

International Development Strategy: Call for Evidence. The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

Joint submission from The Royal Society, British Academy, Royal Academy of Engineering, and Academy of Medical Sciences

4. How and where can Government work on development best support the UK's wider strategic objectives set out in the Integrated Review?

The UK National Academies welcome the objectives and direction of the Integrated Review, particular the focus on keeping the UK's place at the leading edge of science and technology.

Investing in research and innovation represents value for money in building future capacity in research talent, catalysing networks and partnerships, and leveraging further research funding.

UK-funded research and innovation has contributed to significant global advances, including a dramatic reduction of child deaths from malaria, eradication of the devastating livestock disease rinderpest, reduction of gender-based violence and building the case for climate action. These contributions demonstrate the critical role of research and innovation in supporting the objectives of the integrated review, especially the objective of the UK to become a problem-solving and burden-sharing nation with a global perspective.

For example, historical ODA investment delivered through the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) to build scientific capacity in South Africa has supported greater research and innovation activity and developed, attracted and retained skilled people who have chosen to undertake cutting-edge scientific research in that country. This scientific capacity both benefits the local economy and its citizens, but also ensured the rapid identification of the Beta COVID-19 variant within South Africa, informing responses around the world.

The BEIS administered GCRF and Newton Funds have also played a role in developing technologies and education to reduce HIV transmission in sub-Saharan Africa and helping and empowering Brazilian researchers understand and mitigate the impact of Zika virus (1).

In December 2020 the four Presidents of the UK National Academies wrote to the First Secretary of State and Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs to reiterate the importance and value of funding for research

and innovation through the UK's ODA budget, and to express concern at the reduction in funding.(2) This concern remains.

5. In what area of international development does the UK have comparative advantage, particular interests, or is best placed to deliver?

The UK has comparative advantage in many areas of research, technology and innovation. This comparative advantage in research and innovation has helped the UK be a leader in providing robust evidence for development on the most pressing global development challenges, including the priorities set out by the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Affairs. Maintaining these strengths through continued research and innovation ODA via a range of government departments, including the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, is key to ensuring that the UK remains best placed to deliver internationally. The UK National Academies represent leaders in these fields, and are well-placed to deliver a range of high-achieving instruments when it comes to international development collaborations and partnerships. These include capacity building and knowledge systems strengthening, cutting-edge global development challenges research, and fostering new partnerships and collaborations with key partners in the Global South.

6. How should the UK's approach evolve to build partnerships with new actors and strengthen existing ones?

The research and innovation community has spent years building and maintaining significant and deep international partnerships with science and humanities partners all over the world, enabled by government funding. The cliff-edge reduction in investment to ODA programmes, and last-minute nature of this communication has damaged the UK's credibility and trustworthiness as it has forced us to break hard-won partnerships, especially where our international partners are also contributing financially and will be unable to proceed without the UK as a partner. Ensuring the UK is a partner of choice should be a focus moving forward. The recent cuts have damaged that reputation with all our partners worldwide, not simply those in developing countries. An objective of building the UK as a research and innovation superpower by 2030 requires that the UK is an attractive partner for all our partners internationally and that funding for international research and innovation, including international development, is resourced fully, sustainably and with trust that it will be maintained and delivered by government.

The UK government should give proper recognition to the value of inter-disciplinary research and development programmes within its overall international development strategy as a means to both building scientific capacity which benefits all in the face of global challenges and delivering against the ambition of the Integrated Review more broadly. In delivering the strategy, the FCDO should manage the allocations process in such a way that gives confidence to international partners that the UK is a reliable and long-term partner.

The 10-year vision of the Integrated Review should be matched by a similar long-term international development funding commitment, including for research and innovation. If a research project is cancelled mid-way through it may not be able to deliver any of its intended benefit, so ensuring a reliable, multi-year funding stream is essential for the UK to realise its goals. This is especially key to ensure that we are able to support genuinely equitable partnerships with our partners internationally. Our programmes up to now have been helping to spearhead significant changes in UK and international research culture and skills development with the UK well-placed to continue this leadership if funding is restored and maintained.

Bibliography

1. Role of R&D in supporting ODA objectives:

https://www.raeng.org.uk/RAE/media/General/News/Blogs/Annex_Role-of-R-D-in-supporting-ODA-objectives.pdf

2. <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/3244/December-2020-Letter-to-Foreign-Secretary-Presidents-National-Academies.pdf>