

1911 Encyclopædia Britannica, Volume 10 — Foreign Office



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FOREIGN OFFICE, that department of the executive of the United Kingdom which is concerned with foreign affairs. The head of the Foreign Office is termed principal secretary of state for foreign affairs and his office dates from 1782. Between that date and the Revolution there had been only two secretaries of state, whose duties were divided by a geographical division of the globe into northern and southern departments. The duties of the secretary of the northern department of Europe comprised dealings with the northern powers of Europe, while the secretary of the southern department of Europe communicated with France, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, Italy, Turkey, and also looked after Irish and colonial business, and carried out the work of the Home Office. In 1782 the duties of these two secretaries were revised, the northern department becoming the Foreign Office. The secretary for foreign affairs is the official agent of the crown in all communications between Great Britain and foreign powers; his intercourse is carried on either through the representatives of foreign states in Great Britain or through representatives of Great Britain abroad. He negotiates all treaties or alliances with foreign states, protects British subjects residing abroad, and demands satisfaction for any injuries they may sustain at the hands of foreigners. He is assisted by two under-secretaries of state (one of them a politician, the other a permanent civil servant), three assistant under-secretaries (civil servants), a librarian, a head of the treaty department and a staff of

clerks. The departments of the Foreign Office are the African, American, commercial and sanitary, consular, eastern (Europe), far eastern, western (Europe), parliamentary, financial, librarian and keeper of the papers, treaties and registry. In the case of important despatches and correspondence, these, with the drafts of answers, are sent first to the permanent under-secretary, then to the prime minister, then to the sovereign and, lastly, are circulated among the members of the cabinet. The salary of the secretary for foreign affairs is £5000 per annum, that of the permanent under-secretary £2000, the parliamentary under-secretary and the first assistant under-secretary, £1500, and the other assistant under-secretaries £1200.

See Anson, *Law and Custom of the Constitution*, part ii.

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