

Press release: New learning centre honours diplomat and codebreaker Lady Cicely Mayhew

The Diplomatic Academy's new theatre was named after Cicely Mayhew following a vote amongst Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) staff in which she was the runaway winner.

The Mayhew Theatre is an interactive learning environment that allows remote participation from across the FCO global network thanks to high-resolution, multiple cameras and microphones that work seamlessly to capture presenters and speakers in the room.

The project began in 2017 when the Diplomatic Academy, the learning and development body of the FCO, requested a facility to make learning accessible to its global network.

A space was identified in an unused internal courtyard but as the FCO is a Grade 1 listed building, simply erecting a roof over the courtyard was not feasible. Instead, the new theatre building, including its hyperbolic paraboloid roof, was lowered into place by crane.

Jon Benjamin, Director of the Diplomatic Academy, said:

The new Mayhew Theatre shows in tangible form our commitment to equip our staff all across the world in physical and virtual learning sessions, ensuring they have the skills and knowledge needed for 21st Century diplomacy.

It is an honour for us to name this new learning facility after the pioneering female British diplomat, Lady Cicely Mayhew, and to welcome her family members to its opening ceremony.

Cicely Mayhew worked at Bletchley Park, having been recruited from university by naval intelligence. In 1947 she joined the FCO as one of the first female diplomats, helping to pave the way for more women to join the Diplomatic Service, which had excluded women until 1946.

Cicely met her future husband while posted to Geneva but because of the 'marriage bar' in the Diplomatic Service (lifted in 1972), she was required to resign from the FCO. As compensation she was given an allowance of one month's salary for each of the two years she had served with the diplomatic service.

Notes for Editors

The Diplomatic Academy is a centre of excellence, helping FCO staff to become part of the best diplomatic service in the world. The academy brings together knowledge and expertise across the FCO and other Whitehall departments with international responsibilities. The materials produced by the Academy reflect the requirements of modern diplomacy, covering topics such as International Policy, Security Defence & Intelligence, Economics, and Languages, amongst others.