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**Joining the Serving Police CSG Category**

Thank you for your interest in international policing and joining the Serving Police category of the Civilian Stabilisation Group (CSG). The following information is intended to give you a broad overview of what this consists of, and to enable you to consider your suitability.

**Introduction**

The UK Police is a recognised and respected brand. The police service has a long and successful history of assisting other countries to develop their policing and restoring law and order following conflict or social/governmental upheaval.

The challenges and threats to the UK are more globalised than ever; terrorism; international organised crime and mass migration are but a few of the risks that can originate overseas but also have an effect on the UK and its communities. Stabilising countries that are on the precipice can also support UK priorities and security, amongst other objectives.

The use of serving police officers has both external and internal benefits. Developing international working relationships can serve as a foundation for close operational relationships which help to tackle issues upstream before they affect the UK. Deploying officers have the opportunity to develop their skills in an international setting thus bring back valuable skills and experience that improve the quality of UK policing.

**What type of work do deploying officers and staff do?**

The Stabilisation Unit (SU) deploys officers to countries and states that are ‘fragile or conflict-affected’. This means overseas deployments to often unstable, austere or otherwise demanding environments where the risks can be greater than those which officers would expect to experience in conventional UK policing.

Her Majesty’s Government (HMG) supports the promotion of effective international policing by coordinating the provision of support and strategic advice to overseas countries and international organisations. The types of support include:

* Training: e.g. course design and delivery such as public order, community policing or investigations.
* Monitoring and reporting: e.g. physical security and protection, stabilisation and security environment, governance and rule of law, situation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) or human rights.
* Mentoring and advising: e.g. investigations, community policing, organised crime disruption, anti-corruption, counter-terrorism or intelligence.
* Programme and project management: e.g. strategic intelligence, strategic police training, command & control, leadership or professional standards.
* Peace support operations, including: conflict prevention; post-conflict stabilisation and recovery; peace enforcement and peace keeping.
* Security and justice sector training, reform and development activities supporting foreign state police agencies and government authorities.
* The deployment/secondment of police officers and police staff to foreign states and international organisations in order to build relationships and liaison mechanisms which improve police operational capability, both at home and abroad.
* Strategic international engagement in order to share best practice, develop doctrine and provide networking assistance to UK forces and agencies.
* Executive policing (EULEX Kosovo is currently the only mission where the UK contributes to executive policing).

Currently the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCDO), through SU and on behalf of HMG, supports the secondment of UK police officers to a number of European Union Common Security and Defence Policy Missions, the United Nations and various bi-lateral deployments.

**Role Selection for specific SU tasks**

Each multilateral mission advertises their vacancies to Member States. Member States, through their international authority (which for the UK is the FCDO), decide which roles they wish to support based on strategic priorities. All officers are eligible to apply for contracted policing roles, however for secondments that the FCDO routes through SU, only officers in the CSG are eligible to be considered. SU provides the FCDO with suitable candidates from the CSG who match the skill sets for a given role. The multilateral institution will decide which candidate offered by Member States is suited for the vacancy.

The typical process for deployment is that a CSG officer is seconded from their individual home force to the deployment, via SU. The FCDO compensates the force for the salary and relevant expenses of the officer and the duty of care for the individual is held across HMG and the officer’s force.

**Tour Length for specific SU tasks**

The majority of deployments are organised for 12 months. Individual work patterns and periods of leave vary with each deployment. An extension to the deployment may be requested, but must come from the respective deployment authority and be agreed by the respective UK force. SU does provide shorter deployment opportunities from time to time, ranging from a few days to a few weeks or months, but the majority of our undertakings are based around 12 month deployments.

Vacancies are advertised by a variety of organisations and the **terms and conditions and leave periods vary for each**. It is to be expected that the terms and conditions for individuals representing their respective nations will vary internationally. Similarly, some officers will be on inferior terms to those they received in the UK, while others will be better off depending on local agreements.

**Who are we looking for?**

* Each candidate is assessed against the Serving Police CSG category profile which can be found [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591860/CSG_Category_Profiles-O__7.docx).
* We presently recruit serving **Inspector rank and above,** although the skills sets and experience requested by international partners can change subject to the context and we may recruit on that basis.
* **Officers fluent in foreign language are specifically sought, with French, Russian, and Arabic being key languages**. *Flexibility on rank at application may be considered with officers/colleagues fluent in relevant languages or in possession of specialist skills.*

The Stabilisation Unit is committed to having an equal gender balance in its workforce and, to help achieve this, strongly encourage applications from suitably qualified and experienced female applicants.

* The skills and experience of an officer will be considered in the competency and technical assessments, but fundamental to successful deployments is selecting candidates with the skills and resilience to succeed in a deployment.

Officers often deploy into challenging environments where the risk dynamics and other factors are very different to many UK policing experiences. The testimonials below are intended to give a flavour of a deployment; however it cannot be overstated that some deployments are in harsh and austere environments with basic living standards and long working hours or difficult work patterns.

**We need officers who have exceptional qualities and abilities, including:**

**Adaptability** **–** *individuals capable of adjusting to challenging environments and situations unlike anything they may have encountered before, sometimes akin to military conditions.* *In order to maximise their experience and development, officers can be required to display a great deal of adaptability when deployed to international institutions such as the UN.*
**Resilience** **–** *someone who truly can work with minimal support and contact and who can cope with the realities of deploying overseas, often for 12 months or longer.*
**Initiative** **–** *genuine ‘self-starters’ who can adapt to a very different international working environment and deliver.*
**Diplomacy** **–** *officers will always be representing HMG and UK Policing when deployed. SU needs people who always think in these terms and act and behave accordingly.*

A good UK officer, whatever the rank, does not automatically equate to an officer who can adjust to and excel in an international deployment.

**Recruitment and Selection to the CSG**

* Serving officers must have the endorsement of their line manager in order to apply to join the CSG. An open letter from SU to line managers about the importance of candidate suitability for CSG recruitment can be found [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575620/Serving_Police_Supervisor_Letter.docx).
* As stated above, SU presently recruits Inspector rank and above.
* Applications are sent to a CSG Manager to competency sift against the Civil Service Competency Framework. If the application is unsuccessful at this stage, it should still be forwarded to the Serving Police CSG Manager. If they decide the applicant is technically suited for the category, they will provide guidance and advise them to re-submit with revised competency examples.
* If successful at competency sift, applications are forwarded to the Serving Police CSG Manager to technical sift against the CSG Category Profile.
* If successful at technical sift, candidates will be invited to attend a group briefing at the SU. This is the next step in the recruitment process. The briefing will usually be undertaken by the CSG Manager, a deployed officer and a member of the deployments team. They will deliver key messages regarding membership and manage expectations.
* No expenses will be reimbursed prior to formal acceptance to the CSG.
* Officers are emailed to ask if they wish to proceed with their application after having attended the group briefing.
* Interviews are undertaken by a panel of two: the CSG Manager and SEO colleague. The interview assessment includes: warm up, competency and technical questions.
* If the applicant is successful at interview, they will be asked to sign the Terms of Engagement document confirming that they attended the SU briefing and taken on board its key points.
* If the applicant is unsuccessful at interview, there is a twelve month wait for reapplication,
* Successful applicants join the CSG and are free to apply for individual advertised deployments.
* **Membership of the pool does not guarantee deployment**. Applications are often a competitive process at sift and interview stages. Serving officers, again, need their force’s agreement for each application that they make.

*The application process from beginning to eventual deployment can take a number of months. In some cases it can take between 6-18 months, particularly for United Nations deployments. Both the applicant and their force need to be cognisant of the potential for long waiting times and be able to accommodate this professionally and personally.*

**Other factors to consider**

* Deploying internationally is not always conducive to advancement in the officer’s domestic UK career. The personal development and experiences the individual benefits from are unique but different forces have different perspectives on the value of deployments, depending on their own infrastructure and priorities.
* At the point of applying for a particular deployment, the candidate must be committed to the process and, if selected, the expectation of SU will be that the officer will deploy. International relations and reputation can be at risk if the UK doesn’t deliver what it says it can, and retractions from such processes can be damaging for UK interests.
* International policing demands highly developed skills in communicating, influencing and managing relationships, to name but a few. Officers deployed abroad carry the reputation of the UK. The competitive recruitment process, used by SU, is designed to select both the best and the most suitable candidates the UK has to offer.
* Applicants must consider their domestic circumstances. Deployments are challenging for the individual but can prove very taxing for families. Any application should be made with careful consideration of this factor, and the SU recruitment stages may well probe and assess this when considering suitability.
* When deployed, the SU will provide ongoing support through its dedicated Deployments team, with the frequency of contact and support to be discussed for each deployment. That said, officers must accept they are being recruited and deployed as they are recognised ‘self-starters’ who will be expected to integrate themselves into the deployment and be as self-reliant as possible. The infrastructure and support that officers have experienced domestically will **not** be replicated in the fragile and conflict affected states SU deploys to, either by SU or the mission itself.
* Despite the lengthy recruitment process and all the other challenges, SU’s overwhelming feedback from deployed colleagues is extremely positive. Many say their experiences developed them both personally and professionally in ways that were not achievable in their domestic career.

**Pre-deployment Training**

Once an officer is informed that they have been successful in applying for a deployment, SU arranges any necessary training – which is dependent on the mission – and provides pre-briefing packages, uniform, equipment, and makes the travel arrangements. SU will arrange for individuals to undertake medical assessments, Hostile Environment Training (HET) and receive a comprehensive safety briefing, which includes cultural awareness regarding the environment being deployed to.

***This is the basis of SU provision – deploying officers are themselves expected to proactively research and understand the environment and cultures of the deployment they are applying for.***

Only a few selected international policing posts require the officer to be armed – the majority of posts are unarmed. In the case of an armed requirement, training will be provided on a pass/fail basis.

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Finally, please take the time to read the following accounts from UK police officers who have deployed via the SU…

‘***Certain Death in Sierra Leone’ – T/Chief Supt Helen Williams***

That was the name of the book I was given as a gift the day I found out I had been successful in my application to be the Strategic Policing Advisor with the International Security Advisory Team based in Freetown, Sierra Leone. It most certainly made me think but I carried on regardless with the application process as the actual offering of the job is just the start. I am now currently living and working in Sierra Leone and give thanks every day for this opportunity.

A little about me: I am a Metropolitan Police Officer and joined in 1996. My career other than a short stint at the beginning as a PC in the TSG has been entirely Borough based (Territorial Policing). I worked on response teams, borough support units, did my time as a staff officer and on promotion to Inspector applied for level transfer to Detective. I remained on Borough and worked at Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Barnet and lastly before deployment at Camden as the Detective Superintendent. My driving passion has been leading the response to domestic abuse and gender based sexual violence.

I first heard of the SU 3 years ago as a Chief Inspector, as a colleague of mine had been to East Timor and she always spoke of it as a pivotal point in her life.

Firstly I went to see my Borough Commander to garner support, who basically told me not to do it, it would prevent promotion and I would be forgotten about if I was away for any period of time. But if I was determined (he knew me quite well!) then of course he would support. I went to meet the CSG Manager at the time and got a good understanding of what the role entailed and the demands required. I also had phone conversations with deployed officers in Liberia and Libya. This was really important in understanding the ‘ground-truth’ of deployments and ensuring I really appreciated what it was I was applying for. Once I had become a member of the pool, I had regular updates from them. I had opportunities to attend courses regarding security and justice, which were an excellent way of networking and meeting those who had been deployed. The courses are open across HMG personnel so a myriad of experience and a wealth of knowledge that I was able to tap into.

It took 3 years from becoming a member to my deployment. This was partly due to personal circumstances, promotion process and partly due to which posts became available.

Before applying I had to consider that promotion would not feature in the near future of returning, however I was in the personal position that I had 19 years’ service, was a Detective Superintendent, had been moved to the new pension scheme so could have up to another 17 years to do. This meant I still had time should I choose to seek progression. I also needed a challenge I had reached a point in my career that I was in a comfort zone and wanted to do something incredible, therefore applying was an easy decision for me.

Others will have very different considerations; I did not have a partner, children or a mortgage as I was living in rented accommodation, I could literally have left with minimal notice and not have to put much in place for my “home life”. Though telling your family you are applying to live and work in Sierra Leone was an experience as all they had heard was about the place was Ebola, civil war, blood diamonds and child soldiers committing horrific war crimes. Even after managing to convince them the war had ended many years ago, Ebola was and still is a real threat here so educating them in the disease also took a while.

However, I have the full support of my family and with FaceTime, Facebook messenger, Skype and email I have more contact with them out here than I did in the UK, but that still doesn’t come close to being with them.

The application process for the deployment itself was fairly time consuming, it started with a paper-sift and then a telephone interview. I was in an office in the FCDO with a conference call with the Deputy High Commissioner, Head ISAT and Head of Africa Deployments. The interview was about 45 minutes and thorough. Within 48 hours I was informed I had been successful. It was then ‘hurry up and wait’. The process of getting deployed is not an easy one; I was fortunate that I lived in London therefore I was able to make the multitude of appointments easily but if you are not based there I can imagine the constant need to travel to London frustrating.

The stages I went through were:

* Security Vetting to level SC – this took several weeks
* Medical at Inter-health based in Newington Causeway, south-east London. This in total was 5 appointments. Various inoculations or tests to check you’ve already got them (about 15 in total I think), a full medical exam and a psychological assessment.
* Uniform fitting, collection, return trip for uniform that was wrong the first time or not available, so again 3 trips in total.
* Visit to my deployment officer handing over passport – then collecting passport with visa.
* My HEAT course, all 3 modules.

At each and every one of these stages I was sure something would prevent me coming out, and the waiting for results, reports and vetting was nerve racking. Not least as everyone knew I had the job and was off, how would I tell them I wasn’t anymore!

Fortunately all of these were completed with very little issue, but if you don’t live in London I can imagine there are several issues on how many times you have to come in or make sure you coincide several in one day. And all of this whilst still employed by your force negotiating the time to attend.

Even on the day I deployed I still hadn’t received my contract, finally signed after I’d been out here several weeks.

Though throughout all this I had my CSG category manager as support (which was vital and more importantly constant) and my deployment officer – which changed 3 times in the 12 weeks between application and deployment.

**My Post:**

I am the Strategic Policing Advisor here and work with a small team of 8 consisting of a second policing advisor, 2 Military Advisors, 1 Marine Advisor, 1 Civilian MOD advisor, Programme Manager and we are led by Head ISAT, who we are currently waiting to welcome as the role holder has recently changed over. We also have great support staff, led by a Squadron Leader with a Staff Sergeant and a number of locally employed civilians.

Together with the other police advisor, who I am very fortunate to say is excellent and knows his stuff; our role is to represent HMG whilst working within the security sector to the Mano River Union Strategy. I work closely with the Sierra Leone Police and sit at their Management Board as a non-voting member. We have short term objectives of professionalising them in order to ensure free, fair and peaceful elections in February 2018. This has involved us assisting in several training initiatives including literacy, public order, officer safety, search tactics and leadership. To say working with them is a challenge would be putting it mildly, they have such ambition to be better and to learn but their reputation is one of corruption and ineffectiveness. Which sadly is not necessarily a wrong one; in a recent survey, 90% of Sierra Leonean’s said they had had to pay the police for either getting a service or to prevent sanctions.

We are also rolling out a Community Policing project again as part of the pre-election endeavour to prevent and reduce political violence. We are currently in the process of putting together a 2/5/10 year plan for the Sierra Leone Police.

Prior to coming out I did as much research as I could about the arrival, and in that is an experience in itself. You land early evening in Lungi and then have to negotiate the airport with everyone offering to help, find the boat which takes you across to Freetown and have a hair raising ride in the dark through a multitude of boats big and small with no lights on, with people regaling how they once hit a sea container that had fallen off a ship. Then once you finally feel safe on dry land I was met by one of ISATs drivers who brought me up to the base, and I realised why the SOP said, “don’t drive at night!!”

I had 2 weeks of handover from my predecessor, which was more meeting and introductions and visiting parts of the country more than anything and learning about who I needed to work with. Combined with getting used to the driving standards – there aren’t any – the local language of Krio and getting to know the team. So once I was flying solo, it took me some time to get to grips with the different projects and detail of what was planned.

I have now been in post for 13 weeks and the work is still challenging but hugely rewarding. I am able to influence policy, guide the Sierra Leone Police in matters of law and demonstrate to them what they can achieve and what they should have the ambition to achieve.

Everyday something catches me unawares, makes me laugh out loud or completely befuddles me. No two days are the same and time goes so quickly it hard to believe I have been here this long already.

We live on a small compound that was built originally for the military presence out here as IMATT and now the residents here include military, police and FCDO. There is a sense of community and we all look out for each other. The nearest supermarket is about 3 miles away but what shocked me the most was the cost of living. I would say the supermarket is more expensive than in London, this is due to everything having to be imported. Frozen veg - £4.50 a bag. Box of Cereal £9, however you can buy food off the market stalls as long as you soak them in Milton for 30 minutes before eating they are fine. A small bag of cucumbers, carrots and tomatoes will cost about £3.

We are all self-drive here and do have the ability to travel solo if we are on the peninsula, but the roads are more like an off road experience with hazards in the form of people, dogs and motorbikes coming at you from every angle. If we leave the peninsula we have to go as a minimum 2 vehicle convoy. One reason for this is the complete lack of medical facilities in the country. We have one minor injuries / illness clinic in Freetown and that is it. No A&E, no medevac or air support and the biggest risk to us are traffic collisions, followed closely by malaria. There are no emergency services to speak of, no ambulances off the peninsula and those on it are more simply a form of transport than offering any form of medical assistance. There is no form of fire service or an ability to cut you out of a vehicle.

Whilst I am not under canvass or have to have CP officers with me it is still not living in the UK. To get anywhere can take hours due to traffic, road conditions, weather. We are currently in the rainy season and since I arrived I have not had a day without rain and normally it is constant heavy and accompanied by storms.

I have had days when I felt I shouldn’t be here, especially the day of my brother-in-law’s memorial service, family birthdays and events. But then I look at the people of Sierra Leone, hear the stories of what they have been through; the war, the violence, the many coups and most recently the Ebola Virus. They are being mined by foreign countries taking their natural resources and giving them very little in return. Yet they remain a proud nation, desperate to get better and rid their country of the stigma attached to it. If I can be just a small part of it, then any personal sacrifice for the period of my posting is more than worth it.

This is the most challenging but fulfilling role I have had as a police officer which is saying something, I would not hesitate if the opportunity ever came up again, but then I have only been here 13 weeks – who knows, after 40 odd I may be saying a very different thing.

The decision to deploy is not an easy or quick one; you must ensure you have support of your family and loved ones. It is not just difficult for you being in a foreign environment cut off from them, but they have to completely change their life as well in order to support you. But if after having spoken to everyone, understood what it means personally and professionally for you and you feel this role is still for you, don’t put it off or hesitate go for it. I am so glad I did.

***‘Incredible diverse world of working with international colleagues and protecting tribal communities’ Chief Inspector Jackie Gold – South Sudan UN Mission 2014-2016***

I was delighted to have been successful in being selected for deployment to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. I knew very well that this was a country at war and that it would be tough and we, as a team, would see a different side of life. I have to be honest, after the initial ‘euphoria’ of being told I was going to a UN Mission, the processes and waiting for that deployment was long and frustrating. The roller coaster ride had started, however I do recall finally receiving a deployment date and then that terrible journey with my husband to the airport when I knew we would have to say our goodbyes. In my case, I knew I would not see him for over 10 weeks. I cried like a baby!

After our initial induction in Uganda, I think the term ‘rabbit caught in headlights’ would suitably describe my first few weeks in South Sudan. I felt as though I had landed in a different world. The first thing to hit me was the heat, then the realisation that our accommodation was the lowest of the low, external ablutions, frequent power failures, mosquito city and red mud everywhere. But our excitement at being there got us through the really tough times, and then as time went on normality set in and I became immersed in the incredible diverse world of working with international colleagues and protecting tribal communities. I became part of a family, both the UN family and tribal family, even being given an honorary tribal name ‘Nyagoa’.

There were the real down times: heat, illness, hostility and danger all around. I experienced hunger, battle, bunkers and bullets. Thank goodness for the HEAT course! But this was nothing compared with seeing malnutrition in children and the plight of those being persecuted. But, what we did bring were small steps forward that did often put smiles on faces, and those moments when we knew we were so appreciated in what we were doing…it was all worth it. I would not have missed this opportunity for the world. I look back with pride and sometimes tears; yes, I was there, I did something, I formed amazing bonds and friendships that will last a lifetime, and I became part of a family I never dreamed could be at all possible. Would I do it again? Absolutely. What an amazing, humbling chance of a lifetime………what’s next?

***‘From comfort zone to conflict zone’ – Chief Inspector Steve Kendall MBE***

The decision to apply for an International Policing Mission is probably one of the biggest professional and personal decisions that you will ever make, and one of the easiest not to. As police officers, we are trained and conditioned to deal with the usual and the unusual within fairly familiar surroundings. International policing parachutes you into a very different world where you have to rely on all your skills, experiences, personality traits and instincts to steer a path through unfamiliar environments.

Between 2011 and 2013, I spent 18 months as the Regional Chief Advisor to the Kosovo Police in the troubled northern Mitrovica region of Kosovo near the border with Serbia. This was a role within the ‘EULEX’ EU Rule of Law Mission. Why on earth would I want to do this? I had 20 years’ service and held a very good position in my home force of Avon and Somerset. At the time I was not really sure why I applied. I think part of me wanted to know if I could do it, and part of me wanted to contribute to something bigger. It sounds clichéd to say ‘I want to make a difference’ but on the international stage you really can – on a grander scale.

International policing roles allow you to lead beyond your normal authority and to have a direct impact on a nation’s future, post conflict. You have the opportunity get involved in high impact activities of strategic significance. The areas that you work in will have links to ‘big picture policing’ that HMG has interests in, be that organised crime, human trafficking, helping to maintain stability in a region or a myriad of other reasons. The reputation of the UK police service is second to none overseas and our style of policing and approach to problem solving adds real value to security sector reform programmes.

Working with a mixed team of international police officers and NATO peacekeeping forces is a heady cocktail of challenges. Pitch this against mission politics, post-war ethnic tensions within the fledgling police service and the wider community and you soon realise that there is no such thing as a normal day at the office. Your personal confidence grows (it has to) and you find yourself (in my case) negotiating and influencing between community leaders, UN, NATO officials and local commanders.

International policing missions are not usually to be found in tourist destinations. Living conditions can be basic and essential services patchy but that adds to the challenge and sense of worth in being part of something that aims to improve people’s quality of life. You are given excellent training, briefing and kit which equip you for most eventualities. Historical and cultural knowledge of the operating environment is key and it really is fascinating to understand and feel part of a nation’s development.

Going into the unknown is daunting and at first I did feel isolated and disorientated. But the team ethos quickly kicks in and you soon find your measure. It is really important to keep regular contact with family and friends back home to keep you grounded, to let off steam and to manage your own well-being. People will not know you well enough to recognise when you need a break. It is not all about work, and travel opportunities in surrounding countries helped me to understand the wider cultural and historical context.

Mission life is intense and you make international and local friendships which will last a lifetime. Preparing to leave the mission is difficult as emotional engagement cannot be just switched off. There is considerable inertia when you do get home and ‘decompress’. People will never really know what you have done and returning to the ‘UK office’ is a challenge. For me, part of the reintegration process was to write about my experiences and to extoll the virtues of international policing to make others aware of the opportunities and experiences it can give you.

The ‘police family’ is an international network and being an active part of it was one of the best decisions that I ever made in my professional and personal life. Seeking new challenges in a different policing environment is extremely rewarding and it made me realise what a difference we really can make. Life is too short to have regrets and I do not regret one minute of my time in international policing.

***‘My experiences could fill a book’ – Superintendent Stan Bates***

As a young Detective I was fortunate enough to ‘stumble’ into a piece of work that led to a short term deployment overseas with the UN. I enjoyed the experience and, as Kosovo deployments were at their height, indicated to my DCI that I intended applying. In all honesty he was a good mentor over the years but his careers advice on that occasion was probably the worst I’ve ever received: ‘Leave it until the end of your service –once you leave the force you’ll be forgotten!’

Having recently returned from two and a half years in Afghanistan, I’m left wondering where my career could have taken me if I’d applied to work overseas earlier in service. Admittedly it’s not easy; the living conditions can be ‘rustic’, it’s inevitable that at some point illness will strike and the physical risks are far from academic or abstract. It’s also true to say that unless you have few, or alternatively very strong, domestic relationships there can be considerable strain placed on family and friends during long periods away.

That said, during my Afghan tour I experienced strategic working that would be impossible to achieve in the UK. (Here you may choose to replace ‘achieve’ with ‘provide evidence of in an application’!). Initially I worked for the European Union, advising on community policing principles and ultimately managing a project to deliver mobile police stations to several regions of the country. This was negotiated with senior Afghan leaders and ultimately became a key part of the Minister of the Interior’s reform plan.

In order to secure ownership of the project I’d worked with a wide range of senior Afghans, the EU Delegation in Kabul and various coalition partner agencies. This raised my profile in theatre and ultimately led to a move across to NATO where I became the first Civilian Police officer to mentor one of the Afghan Senior Police Leaders –in my case the Chief of Uniformed Police (a national organisation 85,000 strong).

For the next two years I supervised a team comprising military officers, civilian police, civil servants and contractors; predominantly North American but also drawn from across the coalition. Together we secured some significant ‘firsts’:

* A Kabul traffic conference chaired by the President’s special advisor; for the first time bringing together ministers, police and academics to devise a plan for combatting Kabul’s traffic congestion.
* The first community policing conference in Afghanistan –again at the ministerial level and leading to a series of regional events trying to gauge what the public wanted from their police.

We also managed to drive the Ministerial Development Plan forward considerably –at one point being 3 quarters ahead of trajectory and I was privileged to act as the only Civilian Police Advisor to a (British) Ambassador who was negotiating a 10 year vision to develop the Afghan police on a national basis. I got these experiences, not because I’m a genius, but for one simple reason: I applied.

I said at the outset it can be hard and you’ll certainly find every single one of your personal and professional values being challenged routinely. My experiences could fill a book; not all of them positive but each of them memorable. I’m nearing the end of my service and my prospects for post-retirement employment have certainly been enhanced. I just wish I’d grasped the opportunity earlier.

***'A Police Super working for the SU in Afghanistan' –Superintendent Ralph Logan***

**My profile:**

I had 21 years police service prior to my secondment in 2011, with 6 years military experience prior to the police. I’d been a Super then for around 6 years, and was 47 when I went to Kabul. I certainly felt confident I would be a good candidate for further promotion, but also felt that I wanted to try something completely new, without giving up my job, or taking a career break.

I am best described as a generalist police officer rather than claiming any particular specialism, although like all of us after that time, and in this rank, I have worked in a number of different fields.

**My experience prior to arriving in Afghanistan:**

The process for me was straightforward. I made sure I had the support from my force, which they gave me with good grace. I experienced none of the bad situations some colleagues had, which ranged from the “your career is over” to the naïve “what are you doing that for?” comments. None of which does much to serve the cause of helping to professionalise the police capacity and capability in fragile states. My view is simple: some of the greatest threats to the UK stem from such countries, so it seems perfectly reasonable to consider investing time, knowledge and experience to reduce that risk. All of that is just hot air unless you also have the desire to do something different, exciting, challenging and often adventurous.

The application process seemed reasonable: a typical competency based application, followed by a couple of phone interviews, one by FCDO staff in Kabul, and the other by the organization I was joining. There is a wealth of experience now on avoiding the one or two pit falls associated with those processes.

The logistics supporting my deployment worked well. Good quality kit was issued in abundance, medical tests passed, HEAT training undertaken too. Nothing to fear in that either, with most people relishing the experience and having fun. Afghanistan is one of the countries where UK officers need to be armed, and therefore a firearms course needs to be passed. These are definitely pass or fail courses, and contrary to some comments I had heard before attending, people do fail.

I suggest there is little to do to prepare yourself for the course, other than to do the pre-course work and possibly taking any opportunity to fire a gun with your own firearms teams. It’s not for everybody, and why not be honest with yourself beforehand, and find out if you do want to carry a gun 24/7 for months on end, or even years on end, in some cases. Many of my colleagues in Afghanistan had never handled firearms, and were perfectly comfortable in doing so after the training. There is always the need to pass shooting re-qualifications every few months or so, and that can be quite daunting if you are not the best shot, but again, with the professional tuition from the SU team, not only will the shoots be passed, but your shooting will improve.

Health and fitness is important in my opinion. There is no fitness test to pass, but Afghanistan is not the place to be if you have any underlying illness or health issue you are at all concerned about.

**My experience upon arrival:**

All of us suffered the same anxiety upon leaving home and travelling to a foreign country to live and work. It’s a tiring and disorientating experience. However, preparing yourself as well as possible can reduce the disorientation. That includes seeking out those that are already there or have recently returned, and asking as many questions as you can think of. Rest assured also that there will be a UK Contingent Commander on the ground already (in most cases) who will be able to meet and greet you and familiarise yourself with life in your new home.

I suggest it is wise to develop, at the least, an informal plan of what you want to achieve from your secondment, both personally and professionally, and decide upon how you are going to approach this new work and environment. Remember that things will be very challenging to begin with. Your job may not be very clear to you. You may not have undertaken any similar work previously. Flexibility, resilience, and persistence may sound like another set of competencies, but in my experience, is just a matter of fact.

**The good and the bad times:**

The good times hugely outweigh the bad times. Once into your rhythm, the work is challenging and unique. At our rank you are going to be involved in one way or another in strategic decision making, for the mission. This is work at its best, where you can actually shape likely outcomes, within a reasonable time frame. You are likely to be engaging with very senior local counterparts, including senior politicians and police leaders. Much of the work seems to require mentoring. More has been written about this facet of overseas support than needs my addition; however I will simply say it was not mentoring in any form that I had previously thought fitted that description.

UK police officers are highly respected, in my experience. We do bring world-class expertise with us when we travel. Our work ethic is second to none, and we are seen as trusted leaders, with a “can do attitude”. From a professional perspective, I’d say you are likely to find yourself with more scope to use your initiative, and creativity to drive work forward. For me that was exciting and fun. In addition you will get to work closely with colleagues from overseas. In my case this included Germans, Dutch, Swedes, French, Finns, Irish and Americans. You will also work closely with local counterparts.

I made many new friends, genuinely new friends from within UK policing. Of course we had falling outs –living in such close proximity almost demands that –but like all families we got over it and got on with life. I shared more laughter in absurd situations than I ever could have imagined.

Experiencing a new culture is enriching. Gaining an insight into places we only hear about on the news or read about in papers is a privilege. To me there was always a sense of adventure too. Often I realized I had become used to the very unusual life we lived, and in those moments I reflected upon the great opportunity for me personally which had been afforded by my force, and by the SU.

The bad times are more mundane. Illness, discomfort, poor diet, fear, missing loved ones. Time away from home for prolonged periods of time is not nice. No one I knew enjoyed that aspect of life, and if anything that gets harder, not easier, over time. My secondment in Afghanistan lasted over 3 years, and for a very specific reason relating to the project others and I were involved in; typically secondments are for 1 year.

**My career:**

My assessment is that generally an overseas secondment will not be career enhancing, particularly in relation to those seeking promotion. I think that’s fairly obvious. We all know how busy life is in the UK and people change roles frequently and are quickly forgotten in day-to-day life. I accept that as a fact, others have a different view, and for each of us our experience on return will be unique. My own experience is that I applied for a central role back home, while in Afghanistan, and was successful. I know others who have had similarly positive experiences. My own Chief and senior colleagues were very supportive, and provided me with regular updates, and I knew would also go the extra mile should I have needed anything from them.

**Would I do it all again?**

I believe the whole experience has been very positive in a number of ways. I also think it takes a while to put it into perspective, and that time is still passing for me. I would like to work for UK interests overseas again, after I have spent a good deal of time back with family and friends. I think most of my colleagues hold a similar view, and that kind of sums it up. We appear to be living during a period of increasing tension in parts of Africa, the Middle East, Europe and Asia where the UK and EU both hold interest, and share a belief in the duty to support and aid, where possible. I imagine there will only be an increasing demand for the involvement of senior UK police officers, and amongst us are those who, for a variety of reasons, are motivated to help.

If you have considered this kind of work for some time, and perhaps spoken to others who have taken the opportunity, and you are aware of the implications professionally and personally, then my advice would be to wait no longer and submit an application.