

MINUTES OF WILTON PARK ADVISORY COUNCIL (WPAC) SUMMER MEETING

THURSDAY 5 JULY 2007 AT WISTON HOUSE

Present:

WILTON PARK ADVISORY COUNCIL:

Dr Farhan Nizami (Chair)	Director, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies
Dr David Bryer	Chair of Oxfam International and Trustee of Save the Children
Dr Ray Cunningham	Director, Anglo-German Foundation for the Study of Industrial Society
Mr Michael Leigh	Director-General, Enlargement, European Commission
Sir Michael Quinlan	Former Director, The Ditchley Foundation
Lord Skidelsky	Professor of Political Economy, Warwick University
Prof Philippe J Sands	Professor of Law, Director of Centre on International Courts
Sir Stephen Wall	Hill & Knowlton
Professor Myles Wickstead	Visiting Professor (International Relations), Open University

FCO

Neil Kenward	Deputy Head of Policy Planning Staff
Jolyon Welsh	Public Diplomacy Group

WILTON PARK

Donald Lamont	Chief Executive
Adela Gooch	Programme Director
Robin Hart	Programme Director
Isobelle Jaques	Programme Director
Julia Purcell	Programme Director
Mark Smith	Programme Director
Lisa Brewer	PA/Chief Executive (note-taker)

Apologies

Apologies were received from Sir Rodric Braithwaite, Ms Rachel Briggs, Mr Robin Niblett, Sir Patrick Cormack, Mr Nik Gowing, Mr Martin Davidson, Mr David Heath, Mr Janusz Heath, Ms Mary Jo Jacobi, Mr Reijo Kemppinen, Prof Anand Menon, Rt Hon Baroness Quin, Mr Rupert Robson, Prof Shamit Saggarr and Mr Andrew Vickerman

ACTION POINTS

Mr Lamont to address the points raised in discussion, as summarized by the Chairman, and report to the next meeting of the Council.

Mr Lamont to report to the next meeting of the Advisory Council on discussion in the Sub-Committee on the Business Plan.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the new Chief Executive, Donald Lamont, and Lisa Brewer as note-taker.

Item 1: Minutes of the last meeting and Matters Arising

1. The minutes of the last meeting were approved by the Council.

Item 2: Chief Executive's Report

Item 3: Branding and Profile of Wilton Park

2. The Chair suggested that these two items be combined as many issues would be relevant to both.

3. The Chair invited Mr Lamont to give an overview on his report and thanked in particular the Programme Directors at WP for their hard work throughout the difficult circumstances of last year.

4. Mr Lamont agreed that the PDs were at the core of what Wilton Park does and said he was working with to move WP forward. He looked forward to discussing with members how to have the most productive relationship with the Council. There was a great deal of expertise and knowledge available within the Council and he wanted to explore how to maximise the benefit to WP. Lord Triesman had said that WP should demonstrate effectiveness and should be looking to both short and long term benefits.

5. Mr Lamont reported that he had spent his first five months looking at how WP operates and expects now to prepare a Business Plan to define such items as its purpose, quality of events, how to attract the highest level of opinion-formers and funding. Quality is the essential key to gaining funding from other sources as well as from the FCO. And in pursuing a high profile, WP should take care to preserve the non-attributable character of its discussions, which lay at the core of its attraction as a forum for dialogue.

6. Mr Lamont said there was a good relationship with the FCO. It was encouraging that the new Foreign Secretary visited WP twice last year and has expressed satisfaction at his visits. His comment that he wanted a "listening diplomacy" pointed at an important role for Wilton Park. The corporate sector and overseas involvement needs to be expanded to increase funding.

7. The Chair suggested that comments on the Report be taken first, followed by other issues raised by Mr Lamont. The following points arose in discussion:

- JW confirmed that there will be some brutal cuts ahead at the FCO in funding/staffing. However, he confirmed that the new Foreign Secretary wants the FCO to be listening and to reach out and engage with others. Diplomats must be meeting and engaging with the foreign community and its representatives. Renewal of the WP lease reinforces that the FCO feel WP is an important institution. Whilst last year's target was met, it is now time to move forward. He agreed with the comments Mr Lamont made that it is important to review the Council.
- Short term programming - is there unease in the FCO as to whether WP is agile enough to react short term, ie, is there any merit in leaving gaps in the programme to slot in conferences which crop up at short notice? Mr Lamont warned that blank slots will tend not to be at the right time, however, there is generally sufficient flexibility to accommodate such requests. There is a requirement to plan ahead to utilise the facilities as much as possible. If WP were to obtain longer term commitments to funding over say a three year period, it would give better financial predictability.

- Mr Welsh agreed that the FCO should be thinking of using WP for short term conferences which arise, as should all departments dealing with foreign policy in Whitehall. Mr Lamont confirmed that WP is working with OGDs as with the FCO, to encourage use of Wilton Park's facilities and funding for conferences.

- Whilst the range of conferences held is very broad, it was suggested that feedback can be brief and outcomes can be lost. Perhaps there could be a keynote speaker who would speak "on the record". Summaries could be circulated electronically to Council members several times a year to keep everyone abreast of WP events. There was general agreement that it would be useful for Wilton Park to issue regular summaries with a hyperlink to the full conference report.

- It was agreed that reports will be posted on the website and emailed to Council members.
- Sponsors DO require some form of output from events and this would be more attractive to potential sponsors.

- Perhaps there could be one day events for those who cannot afford three or four days to attend longer conferences?

- Whilst the FCO have responsibility for WP, the WP agenda is broader than the FCO and there should be a relationship with DFID as well as the FCO.

- As many members of the Council only attend one of the two meetings per year, would it perhaps be useful to have some smaller group meetings in between? It was felt that different groups could develop varying subjects, working in the background with Programme Directors.

- Mr Lamont noted that the relationship with Policy Planners needs to be developed in parallel with the relationship with Public Diplomacy Group.

- There was a comment that some suggestions for inclusion in the 2008 calendar have not been taken into account. Mr Lamont advised that WP had, of course, to make its own judgement, in light of input from several sources, but he was keen to consider how best to capture Council members' suggestions in the planning process.

- Overall, Council members affirmed that they were available and keen to assist and they encouraged WP to take advantage of this.

- Mr Lamont reported that the earlier response to financial pressures on WP had been to increase the number of conferences. This did not work and put huge pressure on the staff. Fewer conferences last year actually resulted in a rather more successful financial outcome. During this time lack of consistency in organising a conference arose and this still needs to be addressed, although results show that this in itself did not affect results for last year.

- Brainstorming sessions have been held covering output and use of IT.

- In summary, the Chair felt that four main points came from the discussion:

1. What is the purpose and mission of Wilton Park?
2. What should the composition and role of the Council be?
3. How agile can Wilton Park be in programme planning?
4. What should the output should be, and how should it be disseminated?

8. Addressing the branding issue, Mr Lamont said he had gone to his first meeting of the Branding Sub-Committee intending to explain his early impressions of Wilton Park and listen to the Sub-Committee's views on branding. However, the Sub-Committee were clearly deeply frustrated that he had nothing to say on a subject which had been under discussion for so long.

9. The bland tone of the draft minutes had then given the impression that the sense of frustration was being ignored. In discussion with members of the Sub-Committee, Mr Lamont felt he had established common ground. He had suggested the creation, subject to the views of the wider Council membership, of a Sub-Committee to advise on the Business Plan which Wilton Park needed to develop. Members of the Council, including members of the Branding Sub-Committee, could make an important contribution to elements of that Plan. Members of the Sub-Committee had welcomed this suggestion and were content that the Chief Executive chair it. Against that background, the draft minutes of the Sub-Committee could be approved with the elimination of "important" in paragraph 1.

10. The Chairman welcomed the progress that had been made. In response to his invitation to other members of the Council to contribute to the work of the new Sub-Committee, Sir Michael Quinlan acquiesced. The Chairman concluded that it was agreed that a Sub-Committee of the Council should be created, under the Chairmanship of the Chief Executive, to address elements of a Business Plan for Wilton Park and to report back to the Council. It was understood that the whole of the Business Plan would properly be the concern of the Departmental Board.

Item 4: Forward look from the FCO

11. Dr Nizami welcomed Neil Kenward, Deputy Head of Policy Planning Staff, who conveyed apologies from James Kariuki and then gave a brief presentation. He confirmed that this was an exciting time in the department with a dynamic new Foreign Secretary. Despite the change in Government, the overall approach to foreign policy was likely to be characterised more by continuity than change, ie, policy will continue to be progressive, multi-lateralist and activist. He touched on some key issues such as Darfur, the Middle East peace process and counter-proliferation.

- The new Foreign Secretary, prior to his appointment, had maintained an interest in foreign affairs and read widely, so is well prepared for his new role. He has much energy, intellect, strategic thinking and will encourage the FCO staff to embrace these qualities. He is also a listener.
- Mr Kenward reiterated the comments from Mr Welsh about the forthcoming changes and tight resource environment facing the FCO.
- The Capability Review reported areas where the FCO needs to be improved, and this will be taken as an opportunity to develop.

12. Members of the Council wondered whether the Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister would be told by the FCO about the UK's image overseas. The perception of the UK in different countries, it was suggested, is diverse but largely is still well respected. It is generally accepted that the Prime Minister will maintain close links with the USA.

- Dr Nizami asked about how the UK would engage with Islamic countries and felt that this would be an extremely important area for consideration going forward.
- Mr Lamont stated that close interaction with Policy Planners would be important in moving Wilton Park forward.

Item 5: Wilton Park Draft Calendar for 2008

13. Mr Lamont sought comments on the Draft Calendar for 2008. Some ideas which had been raised by the Council might not make it into the calendar because of competing ideas from participants and financial considerations. It is historically produced after an intense period of pressure at the end of the first quarter. It is important that PDs have ownership in order to be able to go out and obtain sponsorship. If the programme aligns itself too obviously to FCO priorities, it could become of less interest to potential international participants. Inevitably, he suggested, there were some gaps in the programme, notably India and the Middle East.

14. The Chairman asked for suggestions as to possible conference themes and the following were made:

Neil Kenward

- Global futures in India, not just China
- Georgia, Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq

Sir Michael Quinlan

- Nuclear Zero and how to get there
- NATO - out-of area role (after Afghanistan)
- Ethics for just war

Prof Philippe Sands

- Implementation/ratification of Reform Treaty
- US policies
- Independence for Kosovo
- Annual Wilton Park Lecture (maybe held in London)

Michael Leigh

- NATO - various topics could be covered
- Quality of democracy

Dr Ray Cunningham

- Happiness agenda for citizens, covering security, health and education
- Global and domestic governments' view of trends and challenges
- Quality of democracy in new EU states
- Within financial markets - trans-national market flows
- Sustainable development - the zero waste future and its international dimension

Dr David Bryer

- This process brings to the fore the question raised about "what is the Council trying to achieve?".
- Does inequality matter - it is a major driver for civil conflict
- Environmental collapse
- Yemen - Conservatism vs fundamentalist Islam

Myles Wickstead

- Felt that the balance in the draft as it stands is quite reasonable
- China - a developing country
- Role of sport/culture in diplomacy

Lord Skidelsky

- Structure of states - borders, conflicts
- Anti ballistic missile system
- EU Reform Treaty and its implications
- Models of democracy
- Energy as an instrument of foreign policy - implication of large natural resources on domestic policies
- Central/Latin America
- Central Asia republics - what role will they play?

Sir Stephen Wall

- Also mentioned that some of the previously raised subjects are not in the current draft
- Sarkozy's impact on French policy
- US Administration

Dr Farhan Nizami

- Agreed that a record/chart of these suggestions, approached by theme/region, which can be used to compare last year with previous year, would be an excellent idea
- Egypt
- Home and foreign policy

- Cultural diplomacy
- Gulf - Saudi Arabia
- Pakistan/Afghanistan - stability and impact of what might happen

15. Mr Lamont thanked everyone for their comments which he said confirmed to him that we want to develop a structure with programmes over a three year period. The meeting had been very constructive and had provided much food for thought about how to develop the relationship between the Council, individual members and Wilton Park.

Item 7: AOB

16. Nothing raised.

Item 8: Date of the next meeting

17. Mr Lamont and the Chairman to consult about the timing of the next meeting.

17 July 2007