

The Four Corners

The DFID Alumni Association newsletter

Issue 56:

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Pauline Hayes



The events in Afghanistan during August were devastating and, from a personal perspective, heart breaking (I was head of the country office, then acting regional director 2010-2015). So many Afghans - and people from all over the world - have worked so hard over the last two decades to help the country stand on its own feet. Steady progress was being made - but the way in which key institutions collapsed so quickly has reinforced how fragile so many states are, especially those affected by conflict. Looking back, a longstanding failure on all sides to reach a political settlement lies at the root of why we are where we are now.

Since 2016 I have been a trustee with the international NGO Afghanaid which has been working in Afghanistan for almost 40 years. The focus so far has been on ensuring the safety of all staff, then looking at ways in which work can continue, as well as securing continued donor funding. Afghanistan has long been one of the poorest countries in the world and is highly aid dependent. Unless aid continues to flow then the country risks collapse, with tens of thousands of people trying to cross the borders, posing major implications for regional stability.

However, the current situation presents huge political and practical challenges for donors. Even emergency humanitarian support presents major difficulties in terms of access, safety and financial flows (the banking system is still suspended), to enable NGOs and key government agencies to deliver. With winter looming fast as well, the international community urgently needs to come together to agree a strategy to avert an economic and humanitarian crisis – and this will require some level of engagement with the Taliban authorities. Hopefully discussions at the forthcoming IMF/World Bank annual meetings will lead to a realistic plan.

As you know, many current and former HMG staff who have worked in Afghanistan have been doing their bit to help current and former British Embassy staff and their families who have been evacuated to the UK – as well as lobbying for those who could not get out in time to exit safely and whose lives remain in danger. A crowdfunding appeal raised £40,000 in less than one week – a big thank you to everyone in the Alumni network who contributed. This will provide much needed short-term support to staff who are scattered around the UK. Many are in hotels, relieved to be safe but inevitably shocked at how their lives have been upturned over the last two months.

While some UK local government authorities and refugee NGOs have been quick off the mark to provide help with housing and schools, others were already overstretched. The degree of local support really is a postcode lottery so any additional help that we can provide for former Afghan colleagues is much appreciated. I am in touch with FCDO on how the Alumni network might support FCDO evacuees via a buddy scheme and will continue to keep you informed. Thank you to those who have already offered help.

This edition of Four Corners contains the usual blend of articles and we are grateful as ever to everyone who contributed. Former DFID Secretary of State Andrew Mitchell describes his unwavering efforts to restore the 0.7 GNI target and re-establish international development as a strategic priority for the government. Andrew's memoirs – *Beyond A Fringe* - will be published on 12 October and the book includes chapters on his time with DFID. Hope you will buy it – there is a link in his article on page 2. Meanwhile, Jim Drummond's latest update on FCDO developments describes an organisation that still seems to be struggling.

On a more positive note, several former SAIC colleagues have contributed to this edition – please keep them coming – and Pam Jenkins has been busy organising various events, a good sign of things gradually returning to normal in the UK. We are also delighted to welcome all our new members.

Pauline



Beyond a Fringe: Tales of a Reformed Establishment Lackey

Andrew Mitchell MP

The Government's decision to cut foreign aid from 0.7% to 0.5% of GNI is a disaster. Looking around the world, it is not difficult to see why. Humanitarian catastrophes abound in Yemen and Ethiopia. The Taliban's resurgence threatens a renewed reign of terror and oppression in Afghanistan. The Covid pandemic continues to ravage fragile health systems across the developing world. But it is not only the impact of these cuts on the world's most vulnerable people that is of grave concern. The contradictions between the global Britain our country is promoting and the one we are fashioning are now laying bare our limits on the world stage. That is deeply worrying. The UK has over decades demonstrated exemplary international leadership on development – leadership that generated respect and influence around the world.

In my new book '*Beyond a Fringe: Tales of a Reformed Establishment Lackey*', I proudly reflect on DFID's achievements since the department was first created. During my tenure as DFID Secretary of State, I was privileged to work alongside a stellar team of civil servants – in my opinion the best in Whitehall. I hope parts of the book will amuse you, but I also try to convey some serious messages about international development. There is a link to it here: <https://bit.ly/3nB4wr0>

DFID oversaw life-saving, economy-building and society-changing programmes, the fruits of which are being reaped today. But beyond the inherent value of helping people transform their lives, there was a palpable sense that the UK mattered. Our actions elevated our standing in the developing world. Soft power was our superpower.

Successive governments have understood the strategically interlinking nature of soft power. More effective and cheaper than traditional hard power, foreign aid is a long-term investment that benefits both giver and receiver. We know, for example, that empowering women through girls' education and family planning engenders greater equality, which feeds into stable and more prosperous societies. In turn, stability and prosperity in one part of the world help create a safer and more secure UK.

The flipside is that where one programme suffers, others will fail too. In Afghanistan, the threat to girls' education as a result of the Taliban's return to power will undermine many other achievements of the past 20 years. The concomitant challenges of instability and mass migration will inevitably lay themselves at our door. From a geopolitical perspective, the success or failure of our decisions determine the strength or weakness of our influence. With our reputation now suffering, our diplomatic clout will fade.

The tainting of the UK's outstanding record and reputation on soft power is just one of the reasons I voted against the government's decision to slash aid in July. Believe me, voting against one's own party is not something to be taken lightly. It is only the third time in my career that I have done so. But it is my job as a parliamentarian to stand up on issues that matter. And this issue matters profoundly.

The aid cuts break a manifesto promise to the world's poorest. In the context of the global pandemic, we are in effect turning our backs on the people who most need our help at a time when they most need it. In conflict zones such as Yemen, the world's worst humanitarian crisis, hundreds of thousands of children are being condemned to starvation. Not only will it have an enormous impact on people's lives and prospects, but these vulnerable societies may also become trapped in unholy alliances with unscrupulous powers. This is starkly evident in Africa, where China has secured its foothold despite the UK's historical ties and friendship with the continent.

The argument that the decision was borne out of economic necessity does not stand up to scrutiny, especially when considering that 6 members of the G7 are either honouring or exceeding their own pledges. Previous economic setbacks never stopped us from keeping our promises. Yet current challenges have become excuses. What's more, the economic tests set out by the government as a precondition to reinstating the 0.7 are a fiscal trap, since it is nigh on impossible to envisage our economy meeting the criteria in the next two decades or more. What does the future hold? I am an optimist: those of us in Parliament who are committed to development will be keeping up the pressure on the government to expand its purse as much as possible within current constraints.

However, the real change will have to come from the ground up. Ultimately the way to an MP's mind is through constituents' hearts. Herein lies the challenge. The UK has a wonderfully generous and charitable public who don't hesitate to support emergency appeals. On the other hand there is a lot of scepticism around overseas aid. So the key question is how do we turn a momentary public surge of charity into a sustained commitment on foreign aid which recognises its strategic, national as well as its moral value. This will be an ongoing effort which I personally will be very much committed to. Because while the parliamentary battle may be over, the case for promoting a big-hearted Britain must go on.



Cabinet Reshuffle

On 15 September [Elizabeth Truss](#), MP for South West Norfolk, replaced Dominic Raab MP as Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs.

Ms Truss, an economist and management accountant, was Chief Secretary to the Treasury from 2017 to 2019 and Secretary of State for International Trade from 2019 to 2021. She is also (since 2019) Minister for Women and Equalities.

See page 4 for other Ministerial appointments at FCDO.

Links to news and comment

In an article for Devex, Will Worley commented on the appointment of the new Foreign Secretary. <https://www.devex.com/news/liz-truss-named-uk-foreign-secretary-overseeing-reduced-aid-budget-101620>

Stephanie Draper, Chief Executive of BOND also commented on the appointment: <https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2021/09/liz-truss-replaces-dominic-raab-as-secretary-of-state-for-foreign-commonwealth-and?s=03>

The Times reported that Ms Truss's ambition is "economic diplomacy" she is understood to want to make Britain's foreign policy more closely aligned with its trading interests, using the power of the diplomatic service and the aid budget to boost exports: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/trade-champion-liz-truss-out-to-show-brex-it-can-work-as-foreign-secretary-gzrtbllh0>

Devex reported that ICAI's new framework agreement with FCDO has been delayed by six months, and that ICAI staff have not been offered security vetting that would allow them to scrutinise FCDO documents: <https://www.devex.com/news/uk-aid-watchdog-s-delayed-mandate-reveals-tensions-with-fcdo-101586>

This BBC account by their Kabul correspondent sums up well the key achievements of the last 20 years in Afghanistan - but also Afghans' fears and uncertainties about the future. *Afghanistan: What has changed in 20 years* - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-58505044>

This is the current FCDO advice on Afghanistan: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/afghanistan>

FCDO: latest developments

Jim Drummond

It has been a busy three months at the FCDO. The September government reshuffle brought wholesale change with the majority of FCDO ministers new to the Department, including a new Secretary of State, Liz Truss. There is still no single minister responsible for international development and there have been no significant policy pronouncements on international development since the reshuffle.

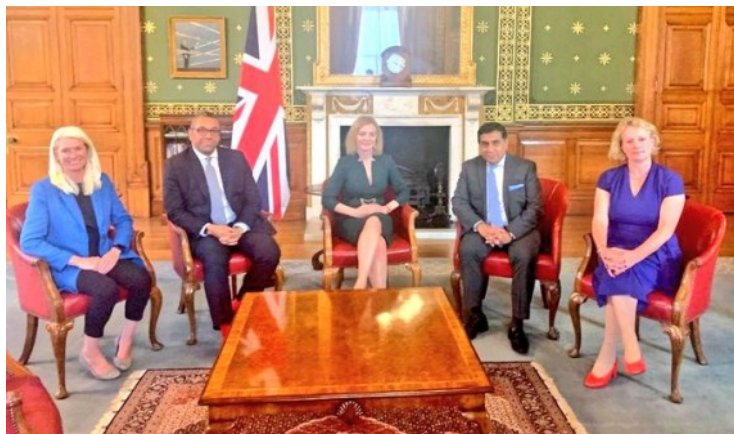
Back in July, as Andrew Mitchell reports in his article, the government won a vote on the reduction of the aid budget from 0.7% of GNI to 0.5% and by a sufficient margin to give it confidence that, if it had to, it could amend the International Development Act, which still enshrines the 0.7%. For example, were the courts to rule the cut illegal. The government argues that it will restore the cut when the economy allows, but it is, of course, unclear when that might be.

The [FCDO Annual Report](#) has issued. This is the first comprehensive document released on the extent of the cuts – the detail is to be found in an annex. It makes sobering reading. Here are a few examples. Poor, Commonwealth but of limited strategic importance, Malawi's budget is cut from £52m to £25m in a year; Bangladesh's from £189m to £72m; the central humanitarian budget from £137 to £41m. Research and evidence budgets face similar cuts. But new programmes start in a few middle-income countries e.g. in Latin America. A link to the Guardian's take is [here](#).

Since August, FCDO has had its work cut out on Afghanistan. Around 500 staff were redeployed to the Afghan Crisis Unit to help to arrange evacuations (15,000 so far), while the Global Britain agenda has been dominated by the new defence pact with the US and Australia centred on China's role in SE Asia and where submarines are made.

Of course, it is a huge challenge to merge the systems of two different departments from a standing start and not surprising that there is a lot left to do. An [FDA survey](#) suggests that only 7.5% of senior staff consider the merger a success for international development. Over 200 former DFID staff have left FCDO, as has the (FCO) Director General responsible for the transition. The post has recently been filled, although at Director level.

Time will tell whether a new set of ministers will resolve these issues or whether the problems are structural, caused by merging so many, now overloaded, senior roles.



The new Secretary of State at the FCDO Liz Truss MP (centre) with (left to right) Vicky Ford MP, James Cleverley MP, Lord Ahmad and Amanda Milling MP

New FCDO Ministers

Amanda Milling, MP for Cannock Chase, has been appointed Minister of State at the FCDO and Minister for Asia. She was Conservative Party Chairman in 2020 to 2021, and before that, Deputy Chief Whip. Before becoming an MP, she worked in market research.

Vicky Ford, MP for Chelmsford, has been appointed Parliamentary Undersecretary of State at the FCDO and Minister for Africa. She was Minister for Children and Families in 2020 to 2021. She was a MEP in 2009 to 2017. She previously worked for JPMorgan Chase and Bear Stearns as a banker.

Baroness Deborah Stedman-Scott has been appointed Parliamentary Undersecretary of State at the FCDO and Minister for Women. She was a Parliamentary Undersecretary of State at the Department for Work and Pensions in 2019 to 2021, and a Government Whip from 2017 to 2019. She previously led Tomorrow's People Trust, a charity for unemployed people, from 2005 to 2015.

James Cleverley MP remains Minister for the Middle East and North Africa. Lord Goldsmith remains Minister for the Pacific and the Environment. Lord Ahmad remains Minister for South Asia and the Commonwealth.

Wendy Morton MP continues as Minister for the European Neighbourhood and the Americas. Kemi Badenoch MP, Minister of State for Equalities in the FCDO Government Equalities Office, is now also Minister of State at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Of the previous FCDO Ministerial team, Secretary of State Dominic Raab MP has been appointed Deputy Prime Minister, Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor. Nigel Adams MP, Minister for Asia since 2020, has been appointed a Government Whip. James Duddridge MP, Minister for Africa since 2020, is no longer a minister.

New Chief Executive for FCDO Services

Mike Astell has been appointed the new CEO of [FCDO Services](#), the trading arm of the FCDO. Mike has over 25 years of leadership experience, developing businesses providing infrastructure and services in complex, international environments for large multinational corporates including Alstom, Shell and Centrica.

A Special Birthday

It was Kathy Marshall's birthday recently.

Kathy was the founding Secretary of the DFID Alumni Association, and is still a member of your Committee.

She deserves a long service medal for her contribution.



Delhi Friends Reunited – Pauline, Aruna, Nisha and Felix

One of the unanticipated pleasures of being chair of the Alumni has been linking up again with former colleagues, whether by email, Zoom or in person – and hearing about what they have been doing since we worked together.

Over the last year three Indian colleagues got in touch. Two of them – Aruna Bagchee and Nisha Jacob – were part of the governance advisory team in DFID India (DFIDI) that I worked in and led between 2000-2003. Aruna joined DFIDI as a Governance Adviser following a distinguished career with the Indian Administrative Service (IAS). She taught me so much about Indian political dynamics and how to coax the Indian government machine towards reform. Nisha was the young, unsung hero of the team thanks to her terrific administrative and organisational skills, keeping the rest of us in line. The third colleague, Felix Anton, was a member of the Andhra Pradesh programme team, always helpful and very patient with my many project queries.

It was a thrill to meet Aruna again this summer after so many years when she and her husband Sandeep visited the UK via the USA. We spent the day reminiscing and discussing the political situation in our countries (some things never change!). This led me to encourage Aruna, Nisha and Felix to contribute a joint item for the newsletter on their times with DFIDI and beyond – their reflections are below.

Aruna Bagchee

I joined DFIDI as a Governance Adviser in late 2002 and found it a great learning experience. The post gave me a good insight into the innovative ways DFID was using to show “best practices” from one country to another, and from one state or province within the country to another. There was great interest among Indian civil servants to learn more about “success” stories from another developing country, for example Bangladesh’s health care and Grameen Bank experience. Similarly, DFIDI would bring officers from “successful” states to speak about budget management and health or education programme innovations to the relatively lagging ones that DFID had selected as its focus areas at the time

In 2006 I was promoted to Senior Governance Adviser and had to make a choice: whether to continue on secondment to DFIDI or return to the Government of India to be eligible for promotion to Secretary level.



I opted to take early retirement from the IAS and joined DFIDI as a permanent staff member. Later that year I moved to Indonesia, now on secondment from DFIDI, to join a multi-donor programme called the Decentralisation Support Facility (DSF). The DSF was largely initiated and funded by DFID, but managed by the World Bank. At the time, a number of donors (including Canada, Germany, USA and Australia) supported the Indonesian government in different sectors. The idea was to bring better cohesion to donor approaches, as well as more funds to the table, by working with the Government of Indonesia in a more coordinated way to help strengthen decentralisation across the country. Donor synergies would be created by coordinating efforts through a multi-donor funded programme aimed at strengthening decentralised education, health and other key sectors.

The DSF was a great learning experience for me in terms of deepening my understanding of the politics of donor agencies - rivalries, coordination, leadership. This assignment also widened my perspective even further - for I was working in a (then) highly experimental, multi-donor partnership. After the secondment I returned to India and decided to retire. Since then I have been enjoying life in Pune and keeping in touch with friends and family who are now scattered around the world. This has been particularly challenging during the pandemic but it was lovely to see so many of them again this year - the various travel rules and restrictions were very wearing at times but did not deter us!

Nisha Jacob

DFIDI was the first serious start to my professional career in the development sector and I could not be more thankful for such a wonderful beginning to my professional life with dedicated and extremely professional national and international colleagues. Pauline was my first boss in DFIDI.

Leaving DFIDI in October 2009 was a big turning point in my life as I had spent nine glorious years there and was fortunate to have many learning and development opportunities. It’s a different feeling now, one filled with emotions and nostalgia, when I talk of my life with DFIDI.



Nisha (right) and her daughter Lorraine

After DFIDI, I joined the UN World Food Programme (WFP) India. This was my first UN experience and it's been almost 11 years now with the WFP. Over these years I have handled and supported a variety of portfolios – programme, communications, procurement, and currently HR, along with providing executive support to the senior management.

My personal world includes my husband and my daughter, Lorraine. In fact, the name I chose for my daughter also has a British history for me. The British High Commissioner's Secretary (when I was working in DFIDI) was called Lorraine. I fell in love with the name and remember telling her that if I had a daughter this would be the name I would give her - and still remember how thrilled she was to hear that I actually did it!

Besides my 9 to 6 job, I enjoy working out – yoga, tai chi and daily walks keep my stress levels balanced. I also enjoy sketching and love to keep exploring different parts of the world with my travels. I got in touch with Pauline after so many years and felt so happy to hear from her again. I am really thankful for this opportunity to share a few words for this article.

To all my DFIDI colleagues and friends – A BIG HELLO! Stay safe and keep well!

Felix Anton

I fondly remember my association with DFIDI - it was called BDCOD if I recall correctly when I joined – and

during my nine and half years stay that was not the only change to remember. I joined the Education Team way back in 1998 and their office was situated in the Polish Embassy. This was my second job, the first being with the Namibian High Commission. The first cultural shock was to address everyone by their first name. It may sound not too hard for many but trust me, if you are used to calling someone Sir, Ma'am, or Your Excellency then it is way too hard to call someone by their first name including the head of the organisation.

Along with the changes of Heads of DFIDI, the biggest organisational change was moving from 'Sectors' to 'States' team structures. I initially joined the Andhra Pradesh Team but was one of the lucky few who worked for other state teams as well – Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. I later managed projects across even more states, for example in West Bengal and Karnataka. I had the opportunity to work with Pauline briefly and remember her wonderful smile.

The highlights of my career would be the two development attachments, first with the Governance Group in DFID South Africa in 2001, and secondly in 2006 with the Corporate Reporting Group in East Kilbride. Some of my work there focused on changing how DFID evaluated its projects globally. Also, at one stage DFIDI had a vision statement contest and I was glad to be one of the three winners whose suggestions were 'crafted' to come out with the final vision statement, which I think was 'Partnering India to see, seek and achieve a safe and just future for all'.

Since leaving DFID I have moved on from generic programme management to become a procurement specialist. However, I continued my association with the UK through my work with OXFAM for about a year and the British Council for about four years. I also had a brief stint with consulting when I joined Grant Thornton India (its HQ is in the UK). Currently I am working with the Indian Government as a Senior Procurement Expert on one of their largest development programmes: the 'National Rural Livelihoods Programme', funded by the World Bank.



Outside work I am glad to be associated with my church which keeps me sane! I lead the worship and play the keyboard, guitar and the drums (not all at the same time though!). I enjoy my work with the youth at the Church where the 'development' work continues, though a bit more 'spiritual' which actually is more satisfying.

I am grateful to Pauline for giving me this opportunity - just writing these paragraphs was an emotional journey. Thank you and God Bless you all!

Welcome and Farewell

Welcome

We are very pleased to have welcomed the following new members to the Association:

- Geoff Hope
- Christa Rottensteiner
- Richard Boulter
- Cate Turton
- Susan Loughhead

Farewell

We bid a sad farewell to Ron Kemp, former Deputy Chief Natural Resources Adviser, who passed away recently. Ron's funeral was held on 4 October in Warlingham. Ron wrote a book of memoirs: "[As far as I remember](#)" by Ronald Hugh Kemp.

Peter Wood, Alumni member and another wonderful forester, also passed away on 4 October peacefully at Green Gates Care home Oxford.

Brian Hammond, ex-Senior Statistician, also passed away earlier this year.

Out of London groups and events

We have a broad geographical spread of members from across the world and we believe there are many informal social and professional groups of ex-DFID members who meet up from time to time and that is fabulous. We would love to hear from you and to feature your group in a future edition of Four Corners.

Also, Graham MacKenzie, Alumni member based in Scotland, has suggested that it would be good to arrange an event in that region. If anyone is interested in getting involved, please email Graham at graham888619@hotmail.com or Pam Jenkins.

Ron Kemp and Brian Hammond

Richard Manning, Alumni member and former DFID Director General said:

Ron and Brian were two colleagues for whom I had huge respect.

Ron was a highly professional forester who could and did explain technical issues with superb clarity, and who was very well aware of the many complex issues around maintaining, safeguarding and developing forests and the livelihoods of those living within them. I had the pleasure of going with him to Brazil as one of the countries where a No.10-proposed forestry initiative was to be delivered in the late 1980s, and seeing the ease with which he related to his Brazilian peers, using his evident high professional knowledge as well as his command of Spanish. The forestry initiative was as far as I was aware one of the better examples of using a sectoral initiative within country programmes in a manageable way, and it owed a lot to the guidance of our Forestry advisers, not least Ron.

Brian, as many alumni will know, was not only a very effective Senior Statistician (for the Development Cooperation Directorate of OECD, as well as for DFID/ODA) but also the originator of the first ODA attempt at a useable management information system, and a key figure in developing all aspects of the use of IT (including moves towards greater transparency) over many years. I had the pleasure of working with him both in DFID/ODA and subsequently in OECD, and he was always fully on top of whatever brief he was called on to deliver.

Two colleagues whom many of us will indeed miss.

In memory of Bob Leverington

Pauline has thanked the many Alumni members who contributed to the Afghanistan crowdfunding appeal. We would also like to give a special acknowledgement to Srimeena Leverington, who made a generous donation in memory of her late husband Bob who worked in Afghanistan in 2011. Here is a lovely photographic memory of Bob.



EVENTS

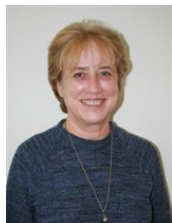


Soho Walking tour

On 21 September, 22 members of the Alumni participated in a walking tour of Vintage 1950s Soho - (Jazz clubs, coffee bars and drinking dens), followed by a buffet and drinks at the Civil Service Club in Whitehall.

Our guide, Barrie Green, was very knowledgeable and the CSC did us proud with a very generous spread of food. Thank you to all those who joined in this enjoyable event and watch this space for future events.





Committee members

Pauline Hayes

Chair



Pam Jenkins

Secretary



John Burton

Treasurer

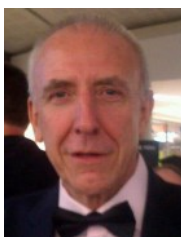


Jim Drummond

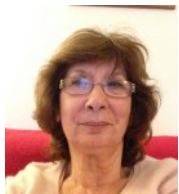
Janet Grimshaw



Mike Hammond



Kathy Marshall



Carol Norman



Marc Taylor



Sasha Zayarna



DIARY

Christmas gathering on 13 December



We are pleased to confirm that plans are progressing well for our Christmas event during the early evening of 13 December, at Admiralty House, next to the DFID building in Whitehall. Pam Jenkins will shortly send members full details of the event with ticket prices. So for now, put the date in your diaries and keep an eye out for Pam's email. She will also be giving members the opportunity to buy tickets to the annual "100 Club" draw which will be held on the night.

Would you like to join a tour of the Royal Mews?

Following the success of the recent Soho walk, we would like to canvass members' interest in another London-based event— a tour of the Royal Mews (equestrian stables) and The Queen's Gallery (art exhibition). Both are within the grounds of Buckingham Palace, have been closed for tours throughout 2021, and will be re-opened in 2022. Please let Pam Jenkins know by 31 October if you are interested. If there are sufficient numbers, we will arrange the event, most likely in early Spring 2022. The price for the combined tour is £23.80, or £21.60 for over 60s. See the Royal Mews website for further details: <https://www.rct.uk/visit/the-royal-mews-buckingham-palace>

CONTACT

This newsletter is produced by DFID's Alumni Secretariat. For any queries, please contact the Editorial Group:

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Editions of The Four Corners from December 2013 are available for anyone - member or not - to download from the Association's web site at www.dfid-alumni.org

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