

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: ICAI Chief Commissioner pre-appointment hearing, HC 1493

Tuesday 4 September 2018

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Members present: Stephen Twigg (Chair); Richard Burden; Mrs Pauline Latham; Chris Law; Mark Menzies; Henry Smith.

Questions 1 – 22

Witness

I: Dr Tamsyn Barton, prospective Chief Commissioner, Independent Commission for Aid Impact.

Examination of witness

Witness: Dr Tamsyn Barton.

Q1 Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome back after the summer recess. Today's session is for us to meet and ask questions to Dr Tamsyn Barton, who is the prospective new Chief Commissioner for ICAI. Can I welcome you, Dr Barton? We have a dozen or so questions that we are going to seek to cover with you over the next hour or so. Let me start by giving you an opportunity to set out what you would see as the main priorities for ICAI over the coming years.

Dr Barton: Thank you very much. It is an honour to have got this far in the process. I know a bit about this Committee and I know you are frighteningly well informed, so I am not expecting to have an easy ride. Nevertheless, I am very pleased to be here. I will just briefly set out, if you like, my vision—which is how it has been advertised on social media—for ICAI.

Ultimately, what I would like to see ICAI achieve is to build back public trust in the effectiveness of aid. I do not know if any of you follow the Aid Attitudes Tracker, but unfortunately what we have seen is that there has been a loss in trust. Actually, the last time it was polled, something like 45% of people seriously doubted the effectiveness of aid. That is indeed the background to why ICAI was set up, but it is something that we must never lose sight of.

ICAI can play its role in increasing that trust only if it is able to contribute to improving that effectiveness, giving the assurance to the public that there is an independent and specialised assessment. The NAO was there before. The NAO did a great job in assessing the value for money. But with an enterprise as big and as complicated as the international development work that the UK Government are engaged in, you need a specialist watchdog. That is ultimately how I see the context.

In terms of priorities, I am just going to give you three. The first priority is particularly something important and where you come in. The first priority is salience. It is already the case, and quite rightly, that relevance is a key criterion by which the choices of targets, subjects, and themes for review are chosen. I have chosen the word "salience" rather than "relevance" because we have to communicate even better to the public, providing assurance that we are examining the most important things. That is where you, along with other key stakeholders externally such as civil society, are going to be helpful for the future ICAI: in determining where reviews are really likely to make a difference to the effectiveness.

That may also shift a little further the nature of the products that ICAI produces. I have seen in my time at EBRD that the effectiveness of the



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evaluation function was greatly increased by making the products shorter, more timely and aimed at the right moment. There is some further work to be done. Although there are already rapid reviews, we could look more at possibly even quicker products, provided that the Departments are willing also to pick up the speed on their side. There is also room to use IT more to get much more out of the data that is available, and also to involve the people who should ultimately be our focus. Saliency is No. 1.

The second I do not need to say much about; I know it has come up. That is quality. Broadly it is there, but it needs constant watching. If there is ever doubt that the Commission is producing high quality, robust, and well-evidenced reports, then it is simply not going to be effective. That will need a constant focus, and it will need, of course, that independence to keep that objectivity.

My last priority, which is the most important and particularly perhaps relates to my past, is a focus on putting poor people first. I started out with grassroots NGOs, and I was a specialist in social development. I have never lost that focus, even when I have been working on lending very large amounts of money.

In my view, putting poor people first does not mean that the only types of intervention that are appropriate are humanitarian or social sector immediate. It can be just as important for poor people to have long-term interventions on governance or economic growth. Poor people still have to be at the centre. If they are losing out as a result of those changes and there are not the appropriate safeguards, then we are not going to be achieving what we want to see. Keeping poor people front and centre is ultimately what will reassure the public.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you very much indeed. Let me now just come on to a couple of questions relating to issues around independence and impartiality. ICAI has a unique status as an NDPB but one that is charged in part with scrutinising the effectiveness of its parent Department. How will you ensure that ICAI remains firmly independent of the Government?

Dr Barton: I am lucky in that I have inherited a good set-up already. Yes, of course, there is a kind of line back into the Department. Inevitably, the Department has to be accountable for the good conduct in terms of looking after the money, good HR practice, good practice in safeguarding information and that kind of corporate link, but they do not have the habit, I am reliably assured, of interfering in any way with the ICAI operational work. There is currently no interference in the selection of the topics for review; that comes to you rather than to them. Apparently the products go directly to the Secretary of State before they go to anybody on the officials' side at all. There is very little room for any compromise in that independence. I have inherited a good set-up there. I know that there are attempts to change a few things at the margins, and discussions on things like traffic lights.



Chair: We are going to come to that.

Dr Barton: Those sorts of thing can be looked at. My view on all those technical questions is that the key to the answer is, "Will it help maintain that independence or not?"

Q3 **Chair:** Super. Regarding your personal position, obviously you have a background in DFID. I think that brings strengths. Can you talk us through what you see as the pros and cons of your having the background in DFID, and in particular how you can demonstrate your independence from the Department where needed?

Dr Barton: Certainly. It is an absolutely fair question. What I would like to say first is that I have had something like 25 years of working in development, of which almost half was at DFID in different periods and in different ways. I would see it very much that there is a common thread; I have always aimed to contribute my part to poverty reduction and social justice, but from different angles depending on where my experience could make the most difference.

As I mentioned, I started out in local grassroots NGOs in India. I moved backwards and forwards, in fact, between civil society and Government. I have had some academic involvement. I also spent almost six years working in international financial institutions. I did indeed spend a total of 13 years in DFID, almost 10 years of which were in Whitehall. For you, that is going to present a big opportunity, because it does give me an unrivalled knowledge of where the difference can be made. It simply is not something you can learn by any other way. Where are the points in the system that are most amenable to change? What will really get us traction where we want to improve things, and what will not?

I did of course leave DFID some eight years ago. In many ways, it is almost unrecognisable. Its leadership on the officials' side now is also completely changed. Nevertheless, there are still the ways of doing things. There are the key tensions between what is decided centrally and how it is implemented in the bilateral programmes, and the way the multilateral programmes work, where it will be enormously helpful that I know where to put the pressure on, if you like. No one can pull the wool over my eyes, I reckon.

Q4 **Chair:** Excellent. In your application, you declared two brief periods of involvement in domestic political parties. Can you just give us reassurance of your willingness and ability to work on a cross-party basis?

Dr Barton: Yes, certainly I can. I have not been enormously politically active in the sense of party politics, because my focus generally in life has more been on development and green issues. I was briefly involved in canvassing for the Liberal Democrats in one by-election and an election, and I joined the Labour Party and left it. Both those things were in the context of the cause that is currently dividing the nation—or at least for those not on *Love Island* it is dividing the nation—which is Brexit. That



is really the only context in which I can think of any potential impact on the work I would do for this Committee.

In relation to the UK's exit from the EU in relation to development, there is actually pretty much cross-party agreement. I am on record in my former role, and even since I have left have been talking about that issue. In general, everybody is promoting the highest degree of co-operation. I was actually on a panel at the LSE with Kwasi Kwarteng and Danny Alexander, which was also looking at Brexit in the context of the EIB in UK infrastructure. There again I found agreement breaking out everywhere. I do not think there is any big risk to my impartiality, but I am sure you would all be alert to any risks should they arise.

Chair: Can I thank you for that? You have really anticipated what was going to be my next question, which was about your previous role at the European Investment Bank. You have given an answer that covers those questions as well, so thank you very much.

Q5 Richard Burden: Could I just ask you to take a look back at what ICAI has done, to get a flavour of your perspectives going forward? Looking over ICAI's recent reviews, whether the short, quick-fire ones or the long ones, which would you say have had the most impact, and why would you say that?

Dr Barton: It is perhaps worth looking back even further than this current Commission, because it is in that light that you can see the achievements of this Commission. I would like to pay tribute to Alison and the team in what they have done. It is a young organisation and inevitably there are always improvements that can be made with each new Commission.

In its first version, the approach as things were being set up was a little bit scattergun and less strategic. One of the innovations that has enabled a greater ability to contribute to the strategic discussion has been the option of rapid reviews. It has been particularly useful because the other Government Department programmes apart from DFID are at quite a formative stage, but nevertheless they are moving ahead quickly, so it was very important to come up quickly with findings in order to give some useful direction. There you can see visible signs of traction because of that formative moment.

Taking the Prosperity Fund as an example, I was actually in front of you in January with my own criticisms of the Prosperity Fund, but without having had the advantage of ICAI's detailed work looking at it. One of the important things that was achieved as a result of its review was the decision to extend the spending period—in effect, to delay—because there was a risk of too much spending going ahead without really enough strategic direction. That is an important example with the other Government Departments.



There can also be an important impact from the very long reviews, which are going to be needed to have the really thorough scrutiny. That is required perhaps at this stage most with the DFID programmes, because the others are, for the most part, more recent. I was particularly pleased to see that in relation to the value-for-money guidance, for example, equity has been included as a result of the work done by ICAI. I forget, but I think that may have been a rapid review as well. That is a good example of where you could make a difference even in a DFID programme.

The answer is that you need both, and I am interested in whether still more could be done. I had discussions with someone about the disability review, which was something where I think it would have been possible, if it was agreed with the Department, to work even more quickly ahead of all the new programming for the disability summit. That is going to be something to watch over the years. To me, one of ICAI's most important products is actually the follow-up review, because you need that follow-through really to keep up the pressure. That again is where you will come in.

Q6 Richard Burden: Apart from speed in responding, disability being the example you gave, are there any areas where you really think ICAI's approach or work could be improved? If so, how do you think your leadership would enable that to happen?

Dr Barton: Most of these are relatively matters of nuance and incremental improvements, but there are a few things that I have thought about. I do not know if we are going to talk about the work plan and what is coming up later, but there are some things that are areas of priority for me that might have been less before. Do you want me to mention them now?

Chair: Yes.

Dr Barton: To my mind, there has not been enough scrutiny of the multilateral programmes. I know that they have started to do more at the moment; there are the humanitarian reforms. If you consider that 40% of the spending is called multilateral in DFID and 60% if you look at what they call multi-buy—the bilateral programmes in-country—we need more. I can understand why it has not been there up to now, but we need to work out better ways of giving that assurance and explaining to the public how the money is used multilaterally.

There is one other area that is worth thinking about, where ICAI has not ventured so far. There has obviously been a lot of focus on the money, but as you all know well, the human resources in DFID are equally important. If you take the governance review that was just done, absolutely fundamental to the key conclusions of that review is what happens to the governance expertise in DFID: where is that? Or, in the case of disability, where is that expertise? We need to think about more emphasis on DFID's HR processes.



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Those are a couple of things that I bring perhaps from the background I have, having been in DFID. In terms of other improvements, I briefly mentioned the IT and big data. Up to now, there has not been a huge amount of information-gathering in that way. I know there was some in relation to research, where it was relatively easy to use IT to get participants in the research programmes to contribute. I am thinking about how we could actually reach beneficiaries. Could we in some cases get them directly involved through participatory methods? That may seem a little wild, and I do not want you to hold me to everything I suggest now, but we need to look into these questions. Those are just a couple of ways in which I might improve things.

Q7 Richard Burden: One of the areas the outgoing Chief Commissioner has raised concerns about has been the quality of Government responses to ICAI reviews. Do you share those concerns?

Dr Barton: It is something where the pressure needs to be constantly kept up. I have been involved in 25 years of work; very often I have been on the other side, having to respond. There are always incentives to have slightly weasel language to escape the really tough recommendations. Partial acceptance is something that opens up a lot of gap. It is something that can be improved, and for that to happen I will need to use all of my knowledge of what helps to get that greater focus in Government responses. The more that we can have little wiggle room in the way that the recommendations read, the clearer it will be. I will need help from the Committee in getting that traction.

Q8 Richard Burden: You did say earlier that one of the areas in which you would like to see some improvement and some progress was in terms of following up on recommendations, particularly on undertakings being given by the Government in response to ICAI reviews. How do you think you would try to make sure that happened?

Dr Barton: Ultimately, there is only so much bandwidth available, which is why it is very important that, on the one hand, this Committee and, on the other, external stakeholders and civil society decide on the priorities, keep the focus on them and do not lose that focus. The successes we have seen in the area of disability have been because of that continued focus, which will need to be maintained if a difference is going to be made. Where there is a recommendation where there is some doubt about whether it would be followed up, it needs to be a decision whereby I as the Chief Commissioner would know there would be follow-through in keeping the pressure up, and it would not just be down to the Secretariat saying, "We are going to have a follow-up with you."

Q9 Mark Menzies: The Government's recent tailored review of ICAI concluded that ICAI's function should still be to produce a small number of well prioritised reviews. How many reviews per year should this equate to in your view?



Dr Barton: I considered this, because I noticed in my preparations that originally it was expected there would be something like 20 reviews per year, and now I think the annual report had nine. That takes me back to that bandwidth point that I just made. There is a risk with 20 reviews: if there are improvements that need to be made, they might get lost with too many asks, in effect. Admittedly, when it started, DFID was the main focus, and now there are a number of Departments; they each have their own bandwidth. In terms of the Committee and external stakeholders, what do you feel? I feel 20 might be too many. Nine seems okay, but it does rather depend on the balance: how many are the long ones? What is important there is, as I mentioned earlier, you might lose quality. Decisions have had to be made sometimes to delay a little compared to the original programme, or even to drop reviews, because it was not going to be possible to get that quality.

Q10 **Mark Menzies:** You have touched on some of this already. Do you have proposals for how ICAI approaches its work? For example, what weight should be given to factors such as the amount of money involved, DFID versus OGDs, country programmes versus thematic coverage, bilateral versus multilateral, humanitarian versus development and so on? What are your thoughts on that as things currently stand?

Dr Barton: Gosh. You have asked me at least 20 questions there.

Mark Menzies: I have, all rolled into one. It is efficiency.

Dr Barton: I have touched on some of them, as you say. The broad approach is the right one and relates to what all evaluation functions do: standards, relevance, effectiveness, learning. On the learning side, ICAI has pushed hard, and it is often very difficult to combine accountability and learning, particularly in such a public context as this, where it has to be seen to be independent. It is an area where the push will still need to be made.

After the last learning review, it was felt there was quite a lot of frenetic response, and then it died down a bit. Again, this is something I know from my time inside DFID: you do need individuals who are really committed to pushing through it. It actually has quite a receptive structure in many ways, because you have the matrix structure with the professional advisers who link up very effectively to spread specialist knowledge. It is a matter of using that as effectively as possible, and I understand now there is a programme management cadre, which will help that.

I would not in any way criticise or rebalance, but we need to keep the focus on learning and not lose that, even if accountability is probably at the forefront of everybody's minds. In terms of the balance between humanitarian and development, that has been broadly right up to now. I feel there should be more on the multilateral side. The way that the themes were identified has also helped make sure that we are not losing



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important areas. I am not sure that I see a big need to rebalance those, but I reserve the right to reconsider.

- Q11 **Mark Menzies:** Each year, ICAI's proposed work plan is signed off by this Committee. Given that the other Commissioners have not yet been recruited, how do you propose to ensure that the 2019-20 work plan is agreed with us in a timely manner?

Dr Barton: That I know is a very appropriate question, because I understand that in between the last two Commissions, there was a definite loss in terms of the scrutiny that should have happened. This time we are much better set up in terms of the process. To an extent, it has even already begun in so far as the Secretariat has at least given me a sneak-peek of some of the ideas that it is kicking around for the upcoming reviews. Even if I start as planned in November, already things will be moving on.

All those steps are being thought through, and by my starting part-time in November, it will be possible to be involved in the recruitment of the Commissioners, the appointment of the contractors and so on. Some key decisions will have been made before the new Commissioners themselves arrive. That is inevitable; otherwise, there would be a gap. It looks well thought through from what I have seen, and for that, the credit goes to the Secretariat and the current Commissioners.

- Q12 **Chris Law:** You mentioned at the very beginning the traffic light system. I wonder what your thoughts were on that. Do you think it is adequate? Should we scrap it? Is there a way of having different shades of colour in there? What do you think we should do with it?

Dr Barton: This is one of those perennial questions. I noticed, again, when I looked at the beginning, it was meant to be red, amber or green. People obviously realised that that ended up being too crude, because you always get everything clustering in the middle; you would have had an awful lot of amber reviews. Now what you have been seeing is a gravitation towards most of them being amber-green, so I can understand why questions are being raised from your side.

I would say, as somebody who has been an external stakeholder, it has helped. I know these are only for the longer reviews, not the rapid reviews. It has helped to get an immediate sense of how serious the concerns are. If it is amber-red, you know, "Everybody wake up and get on this right away." It does mean something. I would also say that anyone in the role of holding the Government accountable needs to have a professional scepticism about the Government's view.

I noted that when there was a discussion at the tailored review that Nick Dyer was doing his best to put you off the idea of traffic lights. That just makes me love it all the more, because I felt that maybe we might lose some teeth if they were not there. The question then is about whether you have any more gradations. The difficulty of that is that you would



lose comparability with past reviews. I do not know how much that matters to you, but maybe that is the only way in which you can avoid having too much amber-green.

- Q13 **Chris Law:** Maybe I will help you a little on that one. Maybe the traffic light system is not an ideal solution. I just wondered whether you would be happy to scrap it and replace it maybe with a numerical scoring system, with something that is a little more nuanced that people can measure against, or even perhaps at the end have a recommendation and a verdict. Would that be something you would consider?

Dr Barton: I would certainly be happy to consider it. I do not think at this stage I would definitely say, "Yes, that is the answer." I have discussed it a little with Alison and the Secretariat to get a sense of the pros and cons. That has not already given me a firm position, but I am inclined to have something that makes it very visible when there are serious concerns. That is my bottom line.

- Q14 **Chris Law:** You touched also a little bit on rapid reviews. There have been quite a number produced recently due to emerging events. Do you intend to continue this or even amplify it?

Dr Barton: I definitely think it is important to continue it. As I mentioned earlier, you do actually need proper, long-term, full literature review, full-on fieldwork reviews to look at programmes that have been there for a long time. That cannot be scrapped, and that would lose a lot of the original purpose of ICAI, which was to give that assurance and really lengthy, rigorous work. What you lose with that is the timeliness, and that is what always happens in evaluations. You get one that takes two years, gives you impeccable information, but you might be two years out of date by the time you get it.

The timeliness, as I mentioned earlier, has been particularly important when programmes are at a formative stage or Departments are at an early stage in setting them up. It was particularly appropriate to do more of them in those circumstances, but sometimes it is particularly relevant with DFID, when something is a new initiative or when it is just a salient thing. This is again where the Committee can have a key role—and I am sure you have that—in saying, "We need this information soon or it will be too late."

Chair: Just to make a comment from the chair about the traffic lights issue, we have certainly on occasion discussed this informally among Committee members, and it is fair to say there are different views among Committee members. I am probably at the sceptical end, because I think, in practice, it has resulted in almost everything being either green-amber or amber-red. I think there would be value in something that was either more qualitative—a narrative description—or something more quantitative with gradations. What would be useful is to keep this conversation going, because I know there are different views even among members of the Committee.



Dr Barton: Absolutely.

- Q15 **Richard Burden:** You have already mentioned the increased amounts of aid that are spent by Departments other than DFID. Those other Government Departments often have limited knowledge, though, of what ICAI is, what its remit is and what it does. How important do you think it is to get across to those other Government Departments that engagement with ICAI and scrutiny by ICAI is part of the territory with the ability to spend ODA? If you think that is important, how do you think you would be able to work with those Government Departments to increase, in a way, the standing of that message?

Dr Barton: It is incredibly important and a very important start has been made. I was actually at a meeting where a Department—it was under Chatham House rules so I cannot tell you which Department it was—said its ODA would not be subject to the scrutiny of ICAI. I was sure that they were wrong. This was a while ago, but the point was it was in question. Credit to everybody for making sure that ICAI was indeed made responsible for scrutinising the spending of that Department.

It is very much a work in progress, and there are some Departments that have not yet been scrutinised; I think the Home Office has not, and there are some reviews just starting that are now completely new, like the Newton Fund. There are bound to be plenty of areas where the message has not got through. It will help a lot that I have a past in Government for relating to other Government Departments, even if there might occasionally have been tensions between DFID and some of the other Departments. Nevertheless, it is helpful to understand how Government works and what expectations are, so I will have some credibility that will be useful, and I may even know some of the relevant people. I can play an important role there. One of the reasons it was worth Alison going full-time was to allow for all of that time for relationships. The relationships are an incredibly important context for this work getting traction.

The biggest risk where a Department is not familiar and used to this, particularly the transparency aspect of it, is that they will find ways to dismiss the findings. There needs to be a full explanation of the relationship and everything that comes with it. These Departments are probably not used to the role of this Committee. All of that has to be made clear. I will necessarily also have to make good use of DFID in its explaining to other Departments so we have a consistent message across the piece as to what is expected. Things are rather developing in the way that the Secretary of State at DFID will have responsibility and accountability in relation to the ODA of other Departments. That was something that was being discussed. I am not exactly sure how it will work, but I am hoping that that will make this an easier task than it is currently. You are right that there is a long way to go in some cases.

- Q16 **Richard Burden:** Formally, ICAI's remit is to be a watchdog over the spending of ODA. Obviously, the growth of these cross-departmental



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funds, CSSF and others, brings together a blend of ODA money and other funds under one cross-Government fund. One of the things that we have recommended is that when ICAI looks at the effectiveness of those cross-departmental funds, you should look at the entirety of the funds to get a perspective on the effectiveness of the ODA element of that. Is that a view that you share?

Dr Barton: It is a very difficult one, because ICAI obviously does not want to have mission creep into examining everything. At the moment, of course, there are not so many blended funds. This really came up in the context of CSSF. There is a serious issue as it stands in trying to provide effective scrutiny of CSSF with the limited amount of information available. The limitations are always explained as relating to the risks, which I am sure are very real in some cases, of making any of that information public.

It is very important that the Committee made a recommendation that drew attention to the importance of having a bigger overview in the case of funds like that, where you simply cannot make an effective assessment with the information being so limited. It will take a detailed look to see how in practice this could be implemented. At the moment, the Commissioners, if I am right, do not have developed vetting or high levels of security clearance, for example. There is the issue of the contractors and so on. I am not sure how this is managed at the moment, but I would think there would be a number of challenging issues. Nevertheless, I welcome that direction of travel, which is at least saying we need more information to have a coherent assessment of blended funds.

Q17 **Richard Burden:** Moving from how ICAI can relate to bodies or funds that it scrutinises, perhaps I could now take you on to ICAI's relationship with other watchdogs, whether it be the National Audit Office, DFID's own internal audit function, the NGO community, or us as the IDC. Do you have any ideas or proposals about how ICAI could develop its working co-operation with bodies like those?

Dr Barton: It is certainly my impression that that is already happening. In fact, there was somebody from the NAO on the panel who also happened to have been head of the ICAI Secretariat. I thought it was also a very good thing, because I imagine there might be issues of division of labour and borders. In fact, it seems as though, because the NAO does not do very many reviews of the ODA spend—maybe one per year—it is not too complicated to co-ordinate, and there certainly do not seem to be any difficulties over terrain or the adjustments of work programmes according to who is looking at what; I think of the CDC review where this happens. Sometimes it may make sense for a review after another one, but, most often, you do not want to repeat work that has just been done from a slightly different angle.

The NAO is probably the most obvious one where the links are greatest, because it is closest to the remit, just not being specialised. It is very



important that there is a healthy relationship between internal audit and evaluation; I think there still is an evaluation department in DFID, although the function has to an extent been decentralised. What you always have to remember with any Department is that within that Department there are differing views, champions of change of various kinds, and plenty of people who would find it helpful to have external reviews that make clear the issues that need to be tackled. I am sure internal audit and evaluation would be among them.

Again, my impression is that there are already good links, but I would certainly attempt to continue them. Externally, in relation to civil society, I am well placed to ensure that, actually, what is already a very constructive collaboration continues. Again, with the Chief Commissioner becoming full-time, there is increasing engagement. That is something I would also hope to continue. I am not sure if I have missed out any of the bodies that you were thinking of.

Richard Burden: Us.

Dr Barton: To me, that too is central. I have constantly brought up being accountable to you. You need to be involved, because the value of what ICAI does without the IDC following through is always going to be limited. Whatever the external stakeholders say, you are the ones who will bring the officials before you, and that is what will really get the traction.

Q18 Mrs Latham: You will be aware that our latest report was about sexual exploitation and abuse. It hit the headlines because of what had been going on for years but came to light several months before. Could you tell us how, under your leadership, ICAI would tackle the issue of safeguarding against sexual exploitation and abuse, both within your team and the contractors, and also within reviews that ICAI would actually conduct?

Dr Barton: I did make sure to check what was already happening on this, and there is something actually in the minutes of the last board meeting. In common with everybody else, all organisations have re-examined their policies and systems, introduced new checks and so on. That is well under way. I do not know whether you were pointing towards this, but perhaps the other big question is to what extent it will be integrated in the operational work of the reviews.

As opposed to checking that the contractors, supporters and collaborators are following best practice, the question is about the extent to which safeguarding is being examined as an issue. I understand that already there is a risk-based approach to considering it. It seems broadly right, although it needs looking at carefully. It is evidence—if you think about it, which you obviously have—that if you are thinking about humanitarian programmes, where the IDC report says the biggest problems are, there appear to be instances where the impact—because this is the independent commission for assessing impact—is actually negative: a



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harm to beneficiaries that are supposed to be being helped. Clearly, that is a matter that has to be central to what ICAI is doing.

Currently, there is a review—I am not sure what stage it has got to—on the humanitarian reform agenda. To judge by a recent seminar that I attended, there is a risk that some of the traditional big reform questions could perhaps obscure the more nitty-gritty but very important questions of safeguarding. There it must be included as one of the key points to examine. It would not be acceptable for the UK Government, after the leadership it has taken in having those summits in the autumn, to focus its reform efforts entirely on how well the UN is co-ordinating rather than also looking at whether it is actually committing safeguarding offences.

Q19 **Mrs Latham:** How would you specifically deal with it?

Dr Barton: It has to be part of the terms of reference to get the information that is available on that. Traditionally, the contractors are going to be doing a combination of literature review and primary research. The literature is actually rather scant, on the whole, on this; it is the primary research where there is not enough information at the moment. It would need to be proportional. I do not think that there are the resources at this point, or that it makes sense to do a full-scale global evaluation. It has to be one of the points to explore in relation to the UK's agenda for reform of the humanitarian system. It is quite easy to find out how much the UK has pushed on this in the past, for example. It is also possible to find out from stakeholders in this system how it is perceived in the system.

Q20 **Henry Smith:** The recent tailored review suggested that ICAI should be bringing more of its work in-house, but ICAI has recently gone out to tender for an external contractor. As Commissioner, would you continue that route of outsourcing? What is your view on in-house versus outsourcing?

Dr Barton: The key is really the extent of the resource that is available, and the administrative resource. At the moment, there are 10 people in the ICAI Secretariat, and they do not themselves have the expertise that the contractors do. It is an extremely specialised activity, so it would be hard to see how it would be possible to get sufficient administrative resource to replace what is brought by the current consortium of contractors. Some form of outsourcing has to continue.

Whether there is any room for squeezing any more admin resource is certainly worth looking at, or whether there is any different way of organising the Secretariat, but I do not anticipate major change here. There is a process under way at least to start the tender, and it is still possible to look at what comes out of that. If there are not satisfactory options, you can shrink or increase to a degree. There has to be a significant element of outsourcing. If you look at what has been done so far, broadly it is accepted in the tailored review that it has been



functioning well. It would be a risk to have a radical change that might make that less likely.

- Q21 **Henry Smith:** Do you think that the contracted outsourcing approach provides enough flexibility for emerging issues? Do you think they are able to effectively conduct follow-up?

Dr Barton: Flexibility is where outsourcing is very strong. I mentioned there are three elements of the consortium. I remember seeing a couple of reviews where it specifically said it had been found that, between them, the consortia had actually been very good at sourcing the requisite expertise, which again it would be impossible to do in-house, really. You could possibly get some people seconded, but again, that is DFID's admin resource.

The flexibility is where outsourcing always scores very highly. That has helped with the juggling that has sometimes been necessary. It is always going to be challenging, for sure. I do not anticipate that it will be easy. If new topics appear where it is important to move quickly and others have to be delayed inevitably, then you need that flexibility. To that extent, I would not expect a huge change.

- Q22 **Chair:** You mentioned that your plan is to start part-time in November for a period while Alison is still in post and then take over, and so you will be able to be involved in the recruitment of the other two Commissioners. What will you be looking for in those other two Commissioners? What sort of skills and experiences do you think will best complement what you bring to the table?

Dr Barton: I would certainly not want to be too rigid in expectations beforehand. I am not the only stakeholder involved. The key thing for me is obviously to have people who have the competence. It will require relatively long experience and a range of experience. That will be very important. Being used to producing work under a lot of pressure and coping with the external pressures of the role are all important things.

I would not be rigid about it, but I would be positively interested in audit skills. That is how ICAI started out. The profession benefits from a lot of systems that have been developed over a long time, which are very useful. Having someone well versed in them would be helpful, but I would not be absolutely rigid about that. Otherwise, in an ideal world, it would be good to have a bit of diversity among the Commissioners. There will only be three now, so that will be more challenging. We might need a man, from that point of view. I do not have stronger views than that.

Chair: Can I thank you very much for joining us today? We will now go into private session. Can I thank you for coming and draw the public part of the meeting to a close?