International Development Committee

Oral evidence: Definition and administration of ODA, HC 547

Tuesday 16 January 2018

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Stephen Twigg (Chair); Richard Burden; James Duddridge; Mr Nigel Evans; Mrs Pauline Latham; Chris Law; Lloyd Russell-Moyle; Paul Scully; Mr Virendra Sharma; Henry Smith.

Questions 1 - 43

Witnesses

I: Professor John Gaventa, Director of Research, Institute of Development Studies; Tamsyn Barton, Chief Executive Officer, Bond.

II: Rupert Simons, Chief Executive Officer, Publish What You Fund; Dr Nilima Gulrajani, Senior Research Fellow, Overseas Development Institute.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: John Gaventa and Tamsyn Barton.

Chair: Good morning, everyone. Welcome. This is our first oral evidence session as part of our inquiry on the definition and administration of ODA. Welcome to our first panel. We have two panels this morning and each will run for 45 minutes. We have eight questions for each panel. Our normal practice is to move straight into the questions, but when you first answer a question, please do introduce yourself.

Q1 **Mrs Latham:** Do you think that the ODA administered by Government Departments other than DFID has sufficient focus on poverty reduction?

Tamsyn Barton: Thank you very much. I would like to begin, if that is okay. My name is Tamsyn Barton. I am the CEO of Bond, which is the membership body for about 450 UK-based NGOs. Our members are clearly very strongly focused on ensuring that both they and the Government contribute to poverty reduction. We really appreciate the opportunity that you have given us to provide evidence and to contribute our thoughts on this very important question.

The aid strategy, which was set out in 2015, broadened the focus from poverty reduction to other areas such as security and prosperity. The NAO report acknowledges that the initial process of bringing in other Government Departments was very much a question of asking them to look at their spend and see what is eligible to be considered as ODA. That is unlikely to result in a strategy that is clearly coherent and focused on poverty reduction. As the International Development Secretary said yesterday, there may be win-wins, but the concern for our members is where there might be trade-offs.

To take an example, the Prosperity Fund is an area where we would like to see as much scrutiny as possible from yourselves, ICAI and others. The indicators from their first annual report do really raise some questions for us and our members. There seems to be quite a lot of emphasis and reference to the importance of UK companies getting business, and the choice of countries very much looks at countries that would be important in a post-Brexit scenario; we want global Britain to get out there and trade more.

Yes, there may be win-wins, but we worry that this is a bit of a slippery slope. We saw what happened in the 1980s, when, after a long time, tied aid got to a point where it had to be organisations like our members that called attention to the fact that money was being wasted. The Pergau dam is perhaps the most infamous story. It was the World Development Movement that brought the focus on that, but AgustaWestland helicopters in India were just as bad. We could be at the beginning of that process if we are not careful; the scrutiny that you provide is absolutely vital to ensure that is not what happens.

Professor Gaventa: Thank you very much. My name is John Gaventa. I am a professor and Director of Research at the Institute of Development Studies. The IDS is a large independent research think-tank that brings evidence to bear on the quality of development around the world. We are not a university; we are more like an NGO, and therefore a member of Bond. I speak from the point of research institutions. The UK is unique in having some of the leading independent research institutions on development aid; that is very important to the whole strategy of soft power in the UK in this era. You will be hearing from one of our sister institutions, the ODI, later today.

Like Tamsyn, we are also a member of Bond. Like Tamsyn, we are very concerned about the extent to which the spend across Departments may be moving us away in some cases from the emphasis on poverty and poverty alleviation, which is the primary definition of ODA and ODA requirements.

Tamsyn mentioned the example of the Prosperity Fund. I could take the question of the CSSF, which is another large, independent fund linked to foreign policy and security. The alleviation of poverty can be critical to overcoming conflict and contributing to global security. However, contributing to global security in the first instance does not necessarily lead to the alleviation of poverty. It is very important that we get our priorities right in these funds.

The challenge is that it is simply difficult to know. We may come to this in later questions, but it is very hard. DFID lead the way in transparency; you can see where the funds are going. It is possible for independent organisations like us to offer our expertise and to bid for opportunities that come up, but it is far more opaque in CSSF, the Prosperity Fund and some of the other Departments.

Q2 **Mrs Latham:** Given that you both answered that question, could you both briefly tell us how the Government ensure that the ODA spend across Government focuses on the commitment to leave no one behind?

Chair: For time reasons, I am just going to ask one of you to respond to that.

Tamsyn Barton: "Leave no one behind" is incredibly important to our members, who are very actively involved in pushing for that to be included in the SDGs. Interestingly—and this is a point that we feel is helpful—the Prosperity Fund is supposed to be specifically focused on inclusive development. That implies that in principle they are integrating that, and we hope to hold them to account. However, it is not clear if you look at some of the projects described. For example if you look at the assistance to South African electricity infrastructure, there are huge inequalities to be addressed, but where is the inclusive element in that story of smart grids? You still see depths of poverty in the regions of China, but how is that being addressed by what is being done to promote green bonds in the City of London? It does not look much like "leave no one behind" to me.

Q3 **Richard Burden:** You both expressed concern that spend by Departments other than DFID could dilute the focus on poverty reduction. The International Development Act itself says that aid must be "likely to contribute to poverty reduction". There appears to have been some disagreement in some quarters about whether that objective should only apply to DFID, and whether it actually applies to other Departments. What is your view on that?

Professor Gaventa: I am not an expert on the details of the Act, but to my understanding it is clear that the 0.7% commitment is about a commitment to ODA and to the alleviation of poverty. We would consider that to be very important; that is cross-departmental. My understanding of the OECD and other kinds of agreements is that is also the understanding in other countries. Tamsyn may want to add to that.

Tamsyn Barton: I am definitely not the technical expert, but I thought I understood that, by the way the reporting happens against the Act, it effectively combines a commitment to spend 0.7% with the commitment to report on expenditure within the DAC rules. To that extent, I would hope that there is a sound legal base for expecting all Departments to comply with DAC rules. I believe that this is what is happening at the moment. The extent to which it can be argued that all these interventions do in some way, however indirectly, contribute to poverty reduction and sustainable development is assured by a process that checks ODA eligibility. I believe DFID is helping Departments to ensure that. That is not to say that they could not be even tougher, but at least there is some kind of a process to ensure that.

Q4 **Richard Burden:** That is the next thing I was going to ask you. Are mechanisms sufficient to ensure a focus on poverty reduction outside of DFID?

Tamsyn Barton: This is a really crucial question. It is vital that there is proper, traditional accountability that exists already in Government systems, through the accounting officer for each Department, so that Departments other than DFID cannot say that it is DFID's responsibility. They must keep that responsibility. However, I do believe we need tougher quality assurance from DFID if we are to see a greater and clearer focus on poverty reduction.

I have been emphasising the Prosperity Fund, and that is because they have at least been good enough to tell us something about what they have been doing. I am actually more concerned about other Departments, such as the Home Office, where it is very difficult to see what they are actually doing against this. My suspicion would be that simply having one member of a ministerial board, when there are eight or nine others at a lower level in the portfolio, is not going to be enough on its own. I hope that there are new thoughts on how there could be more effective quality assurance from DFID.

The other issue would be the extent to which DFID has the staff for this. We recognise that is a challenge, but if we are moving towards 30% expenditure from government Departments, then that resource probably needs to be slightly increased.

Professor Gaventa: DFID in the UK prioritises transparency and accountability. In our aid work, we insist that other Governments are transparent in their operation. We provide and support opportunities for citizen scrutiny, so that in addition to formal regulatory processes, there is scrutiny by citizens to hold Governments and Departments to account. It is an important value, and the UK leads the way in supporting it in large programmes around the world.

DFID is ranked fourth in the Aid Transparency Index. It is one of the most transparent Departments in the world; it allows and encourages citizen transparency, which ensures quality and prevents corruption. We do not necessarily see that same level of transparency in other Departments. In addition to formal regulatory mechanisms, we need to provide mechanisms where societies, citizens and those partners who are being funded can also help to ensure that quality. We may come to the area of research later, but much of research is now being spread from DFID to the GCRF, BEIS and other agencies.

We welcome the new strategic coherence board that is chaired by Professor Baron Peter Piot. That is going to be very important to help ensure that there is a coherent, poverty-focused approach as these funds are spread to agencies and Departments across Government, as well as to many more players entering this field.

Chair: I think we are taking evidence from him at our next session.

Q5 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** If DFID is very good at transparency, would it make sense for DFID to have an overarching view of and responsibility for funds spent in other Departments? Perhaps DFID should be responsible. Would that be a solution?

Professor Gaventa: I am not an expert on the inner workings of various Departments, but it would seem to make sense. There is obviously a very important commitment by the UK Government in the open governance commitments that have been made around the world for transparency and accountability. DFID has played a very important role in that.

It is not the easiest thing to implement, to be honest. There are two problems. The first is that a huge amount of information comes up and you have to create the technical systems to do that. You have to make that information available through various kinds of platforms. They are developing the expertise in this, so they, quite honestly, still have a bit further to go.

There is another problem that I think we might want to come on to. Aid is increasingly spread through other Departments and also many times is going through the hands of large, private contractors who are producing a huge amount of research and evidence about the quality of aid. However, while DFID-supported research programmes are very strongly committed to open access and distributing that knowledge, it is not always clear how you find out what private contractors know about the quality of our aid.

Transparency is a twofold problem. First, information is put up about where public funds are going. Secondly, information that is being produced by aid contractors is also in the public domain. Private contractors do not necessarily want to release that information because it is seen as commercial information; they are developing knowledge that helps them in their next bid. We have a real problem of publically knowing what we know and of getting this taxpayer-funded, public information to help us assess the quality of aid.

Q6 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Transparency seems to be a bit of a problem. Tamsyn, you mentioned that when other Government Departments were asked to do ODA, it was just a case of asking them what they were already doing. Am I right in saying that you do not really feel that there was any additional development programmes created or developed because of this shift away from DFID?

Tamsyn Barton: I would not go as far as that. I was referring to the origin of the aid strategy in 2015. What I was drawing attention to was the way in which that started things off in a very unstrategic way.

Q7 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Do you think that there have been new programmes since then that have been positive?

Tamsyn Barton: There have been new programmes. It has changed allocation of spend within Departments so that more is allocated to areas that are eligible for ODA, and that can be a positive. There can be more allocation of research to diseases that are more prevalent in poorer countries; that is better than allocating it to the diseases that are more prevalent in richer countries, which tend to already be very well funded.

Yes, there are some positives. What I am questioning is the trade-off the other way; there might be even more poverty-focused research if the focus was primarily on how you can make the most difference to poverty and sustainable development.

Q8 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** I noticed that non-DFID Departments have a tendency to invest in middle-income countries, rather than the very poorest countries. I wonder if that is a worrying shift. You already see that with CDC investing in more middle-income countries. If other non-Government and non-DFID Departments were to shift in that direction, would that mean we would lose that focus on poverty reduction and leaving no one behind, as you mentioned earlier?

Tamsyn Barton: There is a case in principle for ODA to middle-income countries. That is the case that is made, for example, in relation to the Prosperity Fund; it is about the large numbers of poor people in those countries. However, if that argument is going to stand up, then those interventions have to be ones that have an impact on poverty in those countries. Perhaps what other Departments are not so used to doing is situating themselves in a context of a lot of development players and thinking, "Where can we contribute the most value?" Although there is not enough information to be able to tell, I wondered whether some of the Prosperity Fund's funding, for example, that takes the form of grants would be much better, in middle-income countries, if it was in the form of loans; that would be a far more efficient use of public money. There is a case for ODA in middle-income countries, but at the moment we are not seeing a good explanation of why these are the best choices for addressing poverty in those countries.

Q9 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Given that the ODA budget is ring-fenced at 0.7%, is there a danger that the eating up of that ODA percentage by other non-Government Departments is not only a slush fund for themselves because their budgets are shrinking, but also undermines the very viability of DFID, because its budget is effectively shrinking?

Tamsyn Barton: At the moment, the aid strategy limits the total to other Government Departments at 30%. Given that we have seen, because of economic growth in the UK, an increase in the overall budget, up to now that trend has not been as serious as it might be. There is a limit to what DFID can do with that money with the staff that it has. We would acknowledge that there is a value to other Government Departments contributing their expertise and engagement with the development effort. Yesterday I was meeting one of our members involved in the humanitarian effort in the context of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, and they acknowledged how important it was for the FCO to contribute in terms of access. That engagement is key and very much acknowledged.

The question is about how much we need to contribute to funds that are really, for the Foreign Office, about their own objectives, which are more about relationships than about how to spend money effectively. That is the culture of the organisation, inevitably. I know they have been doing a lot of work to improve capacity and project management and so on, but the overarching objectives are going to be different. They are going to be more about, "How can we improve our relationship with China?" than they are about "How can we most effectively attack poverty in China?"

Professor Gaventa: There is no question that with the need in the world, the UK Government ought to have an ability to spend the 0.7% well. It should not get reduced to a slush fund, on anybody's terms. In my view, it is not a slush fund; the needs that are being met by aid are very important. The UK's role and commitment to this is outstanding and should continue.

To spend aid well, we know that you have to have good, strong, effective departments, good, strong oversight mechanisms, experienced staff, and strong evidence in research that contributes to understanding the causes, looking at implementation and evaluating the impact. The risk is that for Departments that do not have that in place, it is much harder to ensure the quality of spend that we are after. To me the question is not, "Do we have a risk of slush funds?" but "Are we ensuring the best quality of aid that we possibly can, and do we have the departmental structure in place to make sure that happens?"

Q10 **Mr Sharma:** The Foreign Secretary recently suggested that ODA would be linked more closely to British foreign policy interest. How does this fit in with the UK's commitment to ensuring that poverty reduction is the primary focus of its ODA?

Tamsyn Barton: If you take a long enough time period, you can make a good case for there being a perfect coincidence between British interests and global interests. There are all sorts of arguments, if you look at the long term, for why you would want to invest in ensuring that poorer countries become richer: they become markets, there is less of a problem from economic migration and so on.

The problem for us and our members is when there are very short-term foreign policy interests that might win out over the longer-term considerations. I have already mentioned tied aid as a worrying possibility; at the moment, that should be limited by the rules of the DAC, but nevertheless I think it is something that will really need watching. One of the other key areas of concern is there is inevitably, at the moment, a big focus on security and preventing violent extremism. It is a worry for our members that sometimes that focus on being seen to take quick action may undermine long-term security, both in the UK and globally. We are looking carefully at the CSSF to make sure that as far as we can see—and with greater transparency we could see a lot more—that is not happening. That kind of announcement is a concern for us, however.

Professor Gaventa: I think Tamsyn is absolutely right on this. Security is obviously very important, and, as I said earlier, by reducing poverty one can contribute to security issues, but simply addressing security does not necessarily mean that you are going to reduce poverty. For example, I currently lead a large-scale DFID-funded research programme looking at accountability in fragile and conflict-oriented settings. We are looking at places like Nigeria, Pakistan, Egypt and Myanmar, which are places of real concern for national security.

Programmes will deal with the underlying problems of conflict in those countries, many of which are related to poverty, employment and the huge youth bulge, particularly in Africa. There are a number of educated youths coming in—the biggest bulge we have seen in history—without jobs or support for economic issues. There is potential there for real radicalisation and immigration issues, which contribute to some of our broader concerns. The way we are going to solve that is by getting at the underlying problems in those countries; it takes a certain amount of skill to target aid to get to the problems, which in turn have a security effect. Just dealing with the security as the outcome of the problem—rather than the underlying cause—is not going to be enough.

Q11 **Paul Scully:** Tamsyn, you said in your written submission that it is important that DFID plays a close, supportive role in sharing learning and ensuring policy coherence. I am wondering if you thought there was sufficient cross-Government alignment of ODA to ensure that there is joined-up working towards the delivery of strategic objectives for the UK aid strategy.

Tamsyn Barton: At the moment I would not say we have that full alignment. As I mentioned, a number of governance structures were put in place, many of them subsequent to ideas coming forward about the programmes. There have been some improvements in relation to ICAI's reviews compared to how it was before; there is now some cross-Whitehall working on research, for example, which there was not. As I mentioned earlier, DFID's hand would need to be strengthened in the context of those governance structures for it to have sufficient effect, so that the coherence was aimed primarily at poverty reduction and sustainable development, rather than shorter-term national interest considerations. National interest considerations are likely to prevail, given that those are overwhelmingly the day-to-day preoccupations of Government and the priorities for those Departments. While DFID is outnumbered, there are limits to what it can do by just playing a supportive role and contributing its expertise.

Professor Gaventa: If I could speak to that briefly from the perspective of coherence, knowledge, evidence and research, the cross-departmental spend amongst the largest Departments goes to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, under which sit the science and research funds and the £1.5 billion GCRF fund. DFID has globally led the way in research for quality development. It develops strong evidence on aid and development issues. That is now largely being spread across the GCRF programme, which means that it is going across universities. Bids are coming out and universities across the UK are engaging.

On one hand, that is great. It shows the huge appetite of universities to want to contribute to poverty alleviation. The number of proposals that have come in is huge, and there are many good ideas. Not all universities or research councils are quite as effective as DFID was at understanding the necessity of intra-disciplinary research that looks at the complexity of development problems. We can, for instance, do a lot of spend on science and vaccines and think that is going to be a magic bullet, but we have learned in development that those vaccines take place in social, cultural and political context. We will not solve the problem of health simply with a new vaccine. We have to look at these broader issues, as our work at IDS on the Ebola crisis has shown. The challenge is how we really continue this strong intra-disciplinary, partnership-oriented, long-term approach that DFID has developed over the years. We think GCRF is getting there, but it has taken a bit of time because that coherence was not necessarily there in its early implementation. It is very important that we continue to build and support that process.

Q12 **Henry Smith:** As a supplementary to that, in your written evidence you express concern that ODA funds such as the GCRF might compromise the UK's unique development knowledge base. Can you explain a little bit more about why you said that in your written evidence?

Professor Gaventa: I want to be careful here, because I think the GCRF programme and the commitment to research are very important. The UK is a real leader; I do not know any other country that has such an intense global commitment to research and evidence for development, and that is very important for the UK interest. It is not just security and business, but actually the role it can play. As the Minister said yesterday, the role it can play, using knowledge as a form of soft power, in today's world is critically important.

I think we should start by congratulating this programme, but there are some problems. Over the years in research, we have learned that it has to look at the complexity of these issues and challenges. We cannot simply compartmentalise them into particular disciplines. We know that research has to lead to impact. It is not just a matter of funding universities to come up with research; we have learned over the years that impact is important, and to have that impact, we have to have ownership of our southern partners. We have to have the ownership of universities, think-tanks, and civil-society organisations who are going to use this knowledge to bring about change on the ground. There are many other players besides the large universities in the knowledge ecosystem in the UK. There are institutions like my own and the large NGOs, who have very strong research departments.

So far, despite the great progress that has been made, GCRF has not gone far enough in really thinking about some of those subsequent conditions, such as how it engages with southern partnerships and how it builds impact on the ground. Some organisations, such as the think-tanks, the southern partners and so on, are getting squeezed out because of the terms of this. The GCRF, for instance, using the Research Council formula, requires a 20% matching fund. Large universities are well able to do that, but some cannot compete in that area, such as smaller, independent think-tanks, who have no other sources of funding, southern partners, or NGOs who are being starved of funding at the moment. They cannot compete in that area.

My concern is that, with what we have learned from our research strategy over the years, some of the players who lead that may get slightly squeezed out.

Q13 **Henry Smith:** Do you think it is key that DFID is almost overarching and being able to co-ordinate to ensure that knowledge from those smaller organisations and institutions can be included?

Professor Gaventa: DFID has great experience in this area, and the score will play a role. It is a matter of co-ordination, but also of mechanisms. Under the very rules, at the moment, some of these other organisations in the south and some of the independent smaller organisations are simply not able to compete.

Q14 **Chair:** From what both of you have said—and from other evidence that we have had—there is clearly a set of issues where there are differences between other Government Departments, both in terms of their capacity to administer ODA effectively, and in terms of the level of priority they give to poverty alleviation. I suppose I am trying to get you to take a blue-skies-thinking approach to this. If we accept 30% is going to be spent not by DFID, what would be the best way of spending that 30% to really fulfil the objective of poverty reduction and achievement of the SDGs?

Tamsyn Barton: The most important thing is to take a wide blue sky view, and see where those Departments can contribute what is not contributed by anyone else, not just in the UK but in the system more widely, to ensure that all use of expertise and knowledge is completely untied. Research is clearly showing that the best way to address it should not be about promoting UK interests. It additionally needs to ensure there is quality assurance to show that the theory of change actually translates into impacts and practice. I am afraid it is an abstract answer.

Q15 **Chair:** No, it is a good answer. Coming back to the question that a number of colleagues have asked, you have both said DFID has a crucial role to play in quality-assuring other Departments. Presumably there also needs to be a greater level of capacity in the individual Departments to quality assure. I think that was part of the point the National Audit Office raised with us in their evidence last year.

Tamsyn Barton: Yes, absolutely there does. External quality assurance has its limits if there is no emphasis on it internally. Some progress has been made; the Foreign Office has probably led the way in developing that capacity. It is much too slow on transparency. Transparency is the key, because it will let us citizens in and it will put the pressure on. At the moment, I cannot see why it is so slow. Yesterday I was with the Danish Foreign Ministry, and they said it was possible to almost instantly integrate the ATI systems from DFID. They are in Denmark, so they must have more different IT systems than other Government Departments in the UK.

Professor Gaventa: In blue sky thinking, the role of the SDGs is critically important. Our Government and many Governments around the world have signed up to this platform. There is not a single Government Department that cannot contribute in some way to helping meet the SDGs, but I do not think doing that in an ad hoc way will lead to coherence, the best use of aid funds or an effective strategy.

We need to have overall oversight of how Departments are joining up, not just around poverty reduction, but with the bigger sustainable development goals. That is the global platform that we are all working to at the moment. There needs to be some way of assuring that joined coherence on the SDGs. As Tamsyn and I said, that is a regulatory mechanism internally, in strengthening the role of internal regulatory mechanisms and the leadership of DFID, but it also opens up greater transparency so that the public, partners and knowledge organisations can contribute to this public assurance that we are on track to meet the SDGs.

The UK ought to be in the lead in meeting the SDGs because of its infrastructure and development, and if we fragment our approach too much we will lose that leadership position.

Q16 **Chair:** John, you spoke earlier about the work that you are doing, supported by DFID, on fragile and conflict-affected states. Can I ask you to say a bit more on that in the light of this line of questioning, and particularly on what relevance, if any, you think that might have for the CSSF? Should the conflict fund be reoriented, or are there things that it rightly does but that should not be matched as aid?

Professor Gaventa: It is hard to answer that question, because it has been a bit difficult to find out exactly what the conflict fund does. It has certainly been difficult for us as an independent research organisation to know how we can contribute. In DFID it is quite clear that if a certain expertise is needed, there is a process for procuring that, and everybody can offer their best assistance. We have not found the entry points in this place, so the question of how we can best contribute our knowledge and expertise in this area is very important.

It is clear to me that there is a strong intersection between poverty and conflict reduction, but simply focusing on conflict does not do it. Reorienting to get at the underlying causes of conflict in some of these countries will be critically important, and that requires a certain coherent approach that we do not have.

I will take the example of—I do not want to name the country for various reasons—a particular country where we are doing a lot of work and there is not a very strong DFID presence. Most of the presence is through the FCO, and there is only one DFID person seconded to that country. It is a key conflict country and a lot of FCO money is now going to it. One person is bringing expertise around youth and women, which are so particular to poverty and leaving no one behind. That one person speaks a very different language, and it is not going to have an impact just by embedding one person from DFID in an FCO office in a major conflict country.

Q17 **Chris Law:** You have touched on a number of points already that are in my questions, but I will go through them anyway. Given that there has been an increase in ODA spent by other Departments, is this likely to change any engagement with research and civil society?

Professor Gaventa: The response by universities across the UK to the new GCRF fund has been overwhelming. In the current bid, for instance, which is to create some intra-disciplinary hubs on key global challenges, 10 awards will be made. Over 450 applications went in. Each of those applications involves 20 or 30 researchers and principal investigators, so the amount of effort that has gone into responding to this opportunity by the research infrastructure in the UK is incredible. I do not think it is all simply a matter of people lining up to get money; they really do want to make a difference, and want to see their research make a difference in the world. This general direction of travel of harnessing the best that the UK has to offer from the research and civil society sectors is very important. We need to make sure that we are taking the best of the ecosystem we have and the uniqueness that we have in the world in terms of this field; that is going to be critical. You may want to speak more to the civil society.

Tamsyn Barton: Very briefly, it is fair to say that most Government Departments other than DFID do not have the same expectations of a really constructive and helpful interaction with civil society. In most cases there is less of a habit of it. The exception there, at least in parts, is the FCO, and I would like to give some credit to Melinda Simmons and her team at CSSF for making a real effort to engage. This has not only been on the policy area; Bond has an annual conference, and it has been very hard to get anyone from any other Government Department apart from Melinda to talk about potential funding opportunities. That is because she actually wants to have more of the programmes delivered through NGOs in areas where only they can deliver.

At the moment the report, which was a commendable move in the direction of transparency, did not go all the way there, so it is impossible to say how much is going through NGOs. They acknowledge that it is not as much as it should be, and that would be one way in which the programme could be helpfully reoriented to those areas that are not currently covered enough.

If I may sneak in something on the back of what John said earlier about CSSF and reorientation, I failed to mention gender equality when given the "leave no one behind" cue. That is enormously important. The CSSF has started a process that I hope we will see all Departments following, where the gender equality duty is actually enforced through procedures and process. I think that is something that needs to happen everywhere and to be transparent.

Q18 **Chris Law:** Tamsyn, you mentioned earlier that there was a danger of a slippery slope in some Departments, with a lack of transparency. Do you see the quality of UK aid intervention being detrimentally affected by the increase in administration of ODA in other Departments, and what can we do to mitigate that?

Tamsyn Barton: I did raise the spectre of AgustaWestland and Pergau dam, because, if you look at history, it tells you that in those less transparent circumstances, it was very much up to ODA economists to come up with an assessment that showed why it would be a very poor investment. It was purely on value-for-money grounds that those investments were questioned.

I know in the AgustaWestland case those helicopters were never suitable for tropical conditions; it was purely huge political pressure that led to them being sold. Two of them crashed, and then they spent most of their lives in a crate in Delhi airport. That is the worst-case scenario you can end up with when there is an enormous amount of political pressure and insufficient transparency.

Obviously we are nowhere near that situation, but it is worrying to see so much reference to UK companies in the Prosperity Fund report. Once you open that up as an acceptable way, that counts as a priority equally with poverty reduction. I understand that in the criteria assessment it is something like 30% on poverty reduction and 25% on UK commercial interest. For me, that is too close, so you could see a switch.

Q19 **Chris Law:** What are the obstacles to organisations accessing ODA spent by other Departments, and what challenges have you faced?

Tamsyn Barton: Just what I mentioned earlier. There is not the culture of expecting engagement. In terms of accessing funds and the design, the procurement guidelines are more suited to larger organisations that may have other funds that they can bring to bear, and that have sufficient capacity to go through the process. That is particularly an issue with the smaller organisations. Bond represents many very small members with less than a £2 million spend; there are 300 members of that size.

Professor Gaventa: I think you have named the two criteria. First of all, it is being aware of the opportunities. Sometimes we are more aware than others of how we can offer our skills from civil society or from research organisations. It is the designs under the terms of entry; we are simply not able to engage. On the one hand, the level of competition is a good thing because it shows the commitment and willingness of institutions across the UK to engage, but the risk is that there is a "winner takes all" approach in those competitions and the smaller-scale organisations will lose out.

There is a growing amount of large private consulting firms receiving ODA aid. That raises some questions, as I mentioned earlier, about the extent to which their work is in the public arena and the extent to which they are strengthening the capacity of southern partners and really serving some of the broader public goods that the civil society or research organisations might do. All of those are concerns as we go forward.

To be perfectly fair, there is some skill-building that we probably have to do at our end. We have had the relationships in Bond or through development think-tanks like ourselves. For instance, 30% of our funds come from DFID. It has gone down over the years, but we know how to engage with them. We have to scale up in knowing how to engage with other Departments as well. Other organisations have well-funded lobbyists and people who can visit those Departments and make the contacts. We do not have some of those skills and capacities, quite frankly.

Q20 **Chair:** Can I thank you both for your evidence today? We are going to move to the second panel now, but please do feel free to stay to listen to the further evidence.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rupert Simons and Nilima Gulrajani.

Q21 **Chair:** Welcome, both of you. What we will do is go straight into questions. When you have your first opportunity to answer, please introduce yourself. The evidence that we have received in writing, and it was reflected in the panel that we have just had, highlights both opportunities and risks that arise from the shift of ODA towards other Government Departments and across Government funds. Can I ask each of you, as an opening question, whether you feel that the benefits outweigh the risks, or do the risks outweigh the benefits?

Dr Gulrajani: My name is Nilima Gulrajani. I am a senior research fellow from the Overseas Development Institute. I work in the development strategy and finance group. We provide comparative research on the administration and public management of bilateral aid agencies.

There are opportunities for real benefits and collaboration across areas of specialisation, and there is the potential for the overall impact to be greater than the sum of the parts. I have concerns, and I think there are risks. There could be more reflection on the architecture around which the whole of Government engagement on development takes place. The UK aid strategy did not stipulate enough the machinery of government to support a 30% target of other Government Department spending.

There is also the potential for fragmentation across the system and high costs of co-ordination. We have a large, integrated vision at the macro level, but at the level of operation we have silos that remain. There is a potential risk of policy incoherence as a result of that fragmentation.

Rupert Simons: Good morning. I am Rupert Simons. I am the chief executive of Publish What You Fund, a transparency campaign. My answer to the question would be that it depends. There is a risk of fragmentation with the way it is being managed now, with a lot of Departments managing relatively small amounts of aid. There is potential to reform it and to make it more effective. I would cite the potential for increased transparency as one important way in which we could enable better co-ordination and better learning among Departments.

Q22 **Mr Sharma:** The lack of transparency in the ODA administered by OGDs is a common theme in the written evidence submitted to the Committee. Do you agree with this sentiment? If so, what do you feel are the main causes of this opacity?

Rupert Simons: I agree with that sentiment. It is one of the points that we made in our written evidence. The lack of transparency does not necessarily hamper the effectiveness of these organisations, but it does mean that we do not know how effective they are. There may be great work going on that the British people, the British taxpayers, are not getting adequate credit for. Equally, there may also be problems that are being concealed, or not being brought to the attention of this Committee and others who have an oversight role, because of the lack of transparency.

Dr Gulrajani: There are also potential reasons for that opacity. In the context of the CSSF, there are concerns around the non-ODA spend and the classified nature of the information around that spend. The potential lack of ministerial accountability for the cross-governmental funds might also not create an incentive for transparency. Existing accountability mechanisms like ICAI can only look at the ODA component. They do not have scrutiny for the non-ODA component. If you are looking at the cross-governmental funds, and the CSSF in particular, ICAI's ability to be scrutinising the CSSF is limited.

Q23 **Richard Burden:** I would like to ask you a little bit more about the CSSF, if I may. In the written evidence we have received, that does come in for particular criticism regarding lack of transparency. Do you think that an external audience can know whether the fund's ODA activities are actually ODA-compliant without there being extra transparency mechanisms brought into play?

Dr Gulrajani: We have to set the expectations high for the ODA component. We have an International Development Act. The UK has signed up to the definition of ODA and maintaining the integrity of that. There are mechanisms one could introduce to ensure compliance. For example, you could have all proposals to the CSSF forced to identify the expected causal contribution to poverty reduction. You can strengthen the role of regional boards, to ensure that they are assessing the impact of the ODA component to make sure it is focused on poverty reduction. Our expectations matter within the CSSF.

Rupert Simons: If I may add to that, there are provisions within most global transparency standards, including the standard for aid transparency, for the redaction of sensitive information, particularly if it is likely to put anyone at risk. For example, if we were looking at humanitarian aid to Rohingya in Bangladesh, it would be entirely appropriate to redact the names and identification of people receiving cash transfers, if there were indeed cash transfers going on, which I do not think there are at the moment. If there were in future, you certainly would not expect to see the names. You probably would not even expect to see identification details for beneficiary communities, in order to protect those communities. That is entirely possible. That form of redaction happens routinely within DFID, particularly when they are operating in conflict zones or in areas where there are Governments who may not always be acting in the best interests of all their people.

Q24 **Richard Burden:** You have suggested some additional mechanisms could be brought into play to promote greater transparency externally. As things stand at the moment, do you think we can at least assume that the performance of the CSSF is actually transparent to DFID? Do you get the impression that they know what is happening?

Rupert Simons: I am afraid I do not have enough information to answer that. I have not spoken with DFID about it.

Dr Gulrajani: There are DFID representatives on the regional and local boards of the CSSF, so presumably someone at DFID is sitting on those boards. The bigger challenge is the external scrutiny, effectively. One can expect that there is some engagement with DFID on those boards. Perhaps strengthening their role could be one way to also ensure compliance with the IDA, for example weighting their assessments in the context of the expected impact on poverty reduction.

Q25 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** What are the greatest barriers preventing other Departments from achieving the same level of openness and accountability that we would expect from DFID? How can we try to overcome these barriers preventing us having transparency?

Dr Gulrajani: The one that comes to mind immediately is the fact that other Government Departments can voluntarily opt into the International Development Act. I link these two together—the transparency initiative and the International Development Act. One might question whether a voluntary opt-in is appropriate, and whether there should be full compliance with the International Development Act. You have the UK aid strategy committing Departments to achieve, I think, good and very good scores on the IATI, so it is there in terms of a policy framework. The question is about the compliance function and how that is designed.

Rupert Simons: I would add two things to that. One is that there can be an initial technical hurdle to overcome when starting to publish open data on one's operations. This was certainly an issue five years ago when DFID started doing it. It required quite a long period of investment and learning to get good at it. However, it is worth noting that for the past few years DFID has required full IATI publication from NGOs, and now also from private contractors who receive DFID funds, and increasingly from multilateral development finance institutions and UN agencies as well.

It is surprising, to say the least, that until recently, DFID was requiring that from all its implementing partners, but there was no equivalent requirement for other Government Departments. In view of the Prime Minister's latest statement on this in December, I am hopeful that is now changing and there is a presumption that other Departments will report IATI data. There is a technical hurdle to overcome, and there is also, in some cases, a cultural barrier to openness that needs to be overcome.

Q26 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Rupert, in your written submission to us, I think you called for us to ask the Government how they intend to get to that period. You have identified there some of that investment, asking NGOs. If those steps that you have just outlined there are done, do you think it is achievable for Government Departments to get there by 2020?

Rupert Simons: It is achievable, but it would have been easier if they had started at the time that the aid strategy was published, in late 2015. We are now two and a half years on from that. It is achievable, but it will require significant work.

Q27 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Have Her Majesty's Government contacted Publish What You Fund, asking for assistance? Has there been any contact between you and the Government about maybe how they could do that in such a short timescale?

Rupert Simons: There has been. There are regular contacts between us and DFID, talking about transparency across Government. More recently, we have also been engaging with the FCO as part of our regular Aid Transparency Index, which comes out in the summer, and they are going to be included in this year.

However, I should also clarify that, as an accountability watchdog, as a civil society organisation, though we are certainly in a position to advise people on how they can improve their performance, we are not going to be providing technical assistance. We do not think that doing so would be compatible with our status as an independent monitoring organisation.

Q28 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Fantastic. We wait with bated breath for some of that to come out. Finally, to both of you maybe, we have the UK aid strategy. Do we need any more legislative underpinning or changes to ensure that transparency is reached? You already mentioned, of course, that the ability to opt out should be taken away. Are there other things that might need legislative underpinning to ensure this transparency happens?

Dr Gulrajani: Potentially, the coverage of the International Development Act binds the Secretary of State for International Development. It does not bind the entire Government—all Government Departments, effectively. Some clarity on who is covered in that designation of Secretary of State, to make sure it includes other Government Departments, would be a wider piece beyond just the transparency initiative. That might be able to secure the transparency across the Government.

Q29 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Our previous panel seemed to suggest that they believed that the Act did cover all aspects of Government. Do you maybe take the view that it is too limiting and needs to be amended to extend it?

Dr Gulrajani: I am not a legal expert, but the way I read it, it allows for discretion for the Secretary of State for International Development to decide what is likely to achieve poverty reduction. The clause is very clearly binding the Secretary of State, and it gives discretion to the Secretary of State to make those judgments.

Rupert Simons: I am going to add a point on the legal side. We are a global campaign and look at all major donors. Most have not introduced laws mandating transparency. The two that we look at in most detail are the US Government and the European Commission. The US Government did introduce a Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act, which passed late in 2016. However, it does not actually advance the cause. It merely serves as a back-stop, in case they were to backslide on what they already do, so it has not raised their ambition in any way.

The European Commission has taken a different approach. They have not legislated for transparency and they do not intend to. What they have done is enshrine it in the European Consensus on Development. That is a policy statement of equivalent force to a White Paper, but it lasts longer because it is considered binding over the next 10 years.

Q30 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Will there be any effect of us leaving the European Union and, I guess, not being signed up anymore to the consensus? Will that weaken our position, or is the consensus already lower than where we are achieving?

Rupert Simons: The consensus has an aspiration for transparency to be extended progressively across all development resources. That is very similar to the UK Government's current position. I would say that the UK Government and the EU Commission are probably at about the same level of aspiration. I would note also that the EU Commission reached that level of aspiration partly due to pressure from the UK Government.

Q31 **Chris Law:** That leads on quite nicely to my next question. With regards to the Department for International Development, it is commonly referred to in written evidence as having gold-standard levels of transparency and accountability. We were just hearing earlier that it is in the top five best-performing Departments globally, which is great news. However, if DFID can manage this, what on earth is stopping other UK Government

Departments from achieving the same level of best practice? Can you give us some ideas about what we can do to make sure that best practice is implemented?

Dr Gulrajani: I am speaking to the funds point perhaps, more than the wider piece. As was mentioned previously, the ability within the CSSF to be blending ODA and non-ODA instruments effectively does create some concern around the classified nature of information within the non-ODA spend. Even the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy had difficulty accessing the strategies, the results, and the funding frameworks around which they were to be assessing the CSSF.

There are some provisions, but as you mentioned, there is rightly the possibility to redact and anonymise, and, when data is not released, to think about and quantify the reasons why, and look at aggregate trends in terms of reasons. It might be, by assessing those reasons, we get a better sense of what benefits we are achieving as a result of this spend. Does that outweigh the cost of not being transparent?

The accountability mechanisms that are currently in place, particularly around the ODA spend, focus on the non-ODA spend—ICAI, for example. Accountability across the whole piece is important.

Rupert Simons: I would suggest that Departments would need to go through a technical implementation, so implementing publication to the IATI standard, which can take a year to two. Most people do it in less than two years. Second, they need to go through a period of staff engagement, and potentially training, particularly for in-country staff, to help understand what it is appropriate to publish, what should be redacted, and what the rules are around redaction.

Third, there has to be some degree of co-ordination and quality control, which could be exercised by DFID, but does not have to be. In view of the large number of Government Departments that are engaged in ODA to some extent, it would be appropriate to have some degree of central co-ordination and control, and, if appropriate, technical support provided.

Q32 **Chair:** Rupert, can you tell us a bit more about the engagement with the Foreign Office, with them moving to be part of IATI? I do not think I knew about that, so that sounds like a welcome development. I would be interested to hear a bit more detail.

Rupert Simons: Yes, absolutely. Let me distinguish between two things. There is the International Aid Transparency Initiative, which is a global data standard, with over 600 publishers, and it functions a bit like an accounting standard. It is voluntary, but it is increasingly adopted universally. On the other hand, there is the Aid Transparency Index, which is published by my organisation. That covers a much smaller number of agencies and is assessing primarily, but not exclusively, the quality of data published in the IATI standard.

The FCO has published IATI data intermittently for the last five years. They were included in our 2013 and 2014 index, both of which spurred some improvement. They dropped out of our 2016 index, because we revised the criteria and their budget was not large enough at the time to be included. However, this time around their budget has risen sufficiently for them to be included, and we have been in discussions with them for the past few months.

Q33 **Chair:** It is simply triggered by the size of their budget, rather than any element of volunteering.

Rupert Simons: Yes, exactly. The inclusion of some of the Prosperity Fund and CSSF money that is being spent by the FCO brings them back into the criteria for inclusion. However, given that we are doing 45 agencies globally, it is unlikely at this point that we would ever be assessing all of the UK Government's spending on ODA within that main index. Most of them would simply be too small.

Q34 **Paul Scully:** There are three cross-government funds that are overseen by the National Security Council. Each links up to one of the UK's national security objectives. How well do you think these objectives link up with development aims?

Dr Gulrajani: There is overlap between the UK aid strategy and the aims within the national security strategy. There is some amount of overlap. For the bits of those funds that are ODA-specific, there is a clear need to demonstrate compliance with the International Development Act. There is considerable overlap with the UK aid strategy certainly, not always mutually reinforcing each other. Those objectives have the potential to be pulling in different directions, but nonetheless the overlap is there.

Q35 **Paul Scully:** How do you think they might reconcile conflict between their primary development aim and that secondary national strategic aim?

Dr Gulrajani: The reality is it is very hard to reconcile. The Prosperity Fund is trying to do that. It has dual aims of primary motivation focused on poverty reduction, with a secondary motivation on international and UK business. I agreed with Tamsyn's point earlier that the weighting is far too similar to suggest a real prioritisation across those aims. There is an attempt to try to reconcile the national security aims with the development aims. Whether that is achieved in practice or not is the real question.

Rupert Simons: I believe it can be achieved in practice. I have personal experience of working in Sierra Leone during the Ebola crisis. I was an adviser to the Government there and was very impressed by what I saw as very co-ordinated working between the FCO, the MoD and DFID. In many cases, DFID was funding programmes that were then being supported with technical advice and sometimes hands-on mentoring from military officers. To me, that seemed to be an excellent example of how it should be done.

I understand that something similar was attempted in Afghanistan. I realise it is not going to be possible everywhere, but if we look practically at where the largest amounts of money are being spent, we are going to find quite a lot of overlap between development and national security interests.

Q36 **Chair:** Let me develop that a little bit further. Nilima, you referred to the evidence that Tamsyn from Bond gave us earlier around the Prosperity Fund and its different objectives. What do you think the Government could do to ensure that poverty reduction is the absolute overriding priority for the Prosperity Fund, or indeed the other cross-Government funds?

Dr Gulrajani: If the ultimate purpose of the Prosperity Fund is poverty reduction, we need to really think about what role a scarce resource like ODA can play in middle-income countries. The remit of the Prosperity Fund is very broad, but is largely focused on middle-income countries. We need to think where a concessional resource like ODA can be used to catalyse investment, trade and job creation. This might be thinking carefully about the countries and the sectors.

One could also then expect the benefits to UK aid to be far more indirect than we are currently presenting. Here, the argument is that the provision of aid can increase jobs and exports. Some colleagues of mine did some work at ODI that has shown that. It is not through the tied aid mechanism, whether it be formally or informally tied, but through generic income effects and trade effects.

The focus should be on the global public good function that ODA can play, in terms of building a better, more conducive investment climate in these countries, as opposed to creating a direct subsidy to business, whether international or UK.

Q37 **Chair:** As I understand it, the Prosperity Fund now assesses its bids in part against the criterion of strengthening UK trade and investment opportunities. Do I take it from that answer that you are suggesting that should not happen, and that it should be done in a different way?

Dr Gulrajani: The Prosperity Fund is meant to have secondary benefits to international business, among which UK businesses might benefit. What was interesting was in the ICAI rapid review of the Prosperity Fund, they highlighted that in the criteria to assess proposals, 25% weighting was focused exclusively on UK business, and the international business component had been dropped. Whether that was deliberate or not, I do not know, but it was dropped, according to them.

Q38 **Chair:** When you use the phrase "tied aid", is that essentially what you are referring to, or do you have other concerns?

Dr Gulrajani: It would not be tied if the procurement process was open to all. There is a risk that it can tie aid informally, because in proposals you need to stipulate which UK business or sector is benefitting.

Presumably that sector or business would be contacted. There would be some form of knowledge relationship, so you are potentially informally tying that aid by giving awareness and knowledge of a particular proposal that was going to be launched. If the procurement process is open, though, according to DAC rules, that would be untied.

Q39 **Mr Evans:** On a regular basis you will read in the newspapers an analysis of how some of the money is spent, whether it is by DFID or other Government Departments under the same banner. When we are talking about hunger eradication or poverty reduction, access to clean water, medicines—stuff like that—there does not seem to be a problem. Some of the projects that are featured include teaching people to juggle or play football, or giving direct money to some people because they are unemployed as a form of the dole. Do you believe these jeopardise the 0.7% in the minds of the British public? How important do you think it is that the Department and other Government Departments get it right?

Rupert Simons: The most important thing is that the British Government should be open about what they are doing and justify it to the taxpayer and the public. There are inevitably differences of opinion on what is justifiable and acceptable use of aid to the public, and what is an acceptable use of aid to the country or Government in question.

The reference that I would tend to look at is the sustainable development goals, so seeking to understand how an activity that is badged and branded as aid is helping achieve the sustainable development goals. If it is not possible to provide a clear narrative for how it does so, then I would question that.

Our job as transparency campaigners is not to look at a particular programme and say, "This programme is or is not supported by the evidence". It is for us to make the evidence available so that researchers who are expert in particular fields and particular countries can look at the evidence and come to that view. Transparency makes that easier. It does not necessarily make it simple, because the chains of causation can be very indirect, especially when it comes to job creation. Without greater transparency, I do not think we will ever be able to do that.

Q40 **Mr Evans:** As far as the 0.7% is concerned, do you believe that transparency throughout the world, not just within the United Kingdom, would lead other people in other developed countries, where they clearly can afford it, to think that they ought to be giving more? Clearly, Britain gives 0.7%, but there are so many other countries out there that are not stepping up to the plate. As you know, the Secretary of State for International Development wrote an article just this week about that. Do you believe that the transparency will focus people's attention in the developed world on starting to press their own Governments to step up to the plate?

Rupert Simons: In the developed world, I believe it already is. I would give a few examples. Sweden and the Netherlands tend to do very well in our index. They tend to have a large and generous aid budget, in particular one that is oriented towards supporting the UN system and multilateral agencies. In view of the relatively small size of those budgets in absolute terms, that is entirely justifiable.

Specifically in Germany, there has been a push in the last few years to increase the aid budget. I would argue that is for two reasons. One is greater visibility of where German aid spending is going, and greater confidence by campaigners and NGOs to point to the impact of that spending and demand accountability. Second is also the realisation that Germany, as the largest economy in Europe, historically has not been pulling its weight as a global development player, and needs to do so to a greater extent.

Q41 **Chair:** Could I ask a follow-up to Nigel's question? It takes us back to the previous question around tied aid and what we can learn from other countries, both positively and negatively. As a Committee, we visited Paris to hear the French opinion, including from people from the Macron administration, about French aid. They have ambitious plans for increasing ODA in France, but they also have a more general approach to ODA that is very different from ours. I would be interested if either of you had any reflections on that.

Dr Gulrajani: The UK has committed to untying its aid, and admirably so. It really is considered a world leader in terms of stepping up to the plate on that function. Where tied aid may have a greater role is what we are seeing in the context of middle-income countries. It is the use of aid for that pursuit of economic interest, or economic diplomacy, if you will. There, the role of ODA is seen to be quite limited. It is a package between ODA, guarantees and loans that potentially fit in that context better. I would argue that here the use of tied aid is more commonplace.

Q42 **Chair:** This is the final question, specifically to Nilima. In ODI's written evidence, you highlight the issue of the complexity of the blend of ODA and non-ODA in some of the funds, notably in the CSSF, and the lack of detailed public information, which makes it difficult to assess effectiveness. Do you have any suggestions for how the Government could improve transparency in this area?

Dr Gulrajani: Yes. As I think I mentioned previously, it would be to make a responsibility to report on ODA. Currently two fifths of the fund, £483 million, is ODA-able, but there is no way to systematically see how it is complying with the definition of ODA. ICAI should have its mandate reinforced and be able to explore certainly the ODA spend.

We also need to recognise the classified nature and the sensitivity around certain bits of the information as well, so redaction would be of interest as well, or important. Perhaps we have the reasons, as I mentioned, for non-disclosure monitored by regional boards to really understand why information is not being released in an anonymised fashion, and analyse whether the benefits of blending outweigh the costs to transparency.

Q43 **Chair:** So an enhanced role for ICAI, in a sense, to make it clear they can look at the non-ODA elements, a bigger input for the regional boards, and a stronger representation of DFID's voice in the funds themselves, both centrally and regionally.

Dr Gulrajani: Yes.

Rupert Simons: I would agree with that. I would perhaps add an example. When I was looking at DFID engagement in Myanmar about a year ago, before the latest crisis erupted, it was not really possible to tell what was ODA and what was not ODA, particularly on the side of technical assistance and direct engagement with the Government. We should be wary of a simple assertion that if it is ODA it is good, and if it is not ODA it is bad.

This is now hypothetical, because I do not know if any such programme exists, but if we found a programme that was funded by the CSSF that was promoting exchange and technical support between the British military and the military in Myanmar, or, say, technical training on policing, that is almost certainly not going to satisfy the definition of ODA. Nevertheless, it may be a very good thing from a policy standpoint, particularly a foreign policy objective. Having dialogue with the military in Myanmar may be a very useful way of trying to mitigate some of the consequences of the current politics inside Myanmar.

We do not know that, because we do not know if there are any such programmes. I would suggest that it is in the public interest for ICAI to be able to look at those as well, and for them to be made, to the extent possible within the parameters of national security and protection of vulnerable individuals, to publish details of those programmes as well.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. Thank you for your evidence and for joining us here today. As I said at the beginning, this is the first of our oral evidence sessions as part of this inquiry. Both panels of witnesses have given us a lot of evidence that will be very helpful to our inquiry, so thank you.