



Where I work Carole Mundell

When I first looked up at the dome above the grand staircase of the United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) building, it brought together for me my two professional roles. I work three days a week as chief scientific adviser to the FCO in London, and two days a week as an astrophysicist at the University of Bath.

The building was designed in the 1860s by George Gilbert Scott. Here, I'm standing on his ornate staircase, looking up at that dome, which depicts 20 female figures representing nations that had diplomatic relations with Britain at that time. The apex shows the night sky with stars and the constellations – a link for me with my astrophysical research. The figures depicted illustrate the international recognition that I would like to see for women in science, technology and engineering and mathematics.

In my role here, which I assumed in 2018, I travel to build ties with other nations in science and innovation, and provide evidence-based guidance to the United Kingdom's chief science adviser and other

departments as they set national and international policy. I'm also part of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, which advises government decision-makers during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In Bath, I mainly study how black holes form and evolve.

The entire FCO building reminds me that scientists can make a difference in the world by working together. We tackle big transnational challenges, such as climate change and antimicrobial resistance. For example, someone on our team worked to take an exhibit about antibiotic-resistant bacteria from the Science Museum in London to a museum in Buenos Aires.

The building's grandeur contrasts with the humility of the public servants that work here. This parallels the humility needed to be a good scientist. If you don't challenge yourself, you'll miss important things.

Carole Mundell is the chief scientific adviser at the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and an astrophysicist at the University of Bath.
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