music is great in Britain. We are taking certain provable messages that we know that our audiences find desirable in these areas and promoting them. Rather than promoting something called “Great Britain”, we are promoting the assets of heritage, culture, innovation and sport. It is an important difference. We are saying that Britain is a great place to invest in, to visit, to study in, and to do business with British companies. We are not saying that Britain is great but that Britain has great features which the audience, when they are showcased to them, find desirable and that encourages them to come here. We see that as an important difference.

**Q312 Lord Forsyth of Drumlean:** You mentioned that you see this campaign as being a way of exploiting—perhaps exploiting is the wrong word—building on the Olympic Games. Can you tell us a bit about what you are doing in similar regard to the Commonwealth Games?

**Conrad Bird:** Yes. Overseas, we are celebrating the Commonwealth Games as a great sporting occasion, and our posts around the world are referring to it as such.

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean:** Is that it?

**Conrad Bird:** We are also hosting a business embassy in Glasgow that is particularly related to an event on inward investment around the Commonwealth Games.

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean:** So would it be fair to say that not the same effort is being put into promoting Great Britain in the context of the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow as there was to the Olympic Games in London?

**Conrad Bird:** I think so, yes, we are slightly dialling that down. There are other aspects of Britain that we will be working on next year and over the coming years.

**Q313 Baroness Goudie:** We see now that the campaign was launched in 2011 and I think you have funding until 2016. How do you see the beginning, the middle and the end of the campaign? How are you measuring it? Do you have somebody in all the major embassies around the world as your main contact?
Alex Aiken: At the moment we have established the campaign in around 80% of the embassies around the world. We are working on the remaining 20%, but as you can imagine, we do not have a GREAT presence in some countries because it is not appropriate. Syria would be an example. We have gradually built the campaign up. It is at the disposal of ambassadors and high commissioners around the world, and that is important because it is a tool for them. It is not something that we impose on them. It is something that they can use, and there are some very good case studies showing how it has been used to build trade, tourism and educational links around the world. In terms of the timeline, one thing I am determined to do is to make sure that the campaign continues for as long as it is useful. The constant monthly evaluation of the campaign helps us to understand what works and build organically on that. My professional view is that a campaign of this type should run for at least a decade or more in order to have a maximum impact and to learn the lessons. I think that it has worked pretty well during the years that Conrad has been overseeing the delivery of it.

The Chairman: If I am the ambassador of a medium-sized country and I get word from London that the GREAT campaign is on, is not one of my thoughts going to be, “Well, these are all the things I am here to do already. I have to promote my country, make contacts, practise cultural diplomacy, and put my back into commerce in the form of business deals by accommodating visiting Ministers”. That is something that ambassadors have to do. “Now they are telling me to do some campaign as well”. I am deliberately putting the bad side, but perhaps you can respond with the good side.

Conrad Bird: Okay, I will put the good side. I think that many ambassadors see it as an opportunity. We have to divide the mechanism of the campaign in a number of ways. First, there are the great funded markets, which are the BRICs—Brazil, Russia, India and China. In France, Germany and the Gulf we do some tourism work. Then there are five emerging markets—Mexico, Indonesia, Poland in emerging Europe, Turkey and South Korea. Those are markets that are being identified and assessed on their potential for return and they receive the bulk of the GREAT funds. There is also a smaller innovation fund for other markets with strong ideas to bid for. Most recently, Malaysia put in a good pitch for an idea around a British retail week that had a very good return on investment. Then you have the other countries. They have the benefit of being able to draw upon the central assets, the free to use assets, which we have created for the campaign. Given that one-third of ambassadors’ objectives in every country are on prosperity, they see the campaign as a good toolkit to help them to achieve their objectives on prosperity by assisting in aspects of education marketing and tourism. This really does fit with ambassadors’ strategic objectives at post. They do not see it as an extra burden but as a useful high-impact toolkit of free assets that they can use to achieve their own objectives.

The Chairman: We are getting into the structure here, and we wanted to talk about that.

Q314 Lord Ramsbotham: I am interested in the formulation of the policy. Who lays down the policy that is going to be followed in a particular country? As we have heard, it is not just about the ambassador. Other ministries are frequently involved in doing their bit, having been co-ordinated by the ambassador. How is all this pulled together so that there is a coherent direction?

Conrad Bird: The governance of the GREAT campaign really reflects that question. There is a GREAT programme board, which is chaired by Maria Miller, the Secretary of State at the Department for Media, Culture and Sport. It is attended by senior officials from the Foreign Office, VisitEngland and VisitBritain, UKTI, the British Council and UKVI. The Treasury and
BIS are there, along with other representatives such as London & Partners. All the objectives and policies on trying to promote Britain’s growth are co-ordinated through that board and then assisted and delivered at post.

Lord Ramsbotham: That direction does not conflict with direction from the Foreign Office. Does it go through the Foreign Office?

Conrad Bird: The Foreign Office is a key partner of the GREAT campaign. It is a financial contributor to it and it is a delivery partner in actually delivering at post. The Foreign Office is absolutely key to the campaign. Certainly when we are working with ambassadors, we always say that they are central to the delivery of the campaign at post, and therefore we work very closely with them.

Alex Aiken: For example, GREAT was an integral part of the diplomatic excellence conference held in London earlier this year, when the ambassadors and high commissioners return for briefings and so on. You heard from Hugh Elliott about the story in Mexico where the ambassador used the GREAT campaign successfully to drive up inward investment to the UK. That was one example that was spoken about from the platform at the conference. Certainly my sense from attending that conference was that the campaign is something that the Foreign Office and ambassadors fully embrace.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Just to make a point on Mexico, investment was on its way up anyway. How can you prove that the GREAT campaign was the factor that made it rise a bit further?

Alex Aiken: I think it is worth saying that the ambassador was clearly prepared to talk to other ambassadors at the conference about the GREAT campaign because he believed that it was an asset in driving up inward investment and the reputation of the UK. That is one piece of evidence, but Conrad can talk in more detail about the evaluation of the campaign.

Conrad Bird: We are very careful on evaluation. It would be easy to try to overclaim for the campaign, so in a sense we follow the money. When you have specific GREAT-funded events that can yield a return, whether those are foreign direct investment leads or where we use GREAT money to tackle new markets, that is the real tracking that we do. For instance, this year for our half-year evaluation we can see that UKTI has generated 350 new investment leads directly from GREAT-funded activity. Yes, it can be against a background that is very strong, but we are looking at particular events where we can prove that the contacts made have actually delivered an inward investment lead that could then be turned into an inward investment deal.

Q315 Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Can you sympathise with us as members of this Committee? Everyone is coming along and telling us how wonderful everything is and how Britain is brilliant. You are telling us that the GREAT campaign is the bee’s knees. Could you be Maoist just for a few minutes? Where is it not successful, and why?

Conrad Bird: Certainly. When we look back we can see that this is the first time that any country has tried to combine all four strands of this effort, so we are bound to have experienced failures or made mistakes on the way.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Give us a few examples.

Conrad Bird: Let me give you a few examples then. The first thing is the funding cycle. When it started the feeling was that the campaign was just for 2012. That prevented us from really engaging with private sector businesses and cultural organisations that have a four to five-year planning cycle. They saw this as a campaign that might last only a year, so some of
our relationships with them were quite transactional rather than long-term and strategic. We have corrected that as we have got more certainty. We have set up a great private sector partners' board with major businesses that are really engaging in the campaign and contributing cash, and in kind—real money into the campaign. So the first thing I would say is that the set-up of the campaign felt short-term and therefore we were not able to commit as much.

Equally, I would say that the application of the brand in countries has not been of the highest quality in every market. I have seen errors. I have seen some less than excellent application.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Give us a name.

Conrad Bird: Do I have to name names?

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Yes, why not?

Conrad Bird: Okay, let me be honest. I remember being woken up early one Sunday morning by a DCMS press officer who said that the Mail on Sunday was on the line because we had spelt Brecon Beacons wrongly in one of our big countryside ads.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Shocking.

Conrad Bird: It is shocking. I am sorry about that. It appeared on a poster in a New York subway train. Only three ever appeared, but one was spotted by a member of the public who felt that he ought to alert the Mail on Sunday. So there are minor mistakes in the whole thing.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: I am personally not too worried about the Mail on Sunday, but in other parts of the world it is not as effective as in others.

Conrad Bird: When we launched the first tranche of the campaign, we launched it into markets such as Japan, Canada and Australia. Certainly in Japan we found that as a campaign it was not having as much of a return on investment as in places like China, Hong Kong and India, because Japan is a very expensive media environment and the Japanese people did not respond as well to the brand. That does not mean that we do not do GREAT activity in Japan any more, but in terms of the amount of money invested in the tourist campaign in Japan versus the return on investment of potential visitors coming in, it was one of the less successful countries that we aimed at, so we shifted.

The Chairman: We might return to that, but for the moment Baroness Goudie wants to come back again.

Q316 Baroness Goudie: I just wanted to come back and talk about the groupings of countries that you were working with. You did not mention Brussels, which I personally think is quite important, or the grouping together of the ASEAN countries, which are really important to us, especially with the way everything else is going in trade. You talked about Syria. What we are doing with refugees and in other work is part of soft power, and I would have thought that the GREAT campaign has a role in working with these countries in that way just as much as it does in trade with other countries. We have put in, and will continue to give, large amounts of aid to the refugees in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon and elsewhere, including here.

Also, are we liaising with the UN, because there are trade issues around the UN as well, where there are great gatherings regularly? Also, there are some big international gatherings coming up and our government Ministers are going to be there, along with other Prime Ministers. There again, are we going to be having some meetings on the side, which other
countries are beginning to have, with what in political terms we would call it the fringe? Around all these gatherings now, Governments around the world are supporting a fringe.

**Alex Aiken**: These are all important issues, but let me reassure you that Syria, the plight of the refugees and Britain’s help to those refugees are absolutely central to government communications as a whole. That is included in the work that I co-ordinate on behalf of the Foreign Office, DfID and the Ministry of Defence. I hope that we have been seen to do the right thing and to have been as comprehensive as we can in the very difficult situation there.

**Baroness Goudie**: Absolutely. I am not questioning that, but I think it is also part of this. You say that Syria does not warrant being around the GREAT campaign, but I think it does as much as other countries do. Others might disagree with me, but that is my view.

**Conrad Bird**: Can I try to answer that? When we kicked this campaign off, we had a limited budget. It is a lot of money, and we take it very seriously and track it very closely, but to put it into context, the initial budget was £37 million. That is a large sum, but to undertake a major global advertising marketing campaign, it is really quite small. Our competitors are spending much more than us even on tourism. I can share some figures with you in a moment. It meant that we had to focus very tightly in the first instance on the countries that would give us the greatest economic return. I go back to that point about focusing on the countries with great funded activity but then inviting other countries to take advantage of the assets.

There is a big dilemma and a big discussion here: do you spread the jam too thin and allow all 30 - 40 countries to have a small amount of budget, or do you try to focus and make an impact in some of these very large, very important countries such as China, India, Russia and Brazil? We decided to focus the limited resources on a few key countries to try to get the maximum return, while inviting other countries to be able to participate in the campaign but using what I would call their “business as usual” budgets.

**The Chairman**: You mentioned tourism twice. Of course, the tourist agencies and authorities have their own campaigns around the world, so the GREAT campaign rather supplemented these, did it?

**Conrad Bird**: Certainly the VisitBritain campaign did. VisitBritain is a key delivery partner, and the GREAT campaign has supplemented its work and worked much more with it. It continues to do its marketing and promotional activity, much of it joint-funded, but it uses the GREAT-funded funds to promote much more widely the image work that it does.

**Q317 Lord Forsyth of Drumlean**: I am sure that the GREAT campaign is doing a great job, but listening to this I cannot help thinking that this is just displacement activity. I am very out of date now, but I remember the days when William Hague was the Welsh Secretary and I was the Scottish Secretary, and we would find ourselves bumping into each other in Japan, where he was trying to persuade people to locate in Wales and I was trying to persuade people to locate in Scotland. I watched an advert on the television the other day from VisitScotland, which seemed pretty close to a campaign for independence actually. There is the London Tourist Board and all these agencies. We have ambassadors all over the world whose budgets are being cut because the Foreign Office budget is being cut, and it seems to me that this GREAT campaign is simply taking money away from established activities and channelling it in a particular direction that is decided according to the committee and the brand, but it is not really adding any value, is it? It is just displacing other activity and, because of the control of the funding, forcing organisations to do things that they might not otherwise do. I am sure you have an answer to that.
**Alex Aiken**: As someone who has come to the campaign in the last year, I should say that it is important to remember that while we are here representing the organisation of the GREAT campaign, all the partners that Conrad referred to earlier come voluntarily to the GREAT campaign board meetings, which I attend. They do not need to come. There is also a private sector element to it. These people come together voluntarily, and they believe that there is worth in coming together. You have heard from people such as Mary Rance and Professor Riordan, who have said that GREAT is beginning to bear fruit because it is more than the sum of its parts.

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean**: We have heard that assertion, and I have no doubt that it is a great networking organisation, but my question was about added value and whether it is just displacing other activities in a way that might be inefficient and not actually directly informed in the way our ambassadors on the ground would be.

**Conrad Bird**: First of all, ambassadors are very involved in it, but I would go back to the metrics and say that this campaign has so far in its first year delivered a return of over £500 million for Britain from £37 million. That is a straight economic return from that. We can go through that in a moment.

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean**: Sorry to interrupt you, but if you are going to quote a figure like that, what is the equivalent figure for our ambassadors or the other organisations that are involved in promoting Britain?

**Conrad Bird**: I am not sure that I can answer that question. They promote Britain through their personal influence, but these are funds which they now use to promote Britain, so this is part of their effort as well.

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean**: Yes, but—sorry to go on about this, Chairman—our embassies are given budgets and they promote Britain. If you are going to make a calculation based on the project that you have promoted and which that produced that, surely you have to look at the other side of the balance sheet, which is what they achieve using the budgets they have. If you have not done that, how do you know that you are adding value?

**Conrad Bird**: First of all, it is not “you”. One of the strengths of this campaign is genuinely that it is not as centralised as it sounds. It is a really cross-government effort, and is unique in that. The number of organisations with different objectives have come together to use this and work it very hard indeed. It is extraordinary. One of the things that research among 20 embassies recently reported was that one of the most valuable aspects of the GREAT campaign was the way it unified at post the efforts of the British Council, the UKTI, the ambassadors, the Foreign Office, VisitBritain and UKVI. They actually said that this has pulled together groups of people with a focused effort to try to make a difference, so I would say that this helps them to do their job much more effectively, and they recognise that.

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean**: So you would say that the resource that is being put in here compensates for the fact that the Foreign Office budget and the British Council budget are being cut.

**Alex Aiken**: Well, we live in an age of austerity. I am aware of that as the head of a government communications service that spent £1 billion in 2010. We spend £500 million today, and part of that is the GREAT campaign. That is still a significant sum. Nevertheless, we are all aware that we have to work very hard to get extra value from taxpayers’ pounds, and that is what we are about. Obviously the Foreign Office must speak to how they measure the outputs and outcomes from their work, but we were tasked with measuring the GREAT campaign, which is why we focus on the figures from our campaign.
Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: Thank you very much. Mr Bird, I have a couple of questions. Do you have the capacity, the competence, the power to ensure that the template that you have created at the top is replicated at the bottom on the ground in country? Where I go I see a lot of fragmentation of British effort from the different ministries in several big countries. In one in particular, which is one of yours, DFID has a different office from the embassy, for example. Do you have the capacity to make the template go right down, and if so, how is that working?

A parallel question. As we are all aware, Britain’s great trade and investment are largely powered by the small to medium-sized enterprises. You have naturally, I feel sure, tapped the classic pioneering big companies of Britain, which are always willing to respond to government and to try to put some funding in and be helpful. That is really just skimming the surface of the companies that are already hugely successful and very powerful. What about tackling the SMEs, which are 95%, if I remember correctly, of British business?

Conrad Bird: I am happy to answer both questions, if that is okay. To the first question, on whether I have the capacity to deliver the template, the answer is yes - in theory. There is a branding template that is flexible but certain parts of which are rigid—the use of the union Jack and so on—and all those departments, UKTI, the Foreign Office and so on should apply it consistently on the ground. DFID is an interesting one. It has just begun to come into the campaign because it has more of a business focus in certain of its activities. It has talked about the innovation that British companies can bring in to help some of the world’s poorest people. DFID has quoted some lovely examples. As a department, it was not part of the main caucus going forward, but is coming in on certain messages—as, incidentally, are other departments. For instance, Defra, which is interested in and tasked with exporting food and drink, has begun to join the campaign. So we are beginning to see more departments with an international remit actually joining the campaign where that is appropriate for them. So, yes, I have a certain amount of control. It is carrot and stick because the campaign is good looking and of high quality, and when it is used we know it is effective. Also when it is used, people know that you gain extra power from the consistency of the effort. It is a good substitute for, frankly, some of the less high-quality vehicles that are used. Ministers going around will always come back to me and say, “That was brilliant there, but I noticed that when I went to one country I did not see the full application of the GREAT brand”. I will then take that on board and try to encourage those posts to do it. So I have a certain amount of control over that.

In terms of the SMEs, you are so right. SMEs are vital and we have some major sponsors on board. Major companies have supported us. However, two things are happening. First, you may have just seen a campaign in the UK kicking off to encourage British SMEs to take advantage of exporting services and trade missions that UKTI offers in order to go to some of the markets with which we are involved. So we are trying to recruit SMEs and get them to grow, get themselves ready for exports and go to our markets. Equally, we showcase some of the most fantastic work by SMEs. I think of the lovely example of a small company in Cornwall called Tregothnan, which is the only grower of tea in this country, and it is exporting that tea to China. It is not a large company but we showcase it. We say that that is fantastic. There is an amazing watch designer called Roger Smith, who is almost a one-man band and has produced a beautiful watch. Every single bit of it has been handcrafted, and it is an example not just of a fantastic watch but of British craftsmanship and creativity. We take something such as that and try to showcase it around the world. So we are equally keen to showcase the best that Britain has to offer, whether it be from big companies or smaller companies. We are very mindful of that need to encourage the, I think, one in five companies that export and get that figure down to one in four—that vital figure where we
can encourage British SMEs to become more productive and competitive by exporting. So we are very supportive of them as well as the large companies. Actually, we tend to support the SMEs more, while we tend to try to work with the larger companies on jointly funded exercises. However, SMEs go along on trade missions.

The Chairman: We have talked a bit about the structure and budget of the campaign. Lord Ramsbotham, did you want to pursue the structure issue more, or do you feel that we have covered it?

Q319 Lord Ramsbotham: I think that we have covered it, but there is one aspect that I would like to explore. Very early on we heard that the NSC was, if you like, the directing agent of soft power. We are slightly surprised, because inevitably if the NSC is known to have been doing that propaganda, other things begin to creep in. We had an interesting discussion about how the European effort was co-ordinated in a way that was all working in Europe, and the NSC was able to do the same sort of co-ordination with other countries. However, what is the relationship between your campaign and what the NSC is doing as a sort of national programme, rather than the sort of things that you are trying to produce?

Conrad Bird: To be honest, I left the Foreign Office some time ago, so I am not sighted on the NSC’s control over soft power strategy. I certainly think, though, that it is where it is. GREAT is only a small component of Britain’s soft power strategy in that whole area. I should emphasise that. I understand soft power and see it as a much broader piece than the GREAT campaign fulfils. Therefore, many of the people who might be on the NSC might be aware of the GREAT campaign and its economic aims, although it may not be part of the NSC’s other security aims.

Lord Ramsbotham: But you do not see yourself as part of the NSC empire in all this? You do not see yourself as one of the soft power tools that the NSC is deploying, or do you?

Alex Aiken: I sit on both groups: the GREAT board and the comms group, which helps the NSC with its communications, and the two agendas are very different. I cannot recall an element of overlap at the communications level.

The Chairman: Baroness Armstrong, do you want to pursue this or come on to the broader question of propaganda and other things?

Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top: Yes I wanted to come on to that.

The Chairman: In that case, we will leave that for the moment. I will move on to Lord Janvrin, who wanted to go further on the money issue.

Q320 Lord Janvrin: I want to probe a bit more on evaluation and how you are measuring it. You said you had some figures, and in particular you mentioned £500 million as a figure of the return on the £37 million spent on the campaign. Can you go into a little more detail on that? How do you measure success in the education field, given some of the issues that arise there?

Conrad Bird: I am very happy to do that. In evaluation there are a number of phases and we always have to look backwards. The £550 million refers to the official launch of the campaign, which is when it arrived on the streets in February 2012 and measured up to March 2013, and we then move on to the next year. That £550 million was made up of three key component measures in just the markets we mentioned. There was £300 million in relation to a VisitEngland campaign, a “staycation” campaign in which we encouraged UK citizens to stay in the UK during the Olympics. That yielded £300 million of value. Some £200 million was from VisitBritain tourism activity, which again was generated over that
period of time. UK Trade and Investment estimates that approximately 30 inward investment leads were generated from the initial GREAT campaign activities, which looked at something like £70 million. This is where those figures came from.

Moving forward, we estimate that for the £30 million budget this year the return on investment should be nearer to between £600 million and £800 million. That is what we are projecting. It is made up of a combination of inbound tourism, inward investment, supporting British companies overseas and encouraging students to come to the UK. This measurement is difficult, but on the tourism side these are National Audit Office-audited models that we are using to evaluate whether people who have been attracted towards Britain or are considering it as a destination have seen the GREAT campaign and whether as a result they are more likely to come and visit. That is how we measure all those areas. On the inward investment side, we ask them, “Where did you hear of us? What attracted you?”.

On the point about promoting GREAT, we talk as if the campaign is right up there but it is actually very much couched in fact. When we make claims about, for instance, our cultural heritage, inward investment and how easy it is to set up a business here, they are always backed up in the body copy and the facts that go with it.

**Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top:** How, then, are you actually evaluating it? It would seem to be incredibly costly. Either you are interviewing every tourist who comes here and asking them, “Did you come because you saw the GREAT campaign or because you were visiting Auntie Joan in wherever, or because you wanted to see a Shakespeare play, or because there was a good deal from your travel agent?”. It does seem to be incredibly difficult to assess why tourists come to this country and put it down to one cause. I will come on to students in a minute.

**Conrad Bird:** It is, but this is standard advertising practice. First of all, we do not interview every person coming in. This is modelled on focus groups in the marketplaces.

**Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top:** Focus groups, rather than—

**Conrad Bird:** I am talking about 1,000 people. When I say focus groups, it is larger than that. It is sampling. We are working out the consideration of coming to the UK among those people who have and have not seen the advertising. Then we see how that comes through in terms of where those visitors are coming from and their average spend per visit, which VisitBritain knows and has models for, such as the Chinese, and we calculate on that basis. So there is an element of modelling in it, but the IPS survey backs up the bigger results as they come in. We have to estimate, which is why these are NAO-audited models to assist us in this process.

**Alex Aiken:** We would not want to leave you with the impression that it is done just on sampling. Every event that the GREAT campaign undertakes is evaluated at that level, and then our partners will report to us on particular activities. For instance, the Football is GREAT campaign generated around 600,000 visits to marketing channels. That is another part of the evaluation that is put in place.

**Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top:** I find that incredible because, for example, I go to Zanzibar for different reasons, sometimes for a holiday but also to look at Voluntary Service Overseas projects. I see written up in small letters stuff about how wonderful Arsène Wenger is. I talk to children who know more about the details of Manchester United than I do, and I am a football fanatic. I do not believe that their parents or whoever are interested in coming to this country only because they have seen the Football is GREAT! campaign.
Actually, when I have been in Zanzibar I have seen no GREAT campaign issues. Zanzibar may be a bad example because not many will come from there to this country.

**Conrad Bird:** And the campaign would not claim credit for that. Simon Anholt’s point about nation branding is right: we have an incredibly powerful nation brand called “brand UK”. GREAT is not saying that it is a nation brand, but we are taking some of the very strong components of that nation brand, magnifying them and showcasing them in various destinations. Britain exists and will carry on existing way beyond the GREAT campaign. However, we are claiming that by using advertising models, standard models of destination advertising the GREAT brand has pulled in the amount of income to which I referred. However, no country advertising itself can claim that advertising alone is making this country the destination, because the country is attractive in itself.

**Lord Janvrin:** I just wanted to come back on the education issue and how you measure it. Have you run up against issues around visas for students and so on in opposition to what you are trying to do, and have you had any input into that policy debate?

**Conrad Bird:** Education is interesting. If you take the recording of tourist figures, they come in quite early. You can do something and measure it a year later. From talking to the British Council I can say that its cycle of evaluation takes longer. We do not know but we have not claimed any education figures, as yet, for the campaign. We do have some very interesting points. For instance, in India, despite all the challenging marketing conditions, the latest on the ground intelligence from UCAS shows a 19% year-on increase in the number of applications, while the British Council has reported a 12% year-on increase. GREAT can claim credit for some of that, because in the same way as Britain is a tourist destination, many of those education numbers will be generated by GREAT-funded activities marketing themselves to potential students, going to big trade fairs, talking to parents and working in that way. In China, for instance, we have a specific boarding school campaign that is totally GREAT-funded because GREAT can take activities that people want to do to new places and support them. The boarding school campaign in China has so far directly engaged 105,000 individuals within our target audience in direct face to face activity, conducted a large amount of online activity and worked with media outlets to promote Britain. In the same way in which you can market a destination, you can also market the UK as a place to study. That is very much a strong component of our campaign. However, that £550 million figure does not at the moment contain a really accurate calculation of the education numbers, as yet.

**Q321 Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top:** Given that we have received a fair amount of evidence from other people on the impact of visas on education exchanges and visits, I just wanted to ask whether that has been a problem for the embassies?

**Conrad Bird:** It certainly has; perceptions of the British visa regime have damaged our activities overseas in places such as India and China. We know that. We see it through the papers and so on. That is why, from the very beginning, UKVI has been part of the campaign. We cannot reflect on policy but we can communicate very strongly to change those perceptions. I was interested to see that very early on in the campaign in China. All the partners, including UKVI, work with the British Council, the Foreign Office, UKTI and VisitBritain, to take the visa message around 16 cities, a kind of road show, to explain the ease of access and so on in relation to this. Yes, we are trying to communicate the positive aspects of the visa regime as best we can.

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean:** I am sorry to be terrier-like on this issue, but I am struggling with it. You quoted some figures on visits to Britain which you then turned into value that
had been added as a result of the campaign. I guess you cannot give me the information off
the top of your head, but there is the organisation VisitEngland and the organisation
VisitBritain, both of which have budgets. Are they using the same focus groups or whatever
you call them to evaluate their activities and the return on their budgets? How do they
compare with yours? If you do not have that information, could you let us have a note
setting it out? It strikes me as quite bizarre to say that all these tourists came to the
Olympics because of our efforts and this particular programme.

Conrad Bird: We are not saying that. We are deliberately not saying that.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: What are you saying then?

Conrad Bird: We are saying that many tourists came to Britain as a result of the Olympics.
It was a fantastic and absolutely brilliant moment and it certainly changed and enhanced our
reputation overseas. We have seen that through Anholt figures that show that our natural
beauty goes up and actually the quality of our welcome goes up. The Olympics are a very
important brand.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: In answer to Lord Janvrin’s question you said that you had
created this return by attracting these people to Britain.

Conrad Bird: Yes. The Olympics attracted many millions of people to Britain.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: Forget the Olympics.

Conrad Bird: No. The Games absolutely did attract those people to Britain. That is what we
have measured. Those people saw the advertisements and we have traced them through the
sampling and the focus groups. They said that as a result of seeing the GREAT campaign they
were more attracted to the UK, and in time some of them came to the Games. We can
track those people as a result of seeing the GREAT advertisements.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: How does that compare with the activities of VisitScotland,
VisitEngland and VisitBritain?

Conrad Bird: First of all, VisitBritain’s activity is GREAT activity. When VisitBritain does its
international research, it is tracking it. I know you are confused and I apologise for the
complexity here. VisitBritain is a fully signed up partner to the GREAT campaign, so when it
advertises it uses the GREAT brand, and the returns you see are the result of GREAT
activity.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: But they are not using your budget, they are using their
budget, are they not?

Conrad Bird: No. The budget goes to VisitBritain. When we talk about a centralised
budget—

Q322 Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: That is confusing the picture. What I am trying to
establish here is what value is added by the GREAT campaign. You are saying, “These
tourists came to Britain and spent this amount and therefore we added such and such a
value, and we know that because we have done the research with the focus groups”. I want
to know whether VisitEngland is doing exactly the same evaluation and are you able to
demonstrate that you add value over and above what would have happened if VisitEngland
had put its advertisements in Zanzibar or wherever?

Conrad Bird: Quite right. Perhaps I may make the distinction. The money that VisitBritain
got from the GREAT campaign is used overseas. VisitEngland’s money was actually used to
promote England as a tourist destination to people within Britain. That is how it is tracked
there, and that was money made for the GREAT campaign. VisitEngland was using the money for a domestic staycation campaign to try and ensure that citizens stayed in the UK during the Olympics. VisitBritain’s money was used to promote Britain abroad to encourage tourists to come to the UK.

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean:** VisitEngland presumably does not spend all its budget on encouraging people to stay at home. Does it not use some of the budget to persuade people to come from overseas?

**Conrad Bird:** They should do that through VisitBritain. VisitEngland does not do international advertising. They are different.

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean:** You have the advantage over me on this. VisitBritain does do promotions of Britain in that it shows Shakespeare, Anne Hathaway’s cottage and all that stuff in order to encourage people to come to Britain.

**Conrad Bird:** Which is GREAT-branded.

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean:** Which is GREAT-branded. Are you taking credit for the money that VisitBritain spends as part of the value that is added by GREAT Britain?

**Conrad Bird:** We are only taking credit in these figures for the money that the GREAT fund gives VisitBritain to do that.

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean:** I am asking this: if you take the money that you give from the GREAT fund and compare the value added using your evaluation methods, and you apply the same thing to VisitBritain, what is the difference?

**Conrad Bird:** The difference is that some of their tactical activity is slightly more effective than GREAT activity at the moment.

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean:** What is tactical activity?

**Conrad Bird:** I am sorry. It means some of their other activities. They do joint-funded activity as well. We give them GREAT-funds for activity and the return on investment has been around 8:1 to 10:1 in the launch phase. Some of the other activity that they do, which is still GREAT-branded but it is joint-funded, is actually more effective than that. But VisitBritain would say that you have to do both your image and your tactical work together.

**The Chairman:** I think we ought to leave it there for the moment.

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean:** Perhaps I may ask one more question to be sure that I understand this. So you are saying that they get a better return on the money than the GREAT campaign funding.

**Conrad Bird:** In some areas, yes, but they would also say that you cannot go into new markets only with tactical work. You need to promote your country in the way of GREAT, in an image way, in order to generate awareness so that you can convert that with tactical work.

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean:** Can you give us a note on all this?

**Conrad Bird:** Yes, of course.

**Q323 Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne:** It is possible that Lord Forsyth may have caught you on a hook, but my suggestion would be that it is because you are swimming in the wrong pool. The purpose of the GREAT Britain campaign as identified in our paperwork by, I suspect, you is that it showcases Britain’s capabilities by promoting and
enhancing Britain’s reputation. But you are using judgment criteria, as has been obvious over
the past five minutes, which are the same judgment criteria for other parts of the system
that are not designed to fulfil your requirements: that is, the requirements of the GREAT
campaign. I know how difficult it is to justify promotional campaigns and therefore how easy
it is to grasp at something tangible and say, “This shows that it was worth while”. But that is
difficult because those tangible items are already being grasped by every other department,
rightly or wrongly. Have you put your mind and your team’s mind to identifying new ways of
classifying results? In other words, I would suggest that you are identifying success or failure
by the criteria that are used by other departments, which have different types of objective
and different budgets and which may or may not therefore be able to claim them. I often
think that they should not, incidentally, but that is a different point. It usually happens when
the Prime Minister heads a big delegation, and UKTI will claim that the big contract that has
been signed is due to them. That is very rare. It has usually been worked on for about five
years by the company in question, like Marks & Spencer in China, for example. Are you
falling into that trap, and if that is the case, which as I listen to you I feel may be the case,
why have you not worked out, given the capacity and the knowledge base you have in your
team, ways of really identifying where promotional campaigns can show benefit? There must
be some new ways.

Conrad Bird: That is really helpful. Thank you. When we set this campaign up, we were very
sure that we had to show a return on investment for it. In the first stages we had money and
we allocated that money to certain departments so that they could continue their work
under the GREAT banner, and then we tracked their return on investment on it. We were
really quite strict on that economic return because we need to be able to persuade the
Treasury and others to continue with this campaign based on an economic return. As we go
forward, the point about reputation is really well made because there is a reputational effect
on top of this. We are pushing preceptions.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: It seems to be at the heart of what the campaign
is for.

Conrad Bird: We are driving people’s perceptions for a reason. I think that the two are
linked. The reason we are trying to drive people’s perceptions of the UK in a positive
direction is in order to gain an economic return.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: But it takes time.

Conrad Bird: Yes, it takes time. This is the really good point that you made. As I say, when
the campaign was kicked off, it felt as if it was on an annual cycle. Now that we have more
strategic certainty, we are able to concentrate more on influencing people beyond just an
annual cycle, which is a far more sensible way to do it. We are looking at changing
perceptions over time by working with cultural organisations that have three to four-year
planning cycles. We are working on events and activities that can push our reputation in
order to gain economic returns over time.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: Are they the sort of modus operandi that the
Committee is looking for?

Conrad Bird: I am sorry.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: Is this not what we are searching for from you?
What are these classifications and identifications?

Conrad Bird: We are building those metrics now. Let us remember that the original metrics
were around economic return, but we are looking at metrics such as whether we can
calculate the influence over time that organising GREAT events can have over people in the building of relationships. We are looking at some of what I would call initially softer but very important metrics going forward.

**Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne:** But given that the purpose of your effort is to build reputation and make Britain better known, as it were—you have chosen certain countries, but that is just a matter of choice—why did you not build this in at the beginning? I think you must feel, at least from some of my colleagues on this Committee, that we have a marginally questioning view as to whether your analysis of economic return from other ministries is honestly justified or can actually be analysed at all. We have to ask whether the ministries would be spending the money in other ways. I think it is quite hard for you to justify that, but there would be no difficulty, I suggest, if you came to us with a classification of the soft things that you are in fact trying to do. Why did you not have all that sorted out at the beginning?

**Conrad Bird:** First of all, on your comments about the difficulty of justifying figures. We take all the data we get back from working with departments and we audit them externally to make sure that they are robust. I am pretty comfortable with the figures, which have been through the audit procedure and are as real as we can make them. On the reputation point, we do have perception studies, and again those relate to the economic return. Something that we have been doing more recently with UKTI is measuring how perception of the UK relates back into economic returns. I think that we are making efforts in that direction.

**Q324 Lord Janvrin:** I want to pursue this a little further, but with a general question and a request for a bit of detail on that last point. I am possibly in a minority—I do not know—but I wish the GREAT campaign had been around when I was serving overseas a long time ago because it would have provided a much needed focus, which is something the Committee has discussed in other contexts. If you were looking at starting out again, or if you were to design a “son of GREAT” campaign, or the next phase, what are the key lessons? You have mentioned the importance of taking a longer term perspective and not a one-year funding cycle. Have you formed any conclusions about, for example, using social media and that kind of activity? I do not think that that plays a part in your overarching effort, but perhaps you will correct me. Secondly, this whole point about metrics around influence is actually what soft power could well be about. I will be interested if you could explain what you are doing in trying to measure perceptions of influence in this way.

**Conrad Bird:** On the digital side, we did not really talk about the channels that we use, but digital is at the heart of this campaign; not just because so many tourists seek holidays online, but because in business and so on it is a vital, everyday tool. Digital is at the heart of this. We have Facebook pages with over 2 million visitors. On our tourist sites we include education, and the British Council also has Facebook pages. So we use social media a lot. The more we can get people to engage with each other and interact with our campaigns, the more effective they will be. It is at the heart of the campaign.

On the metrics of influence, I have read much of the evidence and heard Jonathan McClory and so on talking about this. It is not something that I have seen coming through in many of the notes about any organisation that has managed to, in granular detail, calculate return on influence. How do you create influence? When I was at the Foreign Office, I remember finding it a very difficult thing to analyse. We can do general perception. We can do the Anholt surveys and the soft power surveys. We know that Britain is a soft power superpower. We are third or fourth in the nation brands index. This is good global stuff. How you then assess that, work out an activity and then try to measure influence from it is
very difficult. I know from the Chevening programme that when you interrogated people about it, they all said, “Yes, it sort of works but we find it difficult to analyse how”. I think that you can do it around positive perceptions versus negative perceptions. We do that in terms of analysing press clippings about certain activities that we have done and can see positive versus negative sentiments. I think you also have to rely on anecdotal information. For instance, there was a very good quote from one of our senior officials in China who was talking to an official who said, “I did not realise that you were such a creative nation. I thought that you were a nation that was backward-looking, not very innovative and so on. Actually, in the Olympics, the Shanghai expo and the GREAT campaign, your creativity is coming to the fore”. Those perceptions really matter and we can try and work in areas where you gather anecdotal information that shows senior influences and perceptions are changing. It is a really tough area to measure and evaluate. You make a very good point. It is tough to measure the economic return but it is at least tangible. These are robust figures and give you a good idea of return on investment. However, we would be neglectful as we go forward if we did not try to make an effort to work out the return on influence, which is something that we are trying to work on. It really does need some thought and I would welcome the Committee’s thoughts on your understanding of soft power and, most importantly, the measurements of soft power in granular detail, and how we can incorporate that into the GREAT campaign. It is a really tough area.

Q325 The Chairman: There is one final question on the structure side before we come on to a final issue. You are presumably mobilising a great deal of talent from outside. As we know, you mentioned the Shanghai Pavilion, which was brilliant. Are you using one particular advertising agency and one promotion and PR agency or a whole range of agencies, or indeed none?

Conrad Bird: First, when we talk about mobilising talent from outside, you are totally right. Over 150 businesses and celebrities have supported this campaign. That has been fantastically helpful. They have given cash, they have given in kind, and they have given advice to help us build this and extend its reach. In terms of using agencies, we kicked off the campaign with one advertising agency. In terms of the centre, we have moved towards using a different company, which is more around creative services offering design, branding, digital and so on.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Which company?

Conrad Bird: The company that we worked with at the very beginning was called Mother, the advertising agency that came up with the name, GREAT. Today we are using a company called Radley Yeldar, which is a full-service, creative design agency.

Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top: Where are they from?

Conrad Bird: They are both London agencies—British agencies, I must say. That is for my team’s central GREAT campaign activity, and obviously other partners will use their own agencies, but we try to share as much of the agency resource as possible for cost efficiency’s sake.

The Chairman: I am going to ask Baroness Armstrong to open up the final question on credibility. We have heard a lot from Professor Nye and around the world on how these campaigns do or do not convince.

Q326 Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top: First, soft power is most effective when it is not seen as the propaganda of government. We benefit because our BBC and the British Council are not seen internationally as arms of government, whereas the GREAT campaign
is driven and controlled by government. Do you see that as a disadvantage? I add a very small rider: I come from the north-east.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** The north-east of England.

**Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top:** I hope you can hear that. I do not think that the GREAT campaign reflects the regions and so on of the country. We had a fantastic campaign in the north-east, the Passionate People campaign, which was seen as most effective, certainly on tourism, but we had to drop it because the Government did not want regions and regionalism. The GREAT campaign is now the only thing that we can work through. Does this not deny that we are a country of enormous diversity and variety, and that that is part of our strength, too?

**The Chairman:** Right. That is a challenge.

**Conrad Bird:** Shall I try to answer those two questions? Would you mind, Alex, or do you wish to kick off?

**Alex Aiken:** You kick off. There are some things I can add.

**Conrad Bird:** The first thing is whether this is seen as a government campaign. We do not claim that it is not, but if you look at the images and the way it has been set up, it seems to be slightly distant from government for two reasons. First, we do not have government logos or crests all over it. We use the union flag, which is the most powerful icon overseas, and therefore it is seen as being, if you like, on behalf of Britain. Equally, all the businesses that support this—the great brands of McLaren, Aston Martin and Jaguar Land Rover—are willing to wear this brand, if you like, and put it on their products help to take this out of the government campaign sphere and into much more national parlance. That is really important. It does not strictly feel like a government campaign; it feels like a national campaign on behalf of the people and the businesses of Britain.

In terms of the regional side, we were very careful from the beginning when using this campaign to reflect the strengths of all of Great Britain.

**Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top:** It does not come across.

**Conrad Bird:** Have you seen all the advertisements that we use overseas, because we use everything?

**Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top:** We have just been looking at them here.

**Conrad Bird:** We use the Scottish countryside.

**Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top:** You use the DNA single from Newcastle, basically as Newcastle has done all the work, but it does not say Newcastle, it says Britain.

**Conrad Bird:** It is important. How do people overseas see us? We are trying to sell Britain against France, the USA, and Germany. These are our competitors, and to attract them to this country and to aspects of this country we have to try to present a strong, compelling, unified image that can draw them in to come to this country. We reflect education in the north-east, business in Wales, the countryside in Wales, and our Thomas Heatherwick-designed Routemaster bus, which is branded Great Britain and Northern Ireland, is going around the world at the moment reflecting the best that Britain has to offer. We do try to reflect and represent all the strengths that Britain has in all dimensions across this area.

Having said that, we are not claiming to represent all of Britain in its entirety, because we are trying to promote the strengths of Britain in order to gain an economic return on that, so we are trying to work with messages and images that we know from research will be the
most powerful and that will convert our audiences to come and to invest, visit or study in the UK.

Equally, there is a problem of capacity. If we had a bigger team, there would be thousands of Great British images out there. There is so much. The story has not been told yet. It is an 18 month-old campaign. We have a long way to go, and we have hundreds and thousands of stories that we have not told yet that we intend to tell over time. It is simply a matter of time and capacity rather than intent.


Alex Aiken: We hear what you say, but I will seek to reassure you. I have just noted here that part of our new Exporting is GREAT campaign highlights how we are building success from Durham to Dubai. That is one example of how we recognise that it is a UK campaign, but fundamentally it is aimed at overseas audiences, and we need to get that core message across because of the competition that is out there.

Q327 Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: How does DfID fit into that? The purpose of DfID is not to make an economic return for the UK, nor, in that sense, to enhance our reputation. The purpose of DfID is to help the poor overseas.

Conrad Bird: That is its purpose but there are certain images – not many that they have used – on reputation to talk about British companies and organisations that have done amazing things to assist the poor overseas. It sometimes uses those as placards or posters in its offices around the world.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: You mean that you are promoting individual companies’ corporate social responsibility actions. Is that a good idea? Is it harmful for the company? Must you particularise between one company and another company? Surely that is not the right way for your campaign to go.

Conrad Bird: I think we have used a couple of examples for DfID where we are talking about, for instance, an innovative designer of wheelchairs. It made special, robust wheelchairs that were cheap, low cost and robust for getting over poor terrain for disabled people overseas. That was a way of showcasing a small company that was doing great good. We were happy for that to be used.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: So that is not DfID, that is a company that is making a profit, which is perfectly accurate, and why not?

Conrad Bird: But DfID used the message in its offices throughout the world.

Alex Aiken: It was supported through the UK Government by the humanitarian innovation fund on that basis. I was at DfID on Friday, and it recognises that it has a role in the GREAT campaign, although inevitably its main focus is elsewhere.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: But is it not a role in which DfID is therefore using the funding given to the poor to promote the work of DfID.

Alex Aiken: No, I do not think that that is right. It is absolutely focused, as you said, on its main objective, which is to help minimise and where possible end extreme poverty.

Q328 Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: I have two very quick questions. Much to my surprise, you have not mentioned, at least I have not heard you mention, the Diamond Jubilee and the Royal Family. Why?

Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top: He mentioned it at the very beginning.
Conrad Bird: I am happy to mention that.

Alex Aiken: The Royal Family are important.

Conrad Bird: The Royal Family have been very helpful in assisting this campaign, not just through the Diamond Jubilee. Prince Harry attended an event we held in Rio, up Sugar Loaf Mountain, to help support the campaign when we launched it in Brazil. It was very powerful indeed.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Maybe I was not listening properly. Lastly, if this Committee comes out with recommendations for reorienting the campaign, are you prepared to look at them?

Alex Aiken: Absolutely, and Conrad would and he ultimately reports to me. He does an excellent job. This Committee’s work is important to us. Soft power is important to us. I have an interest in cross-government, and in preparation for this hearing I talked to my colleagues at DfID and the Foreign Office and so on. I say, “This is an interesting area. What are we doing?”. I was not intimately aware of the concepts around soft power. I know a little more about it now, although not as much as you, and the Foreign Office idea of smart power. You have my assurance as the head of government communications that we would respond. It will be debated at the directors of communications’ meetings and in the groups that we have for these areas. This campaign is young, organic and growing, but we need the benefit of all citizens and Peers of the realm in order to make it successful. If there is an area in which you say, “Look, you need to think again”; we will absolutely think again.

Conrad Bird: That is the magic bullet.

The Chairman: There we are that is part of our homework and task for the future. Gentlemen, we have kept you longer than I had planned but it has been extremely interesting. You have robustly answered many, many questions. Some of us who are really long in the tooth can remember the post-war campaign, “All that’s best in Britain”—you may remember that—with a picture of a Standard Vanguard. Shortly after that, I am afraid, the British motor industry virtually disappeared, although now it has come back. Shortly after that we had problems outwith the control of government, not entirely unlike the groundnut scheme and other things that did not help our reputation. But this time we must ride over the difficulties. You are obviously putting determined efforts into doing that and displaying an attractive and persuasive image of this country. We thank you for what you are doing and for coming to see us, and we are grateful for the information you have given us. Thank you very much.

Conrad Bird: Thank you very much.