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International Development
Committee

Effectiveness of UK aid: potential impact of FCO/DFID merger

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to the report*

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The International Development Committee

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Summary

On 16 June 2020, the Prime Minister announced the merger of the Department for International Development with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to form the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. The announcement came out of the blue. The Government's Integrated Review of international policy was paused, the world was in the midst of a global pandemic, and barely a week had gone by since the publication of our first report on this topic, which reflected the near unanimous voice of our witnesses by recommending that a well-resourced and independent DFID was very much in the UK's national interest. We have significant concerns that the merger may jeopardise the ongoing effectiveness of future UK aid spending.

Amid projections of a sharp contraction in the UK economy from the pandemic, and warnings that the Government is looking for in-year savings from the UK aid budget amounting to billions of pounds, now is not the time for a major government restructure. Successful mergers require more than an announcement; moreover, while merging departments may seem attractive in the short-term, with possible administrative efficiency savings and improved policy coherence, they can be extremely costly and disruptive, and impair organisational effectiveness. In the long run, the creation of the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office could reduce the UK's clout on the world stage. We restate the recommendation made in our interim report that the Government should present a statement to Parliament setting out an evidence-led rationale for any change, quantifying expected costs and how intended benefits justify the costs, and showing how both will be measured and controlled.

To ensure that UK aid is as effective as possible, poverty reduction should continue to form a central part of the Government's international policy, with UK aid focused upon the very poorest and most vulnerable people in the poorest countries. The Government should frame this commitment to poverty reduction with firm strategic commitments in the conclusions of its Integrated Review. It should underpin these commitments by continuing adherence to both the letter and spirit of domestic development legislation, including the OECD DAC definition of Official Development Assistance (ODA), the 0.7% target, poverty alleviation, gender equality, transparency and independent evaluation of impact.

We welcome increased attention on coordinating the UK's messages, policies and programmes on international policy matters. But this is not necessarily achieved by a simple amalgamation of portfolios. The UK would do much better to demonstrate international political leadership on humanitarian relief, poverty reduction and other development issues by retaining a Cabinet-level Minister for International Development, responsible for the totality of the UK's ODA spend, who should also remain the distinct and separate 'development voice', as now, and should sit on the National Security Council.

The loss of an independent DFID, with poverty reduction at its heart and years of specialist development expertise, risks damaging the quality of UK aid and undoing hard won development gains. The Government should set out how it intends to capture and retain DFID expertise in doing development well, and what plans are in place to rapidly train FCO staff in the skills necessary to manage effective development

programmes. In the face of budget cuts, UK aid must protect its life-saving projects, especially those undertaken by small, local civil society organisations. Aid must be transparent, and accordingly the Government should commit to all UK ODA funding meeting the international aid transparency standard of at least 'good' within the next year.

Maintaining robust scrutiny mechanisms is essential to make sure that UK aid is spent in the best possible way. To that end, we recommend that the House of Commons creates an Official Development Assistance Select Committee tasked with scrutiny of the totality of UK aid spending and echoing the Independent Commission for Aid Impact's remit. We also recommend that the Government retains ICAI in its current form in order to provide thorough, independent scrutiny of the UK's aid budget.

1 Introduction

1. In March 2020, we launched an inquiry into the effectiveness of UK aid, in which we set out to assess how UK aid is spent, and whether that spending is sufficiently transparent, accountable and impactful. The inquiry aimed to contribute to the Government's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy.
2. Since then, the development landscape has changed radically.
 - The COVID-19 pandemic has hit developed and developing countries alike. The pandemic, and the measures commonly taken to combat it, have—amongst other things—exhausted healthcare systems, chilled the world economy, squeezed aid budgets and potentially wiped out decades of hard-won development gains across the global south.
 - On 16 June 2020, the Prime Minister announced the merger of the Department for International Development (DFID) into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to create a new ministry, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The merger, which is intended to be completed by September, aims to establish a full integration of the two departments, with the new department, led by the Foreign Secretary, taking responsibility for around 80% of the £15.2 billion UK aid budget.
3. This report follows on from our interim findings, published on 9 June, in which we advocated strongly for the retention of a standalone DFID with a cabinet-level Secretary of State. We consider how UK aid, held up as an international exemplar, can continue to be as effective as possible following the merger, and draw upon evidence from mergers in other countries such as Australia and Canada. We also recommend steps that the Government should take to safeguard the quality of the UK's development work.
4. First, we consider the process of the merger, including how to manage risks and lessons from other countries' departmental reorganisations. Secondly, we assess how to maintain an effective and targeted UK aid policy, through keeping a focus upon poverty reduction and improving transparency. Finally, we explore and recommend future scrutiny arrangements.
5. To inform our work, we took evidence from a broad range of stakeholders both in the UK and internationally.¹ Given the rapidly changing circumstances over the course of the inquiry, we have repositioned this final report to focus upon issues connected to the merger. For analysis and commentary on a broad range of topics relating to aid effectiveness, we highly recommend that readers visit our website to access the considered written contributions submitted to our inquiry from a wide range of contributors. We also suggest that the Government reads this evidence as a proxy for the consultation process that could have informed the Integrated Review. We are grateful to everyone who contributed to the inquiry and helped to shape our work.

1 This included oral evidence in person (prior to the lockdown), virtual evidence sessions and exchanges of written questions and answers. We also received a substantial number of written submissions to the inquiry.

2 Process of the merger

Overview of steps towards integration

6. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office will be established in September 2020. It will combine the functions of the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and be led by the Foreign Secretary. The new FCDO will be responsible for around 80% of UK aid spending.²

7. The Prime Minister's enthusiasm for merging these departments is well-known. As a backbencher in 2019, he called for DFID to be abolished, telling the Financial Times that "if 'Global Britain' is going to achieve its full and massive potential then we must bring back DFID to the FCO."³ Following the 2019 General Election, the Government began clearing the ground for a merger:

- first, announcing the launch of its Integrated Review of International Policy in December 2019 whose remit included consideration of reforms to Government systems and structures;
- second, merging the DFID and FCO junior ministerial teams in the February 2020 ministerial reshuffle;
- third, in March, instructing DFID country directors to report to British ambassadors and high commissioners, and;
- fourth, in evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee in April, the Permanent Under-Secretary of the FCO, Sir Simon McDonald, said he had been tasked by the Prime Minister "to align terms and conditions [of staff] between the two Departments" [the FCO and DFID].⁴

The Government's Integrated Review of International Policy

8. The Government announced the launch of its Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy in the Queen's Speech of December 2019.⁵ The Review's remit included consideration of the "necessary reforms to Government systems and structures" to achieve the Government's international policy goals.⁶ As part of the Review's process, the Government announced it would undertake a consultation process and build its new strategy upon this. The Review is led by Number 10 and a team in the Cabinet Office. Work on the Review was paused in April 2020 to enable the Government to focus upon the COVID-19 pandemic. The Review was restarted in late June,⁷ and the Government has said that it will report in the autumn.⁸

2 ["Prime Minister announces merger of Department for International Development and Foreign Office"](#), GOV.UK Press Release, 16 June 2020

3 ["Boris Johnson calls for UK's aid department to be closed"](#), Financial Times, 11 January 2020

4 Oral evidence taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee on 21 April 2020, HC 239, [Q84](#)

5 ["PM outlines new review to define Britain's place in the world"](#), GOV.UK Press release, 26 February 2020

6 [Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy: Written statement—HCWS126](#), 26 February 2020

7 [Correspondence from the Deputy National Security Adviser to the International Development Committee Clerk, concerning the Integrated Review of Security, Defence and Foreign Policy - 24 June 2020](#), published 10 July 2020

8 ["Defence and foreign policy review paused as resources diverted to Covid-19 response"](#), Civil Service World, 9 April 2020; and [Correspondence from the Deputy National Security Adviser to the International Development Committee Clerk, concerning pausing the Integrated Review of Security, Defence and Foreign Policy](#), published 22 April 2020

Joint ministerial teams

9. The Government appointed a joint ministerial team to the FCO and DFID in February 2020 (previously this had applied to a small number of positions only, for example, Minister for the Middle East and North Africa). The Foreign Secretary and Secretary of State for International Development do not have joint status. Joint Minister of State in the FCO and DFID, James Cleverly, told us that in practical terms his private office is comprised of a mixture of civil servants from both the FCO and DFID, and that the functions of the Departments “are complementary and aligned, but they are not the same”.⁹ The Secretary of State for International Development, Anne-Marie Trevelyan, said:

“In practice, it was happening before but perhaps without a coherent framework. Whichever Minister was visiting somewhere was asked if they could raise the question of sexual violence or the lack of girls in school, or pick a subject where there was an area of concern. This gives a holistic presentation of that, and I think it is working well. [...] It feels like that overlaying of the two—of certain areas of the world and indeed the kind of DFID programme delivery that is going on there—gives a strength to the UK’s message more than anything else.”¹⁰

Aligning operations in overseas posts

10. The 2015 UK Aid Strategy established an objective of administering an increasing proportion of the UK’s Official Development Assistance (ODA) spend outside of DFID. Since then, DFID’s share of UK ODA has fallen from 86% in 2014 to 73% in 2019¹¹ with a broad range of Government departments administering ODA. Consequently, UK embassies overseas are increasingly home to staff from departments other than the FCO.¹² Reflecting upon this trend, former UK Ambassador to Jordan, Peter Millett, noted that,

“Embassies have increasingly become mini-Whitehalls with many government departments operating under the same roof and engaging with the authorities and people of the host country”.¹³

11. Earlier this year, the move to require DFID staff in country to report to Ambassadors or High Commissioners took this integration even further. Minister of State James Cleverly said,

“The ambassador or high commissioner within a country is the most senior official face of UK Government in a particular country. Having everybody, whether that is trade officials, our humanitarian function or our DFID offices, co-ordinated has to be a good thing. It maximises the impact that we can have in country.”¹⁴

9 [Qq45, 48](#)

10 [Q92](#)

11 International Development Committee, 2nd Report of Session 2019–21, “[Effectiveness of UK aid: interim findings](#)”, HC 215, paragraph 16 and Figure 1

12 For example, the British Embassy in Colombia administers a broad range of funds from a variety of different government departments, undertaking projects and programmes in areas as diverse as tackling serious organised crime, scientific co-operation and supporting the peace process. On a practical level, the FCO also takes a leading role in cross-government working in posts overseas through the One HMG Overseas agenda, through which the FCO manages land and property, security and HR functions on behalf of other government departments, including accommodation for staff from all government departments.

13 [WQ66](#)

14 [Q51](#)

Managing the transition to a new merged overseas department

12. The timing of the Prime Minister’s announcement on 16 June 2020 to fold DFID’s functions and resources into the FCO¹⁵ came as a surprise. Especially against a background in which we had published our interim findings, on the effectiveness of UK aid only the previous week. In that report, we argued strongly for the retention of the current standalone Ministry of State model for international development, with a Cabinet level Minister.¹⁶

Timing of announcement

13. We find it extremely disappointing that the decision to merge the two departments was taken before the Integrated Review, which was supposed to inform such reforms, had even restarted, let alone concluded. Moreover, the timing of the announcement, during the COVID-19 pandemic, was perplexing. Following the decision, the Overseas Development Institute stated that,

“Overall, departmental mergers are complex and time-consuming exercises. So doing this in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic is very strange. The government should be focusing on helping poorer countries to weather the crisis and solving mounting global challenges like climate change rather than rearranging the bureaucratic furniture.”¹⁷

Furthermore, amid projections of a sharp contraction in the domestic economy from COVID-19, and warnings that the Government is looking to make savings of £2bn from the aid budget,¹⁸ the Government’s proposals to restructure two of the largest aid spending departments could not have come at a worse time.¹⁹

Consultation

14. As part of the Review process, the Government committed to “consult with experts beyond Whitehall”.²⁰ However, at the time of the Government’s announcement to merge the departments, no consultation appeared to have started—indeed, the Government had told us that all consultation and engagement “will be placed on hold until the Review is resumed”²¹—and numerous development experts and aid groups were unaware of any plans for consultation.²² Taking the decision before completing the Review denied many external stakeholders the opportunity to contribute evidence; and pre-empted the Review’s conclusions.

15 [“Prime Minister announces merger of Department for International Development and Foreign Office”](#), GOV.UK Press Release, 16 June 2020

16 International Development Committee, 2nd Report of Session 2019–21, [“Effectiveness of UK aid: interim findings”](#), HC 215

17 [“Statement: DFID merged into FCO—ODI response”](#), Overseas Development Institute (ODI), 16 June 2020

18 Oral evidence taken as part of the Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus inquiry, HC 292, [Q153](#)

19 [“Dominic Raab ‘warns officials Britain’s aid budget faces a £3bn cut’](#)”, MailOnline, 21 June 2020; [“Overseas aid grants stopped ahead of department being axed—damaging coronavirus fight in poorest countries”](#), Independent, 21 June 2020; and [“Development Leadership in the UK’s New Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office”](#), Centre for Global Development Blog, 19 June 2020

20 [Correspondence from the Prime Minister, concerning the Integrated Security, Defence and Foreign Policy Review](#), published 11 March 2020

21 [Correspondence from the Deputy National Security Advisor to the International Development Committee Clerk, concerning pausing the Integrated Review of Security, Defence and Foreign Policy](#), published 22 April 2020

22 [“Aid groups deny they were consulted on DFID merger”](#), Devex, 16 June 2020. See also Action Aid ([EUA0040](#))

15. We are also concerned that staff in neither organisation were consulted about the proposals to merge the two departments and only heard about the change through media reports instead of from their employer. The haste in which the decision was taken meant, for instance, that there were no answers to questions from staff about the different employment rules in the two departments - DFID, for example, employs 200 EU nationals who do not meet the more stringent nationality requirements for the FCO.²³²⁴

Planning for the merger

16. Any departmental reorganisation is a project, sometimes a very large and complex one. Adherence to key principles of good project management is essential for success.²⁵²⁶ In our interim findings report, we recommended that, if the Government should decide to make significant changes to the way UK aid is administered, it should set out the rationale for change; and quantify expected costs and how intended benefits justify those costs.²⁷ We would also expect to see an appraisal of merger options; and a delivery plan with clear milestones; and how success will be measured and evaluated.

Rationale for change

17. To ensure any major departmental reorganisation is a success, there needs to be clarity about the problem it is intended to solve. In our view, there is a lack of clarity around the rationale for integrating DFID into the FCO. In his announcement on 16 June, the Prime Minister said:

“[A] dividing line between aid and foreign policy runs through our whole system, with our Department for International Development working independently from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. [...] [N]o single decision maker in either Department is able to unite our efforts or take a comprehensive overview. [...]

“Faced with the [COVID-19] crisis today and the opportunities that lie ahead, we have a responsibility to ask whether our current arrangements, dating back to 1997, still maximise British influence. Those well-intentioned decisions of 23 years ago were right for their time. [...] Yet those judgments date from a relatively benign era when China’s economy was still much smaller than Italy’s and the west was buoyed by victory in the cold war.

“We must now strengthen our position in an intensely competitive world [...], so I have decided to merge DFID with the FCO to create a new Department: the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. This will unite our aid with our diplomacy and bring them together in our international effort.”²⁸

23 [PQ 64205](#) [on DFID reorganisation], 29 June 2020

24 [“Whitehall reorganisations are rarely worth it”](#), Financial Times, 20 June 2020

25 National Audit Office ([EUA0075](#))

26 Comptroller & Auditor General, [“Reorganising central government”](#), HC 452, Session 2009–2010, National Audit Office, March 2010

27 International Development Committee, 2nd Report of Session 2019–21, [“Effectiveness of UK aid: interim findings”](#), HC 215, para 41

28 HC Deb, 16 June 2020, [col 667](#) [Commons Chamber]

The justification for the merger—foreign policy alignment—does not itself provide a compelling case for the proposed change. Furthermore, at this stage, we do not know what the aims and objectives of the new FCDO will be. The Government’s official statement published shortly after the Prime Minister’s announcement said those objectives will be shaped by the outcome of the Integrated Review.²⁹

Merger options

18. The merger option that the Government seems to have chosen - full integration of DFID into the FCO - means the new overseas department will be responsible for both development policy and its implementation.³⁰ It is one of several models for administering development assistance that the Government could have chosen. Across OECD aid donor countries, there are basically four models for administering development assistance, with each model offering development different degrees of distinctiveness and autonomous identity.³¹ These are:

- **Model 1:** International development is integrated within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that takes the lead and is responsible for policy and implementation. (The model proposed in the Prime Minister’s statement. For example, Denmark has adopted this model.)
- **Model 2:** A directorate or development agency located within the overseas department which leads and is responsible for policy and implementation. (For example, Australia, Canada and the Netherlands.)
- **Model 3:** The overseas department has overall responsibility for policy with a separate executing agency responsible for implementation. (For example, the United States, Germany, France, Japan and Sweden.)
- **Model 4:** A ministry or agency (other than a foreign affairs department) is responsible for both policy and implementation (the current UK position.)

There is no evidence that the Government considered the merits of these alternative governance models for administering aid, or assessed the impact of the proposed merger on the poorest and most vulnerable people, before reaching its decision to integrate DFID and the FCO.

19. Furthermore, it is not clear why the Government chose the departmental reorganisation option when other alternatives were available. For example, if the intention was to refocus aid spending on the UK’s strategic priorities abroad, the Government could have ordered a further shift in resources to other government departments and the cross-government Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) and Prosperity Fund.³²

29 [“Prime Minister announces merger of Department for International Development and Foreign Office”](#), GOV.UK Press Release, 16 June 2020

30 The Secretary of State told us that the new department would follow a ‘blended’ model. (Oral evidence taken as part of the Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus inquiry, HC 292, [Q165](#))

31 Nilima Gulrajani, [“Merging development agencies: Making the right choice”](#), Overseas Development Institute; January 2018; and International Development Committee, Second Report of Session 2019–21, [“Effectiveness of UK aid: interim findings”](#), HC 215, para 42; and Figure 6

32 Professor Malcolm Chalmers, [“Farewell Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Welcome Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office”](#), RUSI commentary, 16 June 2020

Merger benefits and costs

20. According to the Overseas Development Institute, mergers between development ministries and foreign affairs departments are often justified in terms of improving administrative efficiency and development impact.³³ In his statement to the House of Commons on 16 June, the Prime Minister said the merger would maximise value for money of the UK's aid budget (although the statement to the House and the subsequent official statement did not explain how this would be achieved).³⁴

21. A merger might also offer policy coherence benefits (the key argument used in the Prime Minister's statement.) In written evidence, the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, University of Cambridge, stated that "a merger between DFID and FCO could help the UK take a clear joined up approach to foreign policy and help DFID and FCO work closer together".³⁵ The HALO Trust stated that [a merger would offer] a more integrated approach between development, diplomacy and defence as current arrangements remain very siloed.³⁶

22. While departmental reorganisations offer potential benefits, they can also be costly and disruptive.³⁷ And the disruption can last years.³⁸

- Peter Ricketts, a former UK national security adviser, assessed that: "In my experience, departmental mergers soak up time and effort of senior management and rarely deliver real operational benefits. A more integrated UK international structure would be a good thing, but what really matters is a clear national strategy for it to implement."³⁹
- The National Audit Office concluded in its 2012 report, 'Reorganising central government bodies', that most government departments do not have a good enough grasp of the one-off costs of restructuring central government bodies or the ongoing costs of carrying on the functions that have been transferred.⁴⁰
- According to the National Audit Office and the Institute for Government, any changes to departmental structures will incur costs and absorb senior decision maker effort. The direct costs of creating a new department—for example, integrating IT and HR systems, moving officials between buildings and aligning pay scales and allowances—average £15 million but can be much higher;⁴¹ with a further estimated cost of up to £34 million when including loss of productivity

33 Nilima Gulrajani, "[Merging development agencies: Making the right choice](#)", Overseas Development Institute; January 2018

34 HC Deb, 16 June 2020, col 667 [Commons Chamber]; and "[Prime Minister announces merger of Department for International Development and Foreign Office](#)", GOV.UK Press Release, 16 June 2020

35 Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, University of Cambridge ([EUA0068](#))

36 HALO Trust ([EUA0036](#))

37 National Audit Office ([EUA0075](#))

38 Ian Mitchell, "[Should the UK's Development Department be Merged with Foreign Affairs and Trade?](#)", Center for Global Development, 22 January 2019

39 "[Three former UK PMs condemn DfID merger with Foreign Office](#)", Financial Times, 16 June 2020

40 Comptroller & Auditor General, "[Reorganising central government bodies](#)", HC 1703, Session 2010–2012, National Audit Office, January 2012, para 25; and accompanying [Press Notice](#), 20 January 2012

41 Comptroller & Auditor General, "[Reorganising central government](#)", HC 452, Session 2009–2010, National Audit Office, March 2010. The average cost is £15 million but the cost of setting up the Equality and Human Rights Commission was £40 million

as staff adjust to the new organisation. Previous departmental changes have typically taken about two years until the new organisation was operating as effectively as possible.⁴²

The last major restructuring of two government departments was the merger in July 2016 of the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) and the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to create the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The Institute for Management estimates that the loss of productivity alone amounted to £34 million over the first year; and it took around two years before the new department began operating properly as a single entity.⁴³

Opportunities and risks

23. While departmental mergers do not, in themselves, bring about greater efficiency, they do create a potential opportunity to review, reprioritise, and develop a strategic vision. We would hope that the recommencing of the Integrated Review of International Policy on 24 July will provide the opportunity to inform that strategy and vision.⁴⁴

24. The success of the proposed merger will depend on blending the diverse skills of both departments. Despite some shared interests, DFID and the FCO do very different things. FCO staff are adept at understanding the politics of countries around the world, while DFID staff are programme managers with development expertise.⁴⁵ In written evidence, many stakeholders drew attention to these differences and how they might impact on the success of any merger. The Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, University of Cambridge, for example, stated that the differences are stark:

“We do not however think it is clear that a merger would clearly resolve these differences without significantly damaging the effectiveness of one or both departments. Discussions with civil servants have highlighted that diplomacy skills and international development skills are very different and suggest that even if the departments were merged it would be important to maintain a separation of the diplomacy profession and the development profession.”⁴⁶

25. The proposed merger of DFID and the FCO brings another significant risk. Once the merger is complete, the vast majority of the FCDO budget will be ODA. According to Professor Malcolm Chalmers (Royal United Services Institute), in spending terms, the FCDO will primarily be a development ministry with some diplomacy functions. And while the new integrated structure is likely to improve the cohesion of policy between diplomacy and development, it could also risk overloading the managers, at every level, who must now combine very different responsibilities previously held by two separate chains of command.⁴⁷

42 Tim Durrant and Gemma Tetlow, [“Creating and dismantling government departments”](#), Institute for Government, 15 November 2019; and Tim Durrant, [“The prime minister failed to answer the most important questions about merging the FCO and Dfid”](#), Institute for Government, 16 June 2020

43 Tim Durrant and Gemma Tetlow, [“Creating and dismantling government departments”](#), Institute for Government, 15 November 2019, pages 11–14, Figure 3 and Table 1

44 [Correspondence from the Deputy National Security Adviser to the International Development Committee Clerk, concerning the Integrated Review of Security, Defence and Foreign Policy—24 June 2020](#), published 10 July 2020

45 Tim Durrant, [“There’s good reason to reform Whitehall – but the government needs to know what it wants to achieve”](#), Institute for Government, 19 December 2019

46 Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, University of Cambridge ([EUA0068](#))

47 Professor Malcolm Chalmers, [“Farewell Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Welcome Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office”](#), RUSI commentary, 16 June 2020

Planning for reorganisation

26. According to the National Audit Office, having good project management systems in place as early as possible, ideally when a reorganisation is announced or as soon after as possible, is essential for success. A lack of preparation time is an acute problem in changes involving new departments. The new body almost always comes into being on the day the change is announced, so senior civil servants have no time to plan before implementation.⁴⁸ In this case, the Government has given itself three months, between now and September, to plan and implement the merger. This is still a very short period of time to merge two strategically important internationally facing departments, not least during the global COVID-19 crisis and when spending budgets are being cut.

27. The Government has set up a merger transformation team, under the Cabinet Secretary's chairmanship, that will report regularly to the Foreign Secretary.⁴⁹⁵⁰ It is not clear how the resignation of the current Cabinet Secretary, announced on 28 June 2020 and due to take effect in September, will affect the merger timetable.⁵¹

28. Reorganising departments is not easy. In our view, the decision to merge the FCO and DFID into a new international department, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), is flawed on a number of grounds:

- **The decision was taken whilst the Integrated Review was paused, in its early stages, and far from ready to reach any decisions about future systems and structures.**
- **Linked to the status of the Integrated Review, there appears to have been no structured consultation of the aid sector, either in the UK or internationally, nor other obvious stakeholders to inform the decision to merge DFID into the FCO.**
- **It is also perplexing that the decision to merge DFID into the FCO was taken in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The decision puts the international response to COVID-19 in jeopardy at a time when global cooperation is needed. It is the world's poorest and most vulnerable who are likely to pay the greatest price.**
- **Little, if any, detail has been provided about the rationale for the decision or its timing, the options considered, likely costs and specific benefits, implementation plans for the reorganisation and how its success will be measured, the new department's aims and objectives, and how it will tackle global challenges beyond aid.**

48 Comptroller & Auditor General, "[Reorganising central government](#)", HC 452, Session 2009–2010, National Audit Office, March 2010

49 [Correspondence following Chair's letter from the Secretary of State for International Development and the Foreign Secretary relating to the DFID and FCO merger](#), published 2 July 2020

50 This team will consist of 30 people, led by Nic Hailey (former UK High Commissioner to Kenya). (Oral evidence taken as part of the Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus inquiry, HC 292, [Q161](#))

51 "[Cabinet Secretary to stand down](#)". GOV.UK Press Release, 28 June 2020

29. While merging departments may seem attractive short-term, with improved policy coherence and possible administrative savings, they can be extremely costly and disruptive and impair organisational effectiveness. In the long run, the creation of the FCDO could reduce the UK's influence on the world stage.

30. *In the light of developments since the publication of this Committee's interim findings on the effectiveness of UK aid, we restate the recommendation we made in that report about significant reorganisations of UK aid: that the Government should present a statement to Parliament setting out an evidence-led rationale for any change; quantifying expected costs and how intended benefits justify the costs; and showing how both will be measured and controlled.*

Lessons from overseas counterparts

Administration of development assistance elsewhere in the world

31. In most OECD donor countries, overseas aid delivery is closely linked to foreign affairs ministries—governance Models 2 and 3 described in paragraph 18 above. The mainstreaming of overseas aid within a Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Model 1) and the existence of a ministry dedicated to development (as in the UK - Model 4) are less usual.⁵² However, the major donor countries in terms of overall aid spending—the United States, Germany, Japan and France—have all gravitated towards delivery models involving a separate development agency responsible for implementing their respective governments' overseas aid policies (Model 3).⁵³

Making the right choice

32. In our interim findings report, we found that evidence about the success of merging development assistance into ministries of foreign affairs - in terms of organisational efficiencies and development outcomes - is mixed.⁵⁴ One key area the UK will need to guard against is losing talented development staff. Loss of this expertise will potentially impair the new overseas department's effectiveness and damage the UK's global standing. According to Ian Mitchell of the Center for Global Development,

“In going a different way [merger of DFID and FCO], the new department will need to work hard to retain that same degree of expertise. DFID is renowned for the professionalism of its approach—and there is clear evidence that mergers elsewhere have led to a loss of expertise.”⁵⁵

52 International Development Committee, 10th Report of Session 2014–15, “[The future of UK development co-operation: Phase 2: beyond aid](#)”, HC 663, paragraph 47

53 International Development Committee, 2nd Report of Session 2019–21, “[Effectiveness of UK aid: interim findings](#)”, HC 215, paras 42–43; and Figures 6 and 7

54 [Ibid](#), para 44

55 Ian Mitchell, “[Development Leadership in the UK's New Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office](#)”, Centre for Global Development Blog, 19 June 2020

Integration of overseas development and foreign affairs - what can the UK learn?

33. In his statement on 16 June, the Prime Minister suggested the UK would draw upon the experiences of Australia and Canada in merging their foreign affairs and development agencies to ensure this merger is as successful as possible.⁵⁶ Both mergers occurred in 2013.

Australia

34. In 2013, Australia folded its standalone aid agency, AusAID, into its Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Announcing AusAID's closure, then Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott said:

“We want Australia’s aid program to be fully integrated into our overall diplomatic effort. We don’t want our diplomacy going in one direction and our aid program going in another direction”.⁵⁷

35. Australia repositioned its aid spending to place a greater focus upon its immediate neighbourhood (the majority of countries in this region are ODA recipients). The merger led to the departure of significant numbers of skilled AusAID staff, taking their expertise in development programming with them, and had a detrimental impact on Australia's aid effectiveness.⁵⁸ The merger of DFAT and AusAID was also accompanied by a significant reduction in the country's ODA budget, and the Australian ODA budget is set to remain frozen until 2022–23.⁵⁹ We discuss the loss of expertise and ODA spending trends further in Chapter Three.

Canada

36. In 2013, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) merged with the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to create Global Affairs Canada.⁶⁰ Administrative costs as a percentage of the country's ODA spend initially increased immediately after the merger, before reducing in 2015.⁶¹ An argument for the merger was to ensure that the former international development ministry could have a substantial influence on foreign affairs. However, in practice, the reverse happened.⁶² The merger was also beset with poor transparency, and Leonard Cheshire told us that “details on the process were scarce and slow to materialise, with the new structure still unclear a year after the amalgamation was announced”.⁶³

56 HC Deb, 16 Jun 2020, [col 667](#) [Commons Chamber]

57 “[Inside the takedowns of AusAID and CIDA](#)”. Devex, 19 January 2015

58 Marie Stopes International ([EUA0008](#)); VSO ([EUA0032](#)); and “[Reset required for DFAT-AUSAid integration](#)”, Richard Moore, *The Interpreter*, 25 March 2019

59 [Donor Tracker / Australia](#), accessed 24 June 2020. Australia's ODA spend is expected to shrink by 34% between 2013–14 and 2022–23.

60 “[What happens when an aid department is folded?](#)”, Devex, 18 December 2019

61 Leonard Cheshire ([EUA0035](#))

62 [Ibid](#)

63 [Ibid](#)

37. There is one notable difference to the Australian experience of integration. In the Canadian case, it has appointed a Chief Development Officer who reports directly to Canada's Minister for International Cooperation; and all major spending decisions need the Chief Development Officer's approval vesting considerable power in that office.⁶⁴

Norway

38. In contrast to the Australian and Canadian examples of integration, Norway is moving in the opposite direction. Norway merged its aid delivery body, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), with its foreign affairs ministry in 2014.⁶⁵ In 2020, Norway reformed its aid management again, strengthening the role of Norad and extending its operational and implementation responsibilities. Responsibility for deciding the strategic focus of Norway's aid and policy development remains with its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has a distinct Minister for International Development.⁶⁶ Effectively, Norway's 2020 reconfiguration has shifted its donor governance from Model 1 (described in paragraph 18 above) towards Model 3, the donor governance model used in the larger donor countries such as the US, Germany, Japan and France.

39. While there has been a trend in recent years for some OECD donor countries to merge their development and foreign policy administrative bodies, all the other most substantial donor countries - the United States, Germany, France and Japan - typically adopt governance models where there is a clear separation between policy and implementation.

64 Richard Moore, "[Strategic Choice: A future focused review of the DFAT-AusAID integration](#)", February 2019

65 [Donor Tracker / Norway](#). Norway is the tenth-largest OECD DAC donor country, spending US\$4.3 billion (0.94% of gross national income) on official development assistance (ODA) in 2018

66 "[Reform of aid management](#)", Government.no Press Release, 10 May 2019

3 Maintaining the effectiveness of UK aid

40. Our evidence indicates that the merger of DFID into the FCO is an error, and the way that the decision has been taken is grievously flawed. That said, the task now is to establish the conditions, mechanisms and indicators that will make this change work as effectively as possible. The creation of the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office presents an opportunity to assess the UK's approach to its international development policy. It offers the chance to make sure that UK aid is spent in the most effective and transparent way, and that it maximises value for money for beneficiaries in country and UK taxpayers alike. We set out below the ways in which we believe the Government can spend UK aid in the best possible way, identifying risks and learning lessons from countries with merged development and diplomacy functions.

Maintaining a focus on poverty reduction

41. The Government's Integrated Review will include a reassessment of the key principles of the UK's international policy, including the role of development and its interaction with the UK's diplomatic, security and trade objectives. We believe that maintaining a core focus upon poverty reduction is the fundamental basis of an effective UK aid policy. Without an independent DFID, there is a risk that poverty reduction could be diluted amongst other competing policy objectives.

42. COVID-19 will deepen the challenge of tackling global poverty, with the World Bank warning that the pandemic will push 49 million people into extreme poverty this year.⁶⁷ The pandemic has the potential to wipe out the development gains of the past 30 years, imposing a catalogue of challenges upon the poorest and most fragile countries. These societies are facing severe damage to their economies, combined with stretched national healthcare systems, reduced access to education and challenges to food security.⁶⁸ The effects of the pandemic will be felt for years to come.⁶⁹

43. Against this backdrop, the predicted contractions to gross national income (GNI) in donor countries mean there will be less money available than before to fund development. Current estimates from the Bank of England predict a 14% drop in UK GNI in 2020.⁷⁰ Therefore, it is key that future UK aid spending maintains its focus on poverty reduction, helping the very poorest and most vulnerable people.

Poverty reduction is in the UK's national interest

44. It is in the UK's national interest to provide development assistance which is targeted at reducing global poverty, and helping those in the very poorest countries. Former UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Sir Stephen O'Brien said,

67 ["The impact of COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\) on global poverty"](#), World Bank Blog, 20 April 2020

68 ["The Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security and Nutrition"](#), United Nations, 9 June 2020

69 For example, each percentage drop in global GNI is expected to result in an additional 0.7 million stunted children. ([Ibid](#), page 3)

70 Bank of England, ["Monetary Policy Report"](#), Monetary Policy Committee May 2020. Page 3

“it is in the interests of the UK and her people to partner with the countries where there is most need as we are making a significant impact on the ability of people to be their own agents and call for good governance themselves”.⁷¹

Through tackling poverty, UK aid extends the UK’s influence on the international stage, creating soft power. Whether through the response to the Ebola crisis, or support to refugees fleeing Syria, UK aid targeted towards the poorest and most vulnerable underlines the UK’s reputation for working towards the global common good, extending UK diplomatic influence at both bilateral and multilateral level.⁷²

45. Reflecting upon his experience as UK Ambassador to Jordan, Peter Millett felt that “our programmes certainly enhanced our influence”⁷³ and former UK Ambassador to Yemen Frances Guy told us that the UK’s international aid commitments “count towards general respect for the UK in multilateral institutions and gives the UK a bigger voice in multilateral meetings”.⁷⁴ Reflecting on her experience in Yemen, she said,

“having a big aid programme certainly helped in discussions on other issues with the government, including on international terrorism, and meant that the UK’s views had to be taken into account”.⁷⁵

In evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee earlier this year, former US Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power added,

“DFID’s contribution, not only in international development as such—helping developing countries to grow more stable over time—but as a tool in our respective foreign policy arsenals, enhances British leverage.”⁷⁶

Shift of UK aid spending towards Middle-Income Countries

46. In 2018, the majority (55%) of the UK’s bilateral aid spending was focused upon Least Developed and Other Low-Income Countries.⁷⁷ In the Prime Minister’s announcement of the merger, he questioned this focus, stating,

“We give as much aid to Zambia as we do to Ukraine, though the latter is vital for European security. We give ten times as much aid to Tanzania as we do to the six countries of the Western Balkans, who are acutely vulnerable to Russian meddling.”⁷⁸

47. Of the countries mentioned by the Prime Minister, Zambia and Tanzania are classified by the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) as Least Developed Countries (the very poorest), whereas Ukraine and the Western Balkans six are classified

71 [WQ67](#). Also, Frances Guy told us that “it is in our national interest that the poorest are lifted out of poverty so that global markets are inclusive”. [WQ53](#)

72 The Mines Advisory Group described UK aid as enabling the UK “to convince others rather than coerce, and to shape others’ preferences by appeal and attraction” Mines Advisory Group ([EUA0026](#)). See also British Council ([EUA0022](#)) and Save the Children ([EUA0030](#))

73 [WQ65](#)

74 [WQ54](#)

75 [WQ55](#)

76 Oral evidence taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee on 19 May 2020, HC 380, [Q9](#)

77 International Development Committee, 2nd Report of Session 2019–21, “[Effectiveness of UK aid: interim findings](#)”, HC 215, paragraph 17 and Figure 3

78 HC Deb, 16 Jun 2020, [col 666](#) [Commons Chamber]

as Middle Income Countries.⁷⁹ DFID concentrates its spending upon 33 priority countries, with interventions predominantly focused on low income countries (in 2018, DFID spent 62.5% of its country-specific aid in Least Developed Countries).⁸⁰

48. In contrast, non-DFID ODA has a different geographic profile, with around three-quarters going to middle income countries such as China and India.^{81,82} The FCO administers ODA through its departmental budget and through the cross-government funds⁸³ and, prior to the merger, is the third largest non-DFID ODA administering department. Unlike ODA administered through DFID, ODA administered through the FCO does not explicitly seek to focus upon the very poorest countries, nor upon the very poorest people in Middle Income Countries.

49. This trend is typified by the Government's pursuit of mutual prosperity, where aid is spent in areas where it delivers benefits both for the recipient country and for the UK economy. Prosperity Fund projects are specifically targeted towards Middle Income Countries, and projects tend to focus upon fostering conditions to create general economic growth in a country. For example, in China this includes supporting reforms to the financial services sector, such as supporting international participation in China's bond and equities market and developing its regulatory approach to financial innovation.⁸⁴ By their nature, these projects are not focused directly upon helping the poorest and most vulnerable in society.⁸⁵ In the Independent Commission for Aid Impact's (ICAI's) recent report into the use of UK aid to enhance mutual prosperity, ICAI expressed concern that the mutual prosperity agenda could,

“skew the allocation of resources of aid towards countries or sectors where the UK has commercial interests, rather than those with the greatest impact on poverty”.⁸⁶

50. The Centre for the Study of Existential Risk argued that there is a “serious risk that a merger would result in strong pressure on DFID to spend ODA in a similar manner to how the FCO spend ODA, with an emphasis upon assistance to Middle Income Countries, rather than specifically targeting interventions towards the world's very poorest and most vulnerable people”.⁸⁷ The Prime Minister's comparison of UK ODA spending in Zambia and Ukraine suggests that he is keen to undertake this reappraisal.

79 Ukraine and Kosovo are classified as Lower Middle Income Countries, whereas Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia are classified as Upper Middle Income Countries

80 Independent Commission for Aid Impact ([EUA0028](#)). The statistic excludes some ODA spent through global and regional programmes. Least developed countries (LDCs) are 47 countries identified by the UN as facing severe structural impediments to their development: see the OECD list at [link](#). ICAI also included Zimbabwe in the statistic, which is a low-income country but not on the official list of LDCs

81 International Development Committee, 2nd Report of Session 2019–21, “[Effectiveness of UK aid: interim findings](#)”, HC 215, para 18

82 For further information on the geographic profile of UK aid, please see paragraphs 17 and 18 of our [interim findings report](#)

83 The cross-government funds are the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) and the Prosperity Fund

84 Department for International Development, “[Data underlying the SID publication](#)”, 19 September 2019

85 The Fund does have some experience in reaching poorer communities, such as through the provision of sanitation facilities to displaced communities living in Colombia's regions. HM Government, “[The Prosperity Fund: Annual Report 2018/19](#)”, September 2019, page 20

86 Independent Commission for Aid Impact ([EUA0028](#)), also Health Poverty Action ([EUA0012](#)) para 2

87 Centre for Existential Risk ([EUA0068](#))

Drawing upon experiences from Australia and Canada

51. The mergers in Australia and Canada were followed by a geographic repositioning of the countries' aid budgets. Since the 2013 integration of AusAID into the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Australia has focused its assistance upon its immediate neighbourhood in the South Pacific and South-East Asia (all of Australia's neighbours are ODA recipients except New Zealand). It has also halved its ODA spend in Africa.⁸⁸ In 2017–18, the majority of Australia's allocated aid budget was designated for Middle Income Countries, and its top two recipients, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia, are both Middle Income Countries.⁸⁹

52. The Australian Government's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper underlined this approach, stating that the country's development assistance would "reflect our values while supporting our interests"⁹⁰ and would "support efforts to build a stable and prosperous world, with a focus on the Indo-Pacific".^{91,92} In December 2019, the Australian Government began the process of developing a new international development policy, which is expected to place an emphasis upon economic development and retain a focus on the Indo-Pacific.⁹³

53. Following the creation in 2013 of Global Affairs Canada, Leonard Cheshire told us that Canada's aid was characterised by a greater focus on Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as a focus upon middle income countries such as Vietnam.⁹⁴ Canada's 'Official Development Assistance Accountability Act' defines the purpose of Canadian ODA to be provided,

"with a central focus on poverty reduction and in a manner that is consistent with Canadian values, Canadian foreign policy, the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness of March 2, 2005, sustainable development and democracy promotion and that promotes international human rights standards."⁹⁵

In June 2017, Canada launched its 'Feminist International Assistance Policy', which targets ODA towards interventions with "the greatest potential to close gender gaps and improve everyone's chance for success".⁹⁶

Creating an explicit focus upon poverty reduction in Government strategy

54. The Government's Integrated Review of International Policy, due to conclude in the autumn, will create a new international strategy for the UK, including defining the role

88 Leonard Cheshire ([EUA0035](#)) para 6.4

89 [OECD DAC Australia donor information 2017–18](#), accessed 23 June 2020

90 Australian Government, "[2017 Foreign Policy White Paper](#)". November 2017, page 11

91 [Ibid](#), page 2

92 The White Paper set four tests against which Australian ODA would be allocated; "is this in our national interest? Will this promote inclusive growth and reduce poverty? Does Australia's contribution add value and leverage partner funding? Will this deliver results and value for money?" ([Ibid](#), page 90)

93 Donor Tracker, "[Donor Tracker Australia](#)", accessed 22 June 2020. Work on this strategy has been paused due to the pandemic

94 Leonard Cheshire ([EUA0035](#)) para 6.4

95 [Official Development Assistance Accountability Act 2008](#), Subsection 2(1) See also Nilima Gulrajani, "[Post-merger development governance in the UK: A preliminary cross-national investigation of Development Assistance Committee \(DAC\) donors](#)", Overseas Development Institute, July 2020

96 Global Affairs Canada, "[Feminist International Assistance Policy](#)", 2017

that an effective development policy can play as part of a joined-up approach in partnership with foreign affairs and security. In the written statement launching the Review, the Prime Minister said it would,

“set out the way in which the UK will be a problem-solving and burden-sharing nation”.⁹⁷

55. Poverty reduction is a key element of an intersecting, forward thinking strategic international policy, that seeks to reduce global instability and threats whilst helping those most in need. Accordingly, poverty reduction has run as a thread through previous Governments’ international policy strategies. The 2015 UK Aid Strategy designated “Tackling extreme poverty and helping the world’s most vulnerable” as a core objective, sitting alongside objectives to strengthen peace, security and governance; strengthen resilience and response to crises; and to promote global prosperity. Building on this, the 2018 National Security Capability Review designated development as a core national security capability, with a focus upon tackling the drivers of poverty.⁹⁸

56. The UK’s refreshed international policy should also continue the UK’s commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals and DFID’s important work to leave no-one behind. The Overseas Development Institute’s Nicola Jones analyses that DFID’s work has “raised the international profile and supported the wellbeing of the world’s most marginalised”,⁹⁹ underpinned by its 2018 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality, 2016 Youth Agenda and 2018 Strategy for Disability Inclusive Development.¹⁰⁰

57. UK aid spending amplifies the UK’s voice on the world stage, promoting our national interest by projecting our core values, and transforming the lives of people living in the very poorest countries. A potential shift of the UK’s ODA budget away from helping the very poorest people would be counterproductive - global poverty drives conflict and instability, and inaction on tackling poverty will compromise the other strands of the UK’s international policy.

58. Poverty reduction should continue to form a central part of the Government’s international policy. Accordingly, it should commit to targeting the majority of the UK’s ODA spend towards the very poorest countries. The Government should also set out how its refreshed international policy intends to work towards attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals and ensure that no-one is left behind.

Keeping a strong rules-based backbone to UK aid

59. UK aid spending is underpinned by a strong basis of internationally agreed rules and domestic legislation. Maintaining this strong, rules-based approach is crucial to ensuring that UK aid retains its effectiveness and focuses upon poverty reduction.

97 Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy: Written statement—[HCWS126](#), 26 February 2020

98 HM Government, “[National Security Capability Review](#)”, March 2018, pages 12 and 41

99 “[DFID and FCO merger: our experts’ views](#)”, Overseas Development Institute, 23 June 2020

100 See, for example, Christian Blind Mission ([EUA0006](#)) Terre des Hommes ([EUA0018](#)), Bond Child Rights Working Group ([EUA0034](#)), Action Aid ([EUA0040](#))

OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) definition of aid

60. The UK voluntarily adheres to an internationally recognised definition of aid—Official Development Assistance (ODA)—as defined by the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC).¹⁰¹ ODA is defined as assistance given to countries on the DAC list of ODA recipients (low and middle income countries) and to multilateral development institutions “with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective”.¹⁰² Loans to developing countries and multilateral institutions are also eligible, providing they are sufficiently “concessional in character”.¹⁰³ The Government has confirmed that it intends to maintain adherence to the definition, which we welcome.¹⁰⁴

Legislation

61. UK aid is governed by four key pieces of legislation which create important safeguards to the quality of ODA spending (summarised in Figure 1 below). The International Development Act 2002 states that ODA must be “likely to contribute to a reduction in poverty”, and the 2014 amendment to the Act added the duty to consider gender equality.¹⁰⁵

62. The International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015 sets out the UK’s duty to spend 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) each year on ODA. The Government has provided assurances that the UK will continue to maintain its commitment to meet the target, but with the projected shrink in the UK economy this is likely to equate to a sizeable decline in real terms.

101 Some countries, such as China, do not adhere to these rules and adopt their own definition of aid

102 OECD, “[Official development assistance - definition and coverage](#)”, accessed 11 June 2020

103 From 2018, this equates to a grant element on a sliding scale of 45% for grants to the very poorest countries, to 10% to multilateral institutions. ([Ibid](#))

104 HL Deb, 18 June 2020, [col 2321](#) [Lords Chamber]

105 International Development Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2017–19, “[Definition and Administration of ODA](#)”, HC 547, paras 5 and 6

Figure 1: What does the law say about UK aid

Act and year	Power or duty for the development secretary
International Development Act 2002	“may provide any person or body with development assistance if he [<i>sic</i>] is satisfied that the provision of the assistance is likely to contribute to a reduction in poverty.”
Reporting and Transparency Act 2006	Requirement to report annually on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aid levels across government, and • “effects of policies... pursued by government departments” on sustainable development and poverty reduction
International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014	Adds the duty to have regard to gender inequality to the 2002 act (DFID aid spend) and to report on efforts on that and women’s empowerment in the 2006 act (in line with SDG 5)
Official Development Assistance Target Act 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the target for official development assistance (ODA)—0.7 percent of gross national income—is met by the UK, and • “the independent evaluation of the extent to which ODA provided by the UK represents value for money in relation to the purposes for which it is provided”

Source: Center for Global Development, [What does the law say on UK aid](#)

63. The ONE Campaign argue that the UK’s

“determination not just to be a leading donor, but to legislate for it, sets a powerful example and makes a statement about the country’s role on the world stage”.¹⁰⁶

Citing the UK’s International Development Act, and Sweden’s Policy Coherence for Development legislation, the Overseas Development Institute’s Nilima Gulrajani agrees, arguing that “legislation sends signals about development priorities against which government agencies can be held accountable”.¹⁰⁷ Former President of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said the UK’s commitment to 0.7 is commendable, and that she hoped the merger would not result in a change to this commitment.¹⁰⁸

64. The UK’s development legislation plays an intrinsic part in ensuring that aid is spent well and is focused upon poverty reduction. The very presence of this legislation demonstrates the UK’s role as a serious player in international development, and accordingly the Government should commit to maintaining the UK’s development legislation.

106 ONE Campaign ([EUA059](#))

107 Nilima Gulrajani, “[Merging development agencies: Making the right choice](#)”, Overseas Development Institute; January 2018, para 5.1

108 Evidence taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee, 18 June 2020, [Q64](#)

Ensuring political leadership on poverty reduction

Representation at Cabinet

65. Strong political leadership on poverty reduction is central to maintaining the ongoing effectiveness of UK aid spending. The Overseas Development Institute’s analysis suggests that, “Governments that possess a senior champion to lead development policy can improve aid effectiveness”,¹⁰⁹ and that the presence of a leading political figurehead for development “safeguards against inferior aid quality, whatever structural configuration is in place.”¹¹⁰ The Secretary of State told us,

“When the new Department comes into place there will be one Secretary of State, who will be the Foreign and Development Secretary in charge of this new Department”.¹¹¹

Evidence to our inquiry overwhelmingly supported the retention of a cabinet-level Secretary of State for International Development in order to maintain the UK’s focus on poverty reduction.¹¹²

66. Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Canada and Germany all have a dedicated minister for development who attends cabinet.¹¹³ In Australia, the Minister for Development and the Pacific reports to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who has responsibility for representing development at cabinet level.¹¹⁴ These arrangements were in place prior to the merger. Therefore, unlike Australia, the merger means that the UK is losing a key decision maker on development.

109 Overseas Development Institute ([EUA0071](#)) para 10

110 Nilima Gulrajani, “[Merging development agencies: Making the right choice](#)”, Overseas Development Institute; January 2018, para 4.2

111 Oral evidence taken as part of the Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus inquiry, HC 292, [Q168](#)

112 For example, Christian Blind Mission ([EUA0006](#)), Marie Stopes International ([EUA0008](#)), Terre des Hommes ([EUA0018](#)), Bond ([EUA0064](#)), Bond Conflict Policy Group ([EUA0031](#)), VSO ([EUA0032](#)), Mercy Corps ([EUA0055](#)), ONE ([EUA0059](#)) and Save the Children ([EUA0030](#))

113 Nilima Gulrajani, “Governing development: A preliminary cross-national investigation of Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors”, Overseas Development Institute, July 2020; Response from the Library of Parliament Canada to request ECPRD 4342 on Organisation of International Development Work in Government

114 “[Portfolio Ministers](#)”, Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, accessed 23 Jun 2020

Figure 2: Ministerial structures with development responsibility across DAC donors

	Position in cabinet	No position in cabinet
Minister with dual portfolios	Austria*	Australia**
	Belgium	Ireland**
	Czech Republic*	Italy**
	Finland	Portugal**
	France*	
	Greece*	
	Hungary*	
	Iceland*	
	Japan*	
	Luxembourg	
	Netherlands	
	New Zealand*	
	Poland*	
	Slovak Republic*	
	Slovenia*	
	South Korea*	
Switzerland*		
United States*		
Minister with dedicated portfolio on development	Canada	Spain**
	Denmark	
	Germany	
	Norway	
	Sweden	

Note *Development/international cooperation is not explicitly mentioned in the Ministerial title but responsibility for it falls within the portfolio;

**The portfolio is held by a Secretary of State or Minister of State, working as a subordinate to the Foreign Minister

Source: Nilima Gulrajani, "Post-merger development governance in the UK: A preliminary cross-national investigation of Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors", Overseas Development Institute, July 2020

Representation at the National Security Council

67. In addition to Cabinet, the UK Secretary of State for International Development sits on the UK Government's National Security Council, making sure that development is considered in national security policy discussions and fostering an approach that considers reducing poverty. The Foreign Secretary has said that future representation on the National Security Council would be by the Secretary of State for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, providing no guarantee that a specific development voice would be around the table.¹¹⁵

68. In international terms, the UK is a leader in ensuring there is a dedicated development voice at meetings of national security bodies. In France, Japan and New Zealand, the Minister for Foreign Affairs (who cover development as a part of a broad portfolio) attends national security meetings.¹¹⁶ In Canada and Australia, the Minister for International Development does not attend national security meetings, although in Australia development representation is made at the National Security Committee (the equivalent of the National Security Council) through the Minister for Foreign Affairs.¹¹⁷ In the United States, the Administrator of USAid sits on the Deputies Committee of the US National Security Council (a sub-committee).¹¹⁸

69. We recommend that the Government appoints a Minister for Development with responsibility for the totality of the UK's aid spend, and that this Minister attends Cabinet. We also recommend that this Minister attends the National Security Council.

Maintaining the quality and transparency of UK aid

70. The merger provides a natural break for the Government to take stock of its aid spending and ensure that all aid programmes are delivering the best possible results. Our interim findings report found that the quality of aid spending across Whitehall is a mixed picture. A review of ICAI reports by the Center for Global Development found that 80% of DFID spend received amber/green ratings or better. By contrast, 80% of FCO spend was amber/red, including the FCO's flagship programme on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict (PSVI).¹¹⁹

71. In the ONE Campaign's Real Aid Index (which ranked the performance of departments against three criteria: poverty focus, effectiveness and transparency) no department performed as well as DFID. The FCO achieved only 'weak' for poverty focus and 'moderate' for effectiveness, with ONE expressing concern about limited local consultation or ownership of programmes.¹²⁰ However, our interim report noted that spending by other government departments appeared to be improving, and cautioned that a reorganisation of the aid budget could risk disruption to this progress.

Maintaining long term and locally led programmes

72. The FCDO will inherit a substantial number of long-term development programmes from DFID; programmes which promote long-lasting, transformational change in some of the poorest societies in the world. Development rarely happens on a linear path; achieving true change in tackling poverty can take years. Maintaining these commitments is important both for recipient communities to realise the benefits of these programmes, but also for UK taxpayers to see value for money from aid spending.

73. In Australia, the integration of DFAT and AusAID created a move towards short term rather than long term development programmes. Australian think tank the Lowy Institute argue,

116 Nilima Gulrajani, "[Post-merger development governance in the UK: A preliminary cross-national investigation of Development Assistance Committee \(DAC\) donors](#)", Overseas Development Institute, July 2020

117 "[National Security Committee](#)", Australian Government, accessed 23 June 2020

118 "[National Security Presidential Memorandum](#)", Whitehouse.gov, accessed 23 June 2020 . See also evidence from Institute for Development Studies (unpublished)

119 For further information on the FCO's PSVI work, see APPG on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict ([EUA0021](#))

120 ONE Campaign ([EUA059](#))

“Aid is becoming more transactional, in large and small ways. Management of bilateral programs by in-country missions also favours short-termism, with DFAT staff, despite best intentions, often working to solve problems of the day, and losing focus on the long-term strategic objectives of aid projects.”¹²¹

Potential cuts to development programmes

74. In response to the anticipated reduction in the UK aid budget, the Government is reviewing its aid programmes to identify potential areas for cuts. Media reports suggest that this will equate to 30% budget reductions by the Treasury to ODA-funded projects,¹²² confirmed by the Secretary of State as equating to a £2bn drop in the UK aid budget.¹²³ The Secretary of State told us,

“Because of the drop in GNI, we also had to have a fairly mammoth review of all our programmes, and to assess, working with the Treasury and other ODA spending departments, where our priorities lie and which programmes will have to be delayed or shrunk, mostly, to meet that GNI 0.7%.”¹²⁴

75. The Secretary of State told us that the delivery of humanitarian support is “at the top of the list” in the Government’s priorities for projects to be retained.¹²⁵ Nonetheless, we are concerned that these cuts may fall disproportionately upon grants to local Civil Society Organisations working in country rather than larger international development contractors undertaking contracts. Following news of the merger, these organisations are already facing an unsettling wait whilst they find out whether their work will continue to be funded by the UK.

76. UK aid will increasingly have to balance short term diplomatic needs and initiatives with long term development objectives. Ultimately, ensuring that UK aid interventions are high quality is crucial to maintaining the UK’s reputation as a top-level development provider, and we are concerned that the FCO’s performance in ICAI reviews suggests it is not yet reaching the performance level required. *The Government should set a target for all FCDO programmes to achieve a minimum ICAI grading of ‘green/amber’ within the next year.*

77. In the face of pandemic-related budget cuts, difficult decisions will need to be made as to how savings can be made whilst protecting the overall effectiveness of aid spending. Given the grave challenges faced by developing countries in tackling COVID-19, disproportionately cutting long-term and locally led development programmes would hamper both present efforts to tackle the pandemic and long-term development goals. *The Government should maintain a commitment to multi-year programming and grants to locally led projects in order to safeguard hard-won development gains. In its current review of ODA spending, it should prioritise life-saving projects across the global south.*

121 “Submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Review of Australia’s Development Program”, Lowy Institute, 5 March 2020

122 Alberto Nardelli, [Tweet](#), 24 June 2020; and “DFID seeks cuts of up to 30% on aid projects”, Devex, 30 June 2020

123 Oral evidence taken as part of the Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus inquiry, HC 292, [Q153](#)

124 Ibid [Q150](#)

125 Ibid [Q152](#)

Maintaining development expertise

78. Within the structure of the new FCDO, the new department must work both to retain the technical development expertise of former DFID colleagues, and to harness this expertise to ensure that future programmes are successfully targeted towards poverty reduction. Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) told us,

“We also note the importance of the collective level of development expertise within DFID as a factor in Britain’s effective development work. DFID is highly respected across the world and international development system as having some of the highest qualified staff in the world.”¹²⁶

79. The UK’s development expertise adds credibility to its development work and extends UK influence overseas. Reflecting upon his experience as UK Ambassador to Jordan, Peter Millett, noted that the UK’s reputation as a development expert meant that support could be viewed “not as lecturing or patronising, but as a tangible contribution to Jordan’s reform efforts” which “enhanced the UK’s reputation as a friend of Jordan”.¹²⁷ Any potential loss of this expertise could damage the credibility of UK development interventions, potentially resulting in a loss of influence overseas.

80. In the face of an unsettling merger, the new FCDO will need to focus upon the retention of existing staff in order to maintain the reputation of UK aid as the top-quality development provider. In Australia, the 2013 integration of AusAID and DFAT resulted in considerable loss of staff, impairing the quality of Australia’s aid interventions.¹²⁸ In written evidence, Marie Stopes International told us,

“since the merger of AusAID and DFAT, significant numbers of locally engaged, highly qualified AusAID staff have left the department taking with them years of specialist expertise and contacts.”¹²⁹

In his analysis of the merger, former AusAID Deputy Director General Richard Moore estimates that “up to 2000 years of expertise in total may have been lost”.¹³⁰

81. Acting Permanent Secretary of DFID Nick Dyer told us he had spoken to his Canadian counterpart, who had told him,

“We are still working on culture, but the main things you have to do and accelerate are things like common core training. Get that done early, so that you are building an understanding across the two organisations about what each other do. You accelerate the pace of promoting across different parts of the business, so that people have experience of different parts of the business. You go early in terms of people building up their skills and knowledge of how to do financial management and accountability well.”¹³¹

126 VSO ([EUA0032](#))

127 [WQ65](#)

128 “The 2015 Australian Stakeholder Survey certainly suggests the merger reduced the perception that DFAT staff were effective (Wood et al., 2016)”, Nilima Gulrajani, “[Merging development agencies: Making the right choice](#)”, Overseas Development Institute; January 2018

129 Marie Stopes International ([EUA0008](#))

130 “[Reset required for DFAT-AUSAid integration](#)”, The Interpreter, 25 March 2019

131 Oral evidence taken as part of the Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus inquiry, HC 292, [Q162](#)

82. As discussed in Chapter Two, the new FCDO will also need to focus upon training FCO staff to undertake development projects in order to safeguard the quality of UK aid. Diplomacy and development are fundamentally different skillsets, and FCO staff will need to quickly learn both the principles and approaches which underpin successful, poverty-reduction focused development programmes, whilst also learning the project management and transparency reporting requirements needed for ODA spending. Professor Malcolm Chalmers (Royal United Services Institute) said,

“Heads of missions in key developing countries will need to spend more time overseeing programmes that had previously been managed by DFID. Career paths in a fully integrated FCDO will become much more focused on showing an ability to contribute to the effective management of the programmes that will make up the bulk of the work of the new department.”¹³²

83. *To safeguard the effectiveness of UK aid interventions, the Government should set out how it intends to capture and retain DFID expertise in doing development well, and what plans are in place to rapidly train FCO staff in the skills necessary to manage effective and poverty reduction focused development programmes.*

Transparency

84. The merger presents a unique opportunity to tighten up ODA transparency standards across Whitehall, ensuring that taxpayers can see clearly how and where aid is spent, and that interventions are high quality. The transparency standards of departments administering ODA across Whitehall are variable. The 2015 UK Aid Strategy set a target for all UK government departments administering ODA to be ranked ‘good’ or ‘very good’ in the international Aid Transparency Index (ATI) by 2020. However, only three departments - DFID, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) - have met the target.¹³³ The Government has made no future commitment to aid transparency targets.¹³⁴

85. In Publish What You Fund’s 2020 Aid Transparency Index, which assesses the transparency of international aid funders, DFID retained its ranking as ‘very good’. By contrast, the FCO ranked near the bottom of the ‘fair’ category and scored zero for performance information including objectives and results.¹³⁵ However, this is an improvement on its previous ranking of ‘poor’. The ranking of donors is given in Figure 3 overleaf.

86. **Aid spending through the FCO continues to raise concerns relating to transparency and quality of programming. With the new FCDO set to become the largest implementing department of UK aid spending, this trend is very concerning. The Government should set out how it intends to ensure that ODA administered through the new FCDO meets high standards for transparency in its programming. Consequently, it should commit to all UK ODA funding meeting the transparency standard of ‘good’ within the next year.**

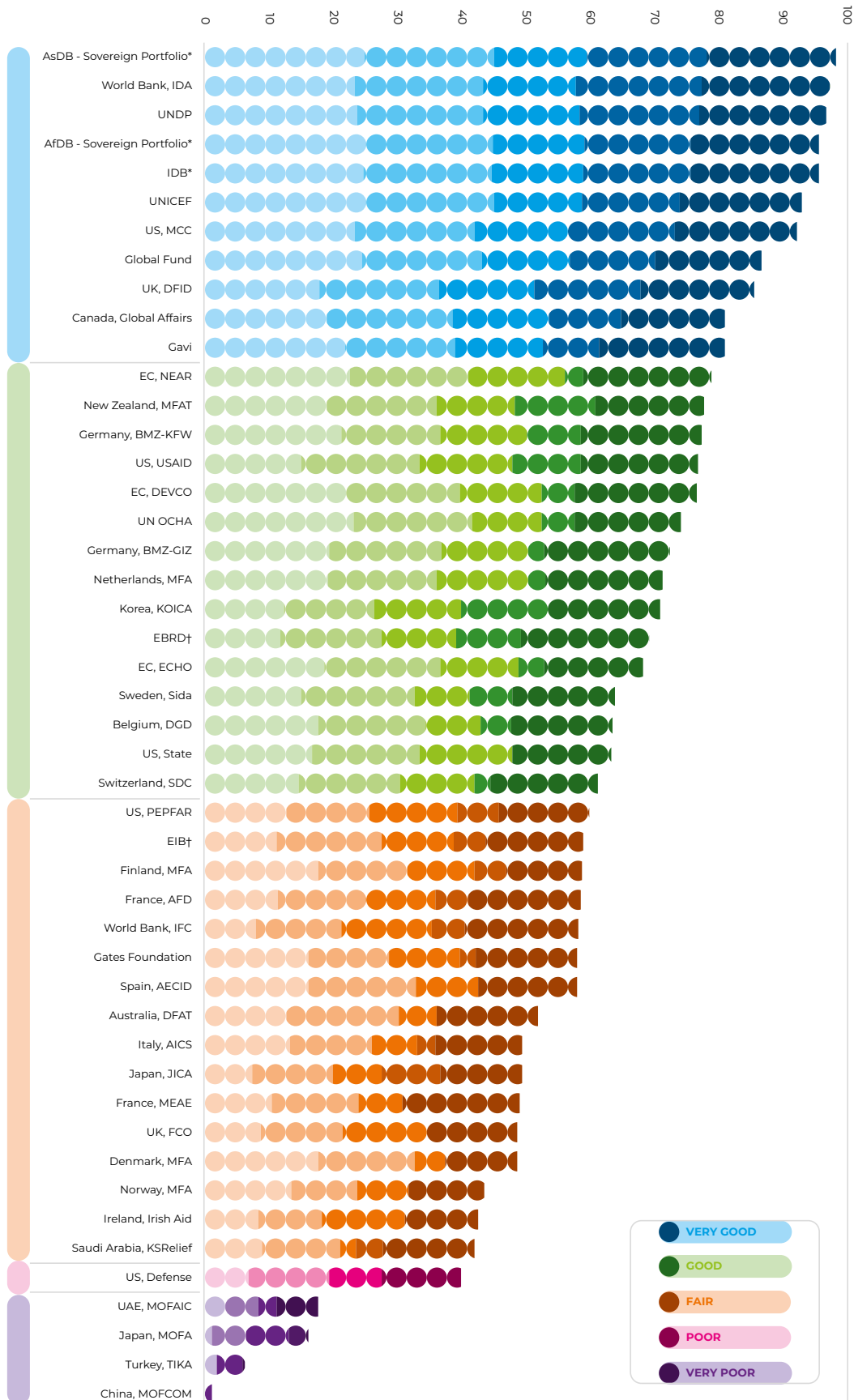
132 Professor Malcolm Chalmers, “[Farewell Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Welcome Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office](#)”, RUSI commentary, 16 June 2020

133 Publish What You Fund ([EUA0007](#))

134 Publish What You Fund state, “it is noteworthy that the UK government’s transparency targets will also soon expire with no obvious successors.” ([2020 Aid Transparency Index - Press release, 24 June 2020](#))

135 Publish What You Fund, [2020 Aid Transparency Index - Press release, 24 June 2020](#)

Figure 3: Aid transparency index 2020: Overall scores and ranking



Source: Publish What You Fund: [2020 Aid Transparency Index](#)

Multilateral spending

87. Multilateral spending forms a significant proportion of the UK's ODA, accounting for 33% (£5.1 billion) of total UK aid spending in 2019.¹³⁶ The Government will need to set out the role of multilateral spending in the UK's future development policy, especially with the UK's contributions to EU development spending drawing to an end. The UK's contributions to multilateral funds are pooled with other donors to form the budget of these organisations, such as the World Bank International Development Association. By its nature, this makes tracking this spending more complex.

88. However, oral and written evidence to this inquiry drew attention to the lack of transparency over the substantial amounts of aid disbursed through large multilateral development partners, such as the World Bank, and other delivery partners such as the UK's development finance institution, CDC Group (CDC), and the Private Infrastructure Development Group (PIDG).¹³⁷

- In 2019, DFID invested some £0.7 billion in CDC in 2018–19¹³⁸ and plans to increase this to almost £1 billion in 2019–20.¹³⁹
- DFID had intended to provide up to £500 million to PIDG between 2018 and 2022.¹⁴⁰ PIDG is a multi-donor initiative supported by DFID, DFAT (Australia), DGIS (Netherlands), Sida, (Sweden), SECO (Switzerland), and the World Bank set up to encourage and mobilise private sector infrastructure investment in the most challenging markets of Sub-Saharan Africa and South and South-East Asia.¹⁴¹

89. In Australia, the integration of AusAID into DFAT led to a growth in the proportion of ODA administered through multilaterals, initially introduced as a “temporary scale-up strategy”. Multilateral spending rose from around 34% of the Australian aid programme in 2013–14 to around 48% in 2016–17.¹⁴² Former AusAID official Richard Moore argues that Australia's choice to channel increasing amounts of ODA through multilateral organisations in part reflected a loss in its capability to undertake intensive bilateral cooperation.¹⁴³

90. Moreover, we are concerned that the combination of the upheaval of the merger with the legal requirement to spend 0.7% of GNI on ODA may lead to increased funnelling of UK ODA spending through untargeted multilateral channels. We are particularly concerned

136 Department for International Development, “[Statistics on International Development: Provisional UK Aid spend 2019](#)”, April 2020, page 8

137 [Q12](#); [Publish What You Fund \(EUA0007\)](#), [Health Poverty Action \(EUA0012\)](#), [Global Justice Now \(EUA0014\)](#), [CAFOD \(EUA0025\)](#), [James Rogers \(EUA0037\)](#), [UK Youth Climate Coalition \(EUA0046\)](#), [STOPAIDS \(EUA0058\)](#), [Human Rights Watch \(EUA0060\)](#); and Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI), “[CDC's investments in low-income and fragile states](#)”, March 2019

138 Department for International Development, “[Annual Report and Accounts 2018–19](#)”, HC 2390, 11 July 2019, page 159

139 [2019–20 supplementary estimate, Table 2 \(Capital Annually Managed Expenditure\)](#)

140 [DFID development tracker, Second phase of DFID's Support to the Private Infrastructure Development Group \(PIDG\)](#), IATI Identifier: GB-GOV-1-300351

141 [ibid](#)

142 Richard Moore, “[Strategic Choice: A future-focused review of the DFAT-AusAID integration](#)”. February 2019, page 16

143 [ibid](#)

about the potential for increased use of promissory notes (legally binding agreements to provide funding at some point in the future), which count towards a country's ODA spend when they are issued, not when they are spent.¹⁴⁴

91. Multilateral spending forms an important part of the UK's ODA, but we are concerned that the merger may lead to an increase in funds provided to these organisations for generalised future spending rather than targeted funds delivering immediate benefits. *As part of the Integrated Review, the Government should set out its strategy for development spending through multilateral institutions over the next five years, including the proportions of UK ODA to be spent through bilateral and multilateral channels, whether it intends to honour existing agreements and how it will seek to influence these organisations to ensure that UK aid is spent in the best possible way.*

144 Promissory notes are treated as liabilities in departments' financial accounts. DFID is responsible for the majority of the UK's aid expenditure through promissory notes. Between 31 March 2018 and 31 March 2019, DFID's balance of promissory notes increased by £1.5 billion (33%) from £4.5 billion to £6.0 billion (source: [DFID annual report and accounts, 2018–19](#), Note 10.3)

4 Scrutiny arrangements

Ensuring oversight of the totality of ODA spending

Select committee oversight

92. With a budget in 2019 of £15.2 billion, comprehensive and timely parliamentary oversight of the UK's aid spending is essential. The creation of the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office raises questions concerning the form of future scrutiny arrangements. In letters to the Chairs of the Foreign Affairs and International Development Committees on 16 June, the Government said,

“The Government’s view is that Select Committees in the House of Commons should generally mirror Government departments. We would therefore expect that the International Development Committee will not continue and the remit of the Foreign Affairs Committee will change to reflect the new department’s roles and responsibilities”.¹⁴⁵

However, in proceedings following an Urgent Question in the House on 18 June, the Foreign Secretary acknowledged that select committee arrangements are a matter for the House.¹⁴⁶

93. Since 1979, select committees have mirrored Whitehall departments, with at least every department having its own committee. In common with other departmental select committees, the remit of the International Development Committee is to scrutinise the spending, administration and policies of the Department for International Development. In addition, some committees have a cross-departmental remit, allowing scrutiny of cross-cutting policy areas and spending (for example, the Environmental Audit Committee and the Public Accounts Committee).¹⁴⁷

94. Arrangements exist for various types of cross-departmental scrutiny in recognition that, very often, one department’s activity will affect one or more others. This may include ‘gusting’, where members of one committee are invited to participate in other committees from time to time, and formal concurrent working between one or more committees, such as the model of the Committee on Arms Export Controls.

95. In the last Parliament, the International Development Committee secured acknowledgement within the Liaison Committee that it would take on responsibility for scrutiny of ODA spending across government (whilst also encouraging individual committees to examine their departments’ ODA expenditure). There has been some limited scrutiny of UK ODA spending by other select committees, for example the Public Accounts Committee’s 2019 report into the Effectiveness of Official Development Assistance

145 [Correspondence from the Secretary of State for International Development and Foreign Secretary, relating to Global Britain: DFID and FCO merger](#), published 2 July 2020

146 HC Deb, 18 June 2020, [col 947](#) [Commons Chamber]

147 The Public Accounts Committee examines the value for money of Government projects, programmes and service delivery, drawing on the work of the National Audit Office, to check the efficiency and effectiveness of public spending. ([Public Accounts Committee](#) homepage, accessed 22 June 2020)

spending.¹⁴⁸ Additionally, the International Development Committee traditionally appoints a sub-committee to examine the work of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, receiving its reports and conducting further scrutiny.¹⁴⁹

96. Development experts have highlighted the importance of a standalone development-focused select committee for promoting accountability and understanding of aid spending. The Overseas Development Institute's Nilima Gulrajani said "By its very existence, it [the International Development Committee] enhances transparency, public understanding and awareness of UK work on development."¹⁵⁰ In her paper on merging development agencies, she states,

"It [a committee on development] can become a channel of communication linking the public, the government and the development agency in ways that ensures bipartisan political engagement and accountability of the merged institution."¹⁵¹

97. Elsewhere in the world, parliamentary scrutiny of development policy is undertaken by committees with broader remits, in which development is just one element of competing scrutiny demands. In Australia, oversight of ODA and development policy is undertaken through the Foreign Affairs and Aid Sub-Committee of the Parliament of Australia's Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade.¹⁵²¹⁵³ In Canada, aid scrutiny falls under the remit of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Development¹⁵⁴ and, in Norway, development is covered by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence.¹⁵⁵

98. We are concerned that without a specific ODA focused committee, the UK risks falling into a similar trap, with time and resources for scrutiny of development competing against other areas of international policy. The Center for Global Development's Ian Mitchell suggested that,

"the government should create a cross-cutting committee, like a public accounts committee, to focus on questions of aid value for money. This would provide visibility and reassurance to taxpayers and Parliament alike on aid spending, and enable the Foreign Affairs and Development Committee to focus on policy".¹⁵⁶

148 Committee of Public Accounts, One Hundred and Seventeenth Report of Session 2017–19, "[The effectiveness of Official Development Assistance expenditure](#)", HC 2048

149 For example, our sub-committee recently published a report on the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)-funded Newton Fund—[International Development Committee, 3rd Report of Session 2019–21, "The Newton Fund review: report of the Sub-Committee on the work of ICAI"](#), HC 260

150 Nilima Gulrajani, [Tweet](#), 15 June 2020

151 Nilima Gulrajani, "[Merging development agencies: Making the right choice](#)", Overseas Development Institute, January 2018, para 5.3

152 Parliament of Australia, [Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade](#), accessed 20 June 2020

153 For example, the Australian Parliament's Joint Standing Committee's more recent development-specific report was its 'Inquiry into the strategic effectiveness and outcomes of Australia's aid program in the Indo Pacific and its role in supporting our regional interests', launched in 2018. This lapsed in April 2019 due to the general election. In February 2020, the Committee launched an inquiry into "Strengthening Australia's relationships with countries in the Pacific region"

154 House of Commons Canada, [Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development](#), accessed 24 June 2020

155 Institute of Development Studies, (EUA0078)

156 "[Development Leadership in the UK's New Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office](#)", Center for Global Development, 19 June 2020

The Overseas Development Institute's Nilima Gulrajani agrees with the principle of a cross-cutting committee, and suggests that,

“Given that the UK already has examples of select committees transcending departmental boundaries, including the Public Accounts and Environmental Audit Committees, this may be an opportune moment to assess the value of a similar cross-departmental committee focused on development”¹⁵⁷

Furthermore, the Secretary of State told us,

“it [the FCDO] will be a big, chunky Department, there will need to be a very substantial parliamentary oversight Committee, or Committees, to make sure that Parliament has the level of involvement and transparency that we would all expect”¹⁵⁸

Independent Commission for Aid Impact

99. The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) is the independent body responsible for scrutiny of UK aid spending, established in 2011 and given a soft statutory basis in the 2015 International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act. Since the 2015 UK Aid Strategy, ICAI has undertaken around 40 reviews of ODA spending across Whitehall, assessing areas including procurement, fiduciary risk management, oversight, value for money, governance and management.¹⁵⁹ These reviews are submitted to our sub-committee for consideration. ICAI fulfils the Government's statutory duty to,

“make arrangements for the independent evaluation of the extent to which ODA provided by the United Kingdom represents value for money in relation to the purposes for which it is provided”¹⁶⁰

100. Retaining ICAI will be essential to ensuring thorough scrutiny of UK aid spending, both within the new FCDO and across Whitehall more broadly, and in fostering greater cohesion in the UK's approach to development spending. The Institute of Development Studies argues that “ICAI plays a crucial role” and that,

“in the context of the Integrated Review, ICAI's reports and analysis play an important role in providing evidence to inform how DFID, the FCO and Defence can complement each other.”¹⁶¹

Ian Mitchell from the Center for Global Development suggests ICAI “should automatically move to the merged department” as a simple means of satisfying the legal requirement placed upon the Secretary of State to ensure independent evaluation of UK aid spending.¹⁶² ICAI say,

“If the UK is to maintain its reputation for aid excellence and its global standing as a development superpower, it needs to invest in maintaining

157 Nilima Gulrajani, “[Post-merger development governance in the UK: A preliminary cross-national investigation of Development Assistance Committee \(DAC\) donors](#)”, Overseas Development Institute, July 2020

158 Oral evidence taken as part of the Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus inquiry, HC 292, [Q176](#)

159 Independent Commission for Aid Impact ([EUA0028](#))

160 International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015, [section 5](#)

161 Institute of Development Studies ([EUA0013](#)) paras 4.2 and 4.5

162 [Development Leadership in the UK's New Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office](#)”, Center for Global Development, 19 June 2020

the high standards of UK aid. Independent scrutiny is an essential part of this, as recognised in the 0.7% spending target legislation. It is also key to maintaining public confidence in and support for a large aid programme.

“... Independent scrutiny is all the more important during a period of rapid change in the UK aid architecture, when risks to the integrity, effectiveness and value for money of UK aid are heightened”.¹⁶³

101. There is international precedence for maintaining an independent ICAI-style body. In Sweden, the Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA) evaluates and analyses the governance and implementation of ODA¹⁶⁴ and in Germany the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) provides evaluation of German development work.¹⁶⁵ In Australia the Office of Development Effectiveness is a less independent version of ICAI, which is overseen by an Independent Evaluation Committee. Based upon the ICAI model, France is legislating to introduce an independent scrutiny body.¹⁶⁶

102. In 2019, the UK aid budget totalled £15.2 billion. Given the size and complexity of this budget, thorough parliamentary scrutiny of UK aid spending is essential. This is best performed by a dedicated select committee which is able to take a holistic overview of UK ODA, ensuring that aid is spent in a strategic and transparent manner on high-quality interventions. Therefore, we recommend the creation of a House of Commons Select Committee on Official Development Assistance (ODA), with a remit for scrutiny of the totality of the UK's ODA spending.

103. Through its close work with us, and our sub-committee, the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) is a crucial part of the robust scrutiny architecture which ensures the aid budget is well spent. ICAI's expert reviews identify areas of good practice as well as areas for improvement, helping the UK to maintain its reputation as an international development superpower. It also satisfies the statutory requirement set out in the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015 for independent scrutiny of UK aid spending. There is simply no reason to change these arrangements. *We recommend that the Government retains ICAI in its current form in order to provide thorough and independent scrutiny of the UK's aid budget.*

104. *Drawing upon the highly effective model of cooperation between the National Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee, the new ODA Committee should have responsibility for receiving and considering ICAI's reviews. It should also have responsibility for the other aspects of cooperation and coordination with ICAI in which we currently participate, including recruitment of the Chief Commissioner and other commissioners; agreement of the forward work programme and commissioning work.*

163 Independent Commission for Aid Impact ([EUA0028](#))

164 [Expertgruppen for Bistandsanalys](#), accessed 22 June 2020

165 ['About Us'](#), German Institute for Development Evaluation, accessed 22 June 2020

166 Written evidence submitted to the Foreign Affairs Committee, The FCO and the Integrated Review, Independent Commission for Aid Impact ([INR0072](#))

Conclusions and recommendations

Process of the merger

1. Reorganising departments is not easy. In our view, the decision to merge the FCO and DFID into a new international department, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), is flawed on a number of grounds:
 - The decision was taken whilst the Integrated Review was paused, in its early stages, and far from ready to reach any decisions about future systems and structures.
 - Linked to the status of the Integrated Review, there appears to have been no structured consultation of the aid sector, either in the UK or internationally, nor other obvious stakeholders to inform the decision to merge DFID into the FCO.
 - It is also perplexing that the decision to merge DFID into the FCO was taken in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The decision puts the international response to COVID-19 in jeopardy at a time when global cooperation is needed. It is the world's poorest and most vulnerable who are likely to pay the greatest price.
 - Little, if any, detail has been provided about the rationale for the decision or its timing, the options considered, likely costs and specific benefits, implementation plans for the reorganisation and how its success will be measured, the new department's aims and objectives, and how it will tackle global challenges beyond aid. (Paragraph 28)
2. While merging departments may seem attractive short-term, with improved policy coherence and possible administrative savings, they can be extremely costly and disruptive and impair organisational effectiveness. In the long run, the creation of the FCDO could reduce the UK's influence on the world stage. (Paragraph 29)
3. *In the light of developments since the publication of this Committee's interim findings on the effectiveness of UK aid, we restate the recommendation we made in that report about significant reorganisations of UK aid: that the Government should present a statement to Parliament setting out an evidence-led rationale for any change; quantifying expected costs and how intended benefits justify the costs; and showing how both will be measured and controlled.* (Paragraph 30)
4. While there has been a trend in recent years for some OECD donor countries to merge their development and foreign policy administrative bodies, all the other most substantial donor countries - the United States, Germany, France and Japan - typically adopt governance models where there is a clear separation between policy and implementation. (Paragraph 39)

Maintaining the effectiveness of UK aid

5. UK aid spending amplifies the UK's voice on the world stage, promoting our national interest by projecting our core values, and transforming the lives of people living in the very poorest countries. A potential shift of the UK's ODA budget away from helping the very poorest people would be counterproductive - global poverty drives conflict and instability, and inaction on tackling poverty will compromise the other strands of the UK's international policy. (Paragraph 57)
6. *Poverty reduction should continue to form a central part of the Government's international policy. Accordingly, it should commit to targeting the majority of the UK's ODA spend towards the very poorest countries. The Government should also set out how its refreshed international policy intends to work towards attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals and ensure that no-one is left behind.* (Paragraph 58)
7. The UK's development legislation plays an intrinsic part in ensuring that aid is spent well and is focused upon poverty reduction. The very presence of this legislation demonstrates the UK's role as a serious player in international development, and accordingly the Government should commit to maintaining the UK's development legislation. (Paragraph 64)
8. *We recommend that the Government appoints a Minister for Development with responsibility for the totality of the UK's aid spend, and that this Minister attends Cabinet. We also recommend that this Minister attends the National Security Council.* (Paragraph 69)
9. UK aid will increasingly have to balance short term diplomatic needs and initiatives with long term development objectives. Ultimately, ensuring that UK aid interventions are high quality is crucial to maintaining the UK's reputation as a top-level development provider, and we are concerned that the FCO's performance in ICAI reviews suggests it is not yet reaching the performance level required. *The Government should set a target for all FCDO programmes to achieve a minimum ICAI grading of 'green/amber' within the next year.* (Paragraph 76)
10. In the face of pandemic-related budget cuts, difficult decisions will need to be made as to how savings can be made whilst protecting the overall effectiveness of aid spending. Given the grave challenges faced by developing countries in tackling COVID-19, disproportionately cutting long-term and locally led development programmes would hamper both present efforts to tackle the pandemic and long-term development goals. *The Government should maintain a commitment to multi-year programming and grants to locally led projects in order to safeguard hard-won development gains. In its current review of ODA spending, it should prioritise life-saving projects across the global south.* (Paragraph 77)
11. *To safeguard the effectiveness of UK aid interventions, the Government should set out how it intends to capture and retain DFID expertise in doing development well, and what plans are in place to rapidly train FCO staff in the skills necessary to manage effective and poverty reduction focused development programmes.* (Paragraph 83)
12. Aid spending through the FCO continues to raise concerns relating to transparency and quality of programming. With the new FCDO set to become the largest

implementing department of UK aid spending, this trend is very concerning. *The Government should set out how it intends to ensure that ODA administered through the new FCDO meets high standards for transparency in its programming. Consequently, it should commit to all UK ODA funding meeting the transparency standard of 'good' within the next year.* (Paragraph 86)

13. Multilateral spending forms an important part of the UK's ODA, but we are concerned that the merger may lead to an increase in funds provided to these organisations for generalised future spending rather than targeted funds delivering immediate benefits. *As part of the Integrated Review, the Government should set out its strategy for development spending through multilateral institutions over the next five years, including the proportions of UK ODA to be spent through bilateral and multilateral channels, whether it intends to honour existing agreements and how it will seek to influence these organisations to ensure that UK aid is spent in the best possible way.* (Paragraph 91)

Scrutiny arrangements

14. In 2019, the UK aid budget totalled £15.2 billion. Given the size and complexity of this budget, thorough parliamentary scrutiny of UK aid spending is essential. This is best performed by a dedicated select committee which is able to take a holistic overview of UK ODA, ensuring that aid is spent in a strategic and transparent manner on high-quality interventions. *Therefore, we recommend the creation of a House of Commons Select Committee on Official Development Assistance (ODA), with a remit for scrutiny of the totality of the UK's ODA spending.* (Paragraph 102)
15. Through its close work with us, and our sub-committee, the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) is a crucial part of the robust scrutiny architecture which ensures the aid budget is well spent. ICAI's expert reviews identify areas of good practice as well as areas for improvement, helping the UK to maintain its reputation as an international development superpower. It also satisfies the statutory requirement set out in the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015 for independent scrutiny of UK aid spending. There is simply no reason to change these arrangements. *We recommend that the Government retains ICAI in its current form in order to provide thorough and independent scrutiny of the UK's aid budget.* (Paragraph 103)
16. *Drawing upon the highly effective model of cooperation between the National Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee, the new ODA Committee should have responsibility for receiving and considering ICAI's reviews. It should also have responsibility for the other aspects of cooperation and coordination with ICAI in which we currently participate, including recruitment of the Chief Commissioner and other commissioners; agreement of the forward work programme and commissioning work.* (Paragraph 104)

Formal minutes

Tuesday 14 July 2020

Members present:

Sarah Champion, in the Chair

Theo Clarke

Chris Law

Brendan Clarke-Smith

Draft Report (*Effectiveness of UK aid: potential impact of FCO/DFID merger*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 104 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fourth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

[Adjourned till Thursday 16 July at 2.00 p.m.]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 17 March 2020

Emma Mawdsley, Vice-Principal, Fellow, Newham College, University of Cambridge; **James Rogers**, Directory of the Society's Global Britain Programme, Henry Jackson Society; **Ian Mitchell**, Senior Policy Fellow, Center for Global Development [Q1–28](#)

Tamsyn Barton, Chief Commissioner, Independent Commission for Aid Impact [Q29–41](#)

Tuesday 28 April 2020

Rt Hon James Cleverly MP, Minister of State for Middle East and North Africa, Foreign and Commonwealth Office & Department for International Development; **Joelle Jenny**, Director of Joint Funds Unit, Cabinet Secretariat [Q42–62](#)

Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP, Secretary of State for International Development, Department for International Development; **Nick Dyer**, Acting Permanent Secretary, Department for International Development [Q63–110](#)

The following witnesses answered written questions in lieu of oral evidence.

April 2020

Stephanie Draper, Chief Executive, Bond; **Romilly Greenhill**, UK Director, ONE; **Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP**, former Secretary of State for International Development; **Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP**, former Secretary of State for International Development [WQ1–44](#)

May 2020

Frances Guy, former UK Ambassador; **Peter Millett**, former UK Ambassador; **Sir Stephen O'Brien**, former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, DFID; **Chris Mullin**, former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, DFID and FCO; **Hajir Maalim**, Action Against Hunger; **Mauro Tadiwe**, Saferworld; **Su'ad Jarbawi**, Mercy Corps [WQ45–103](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

EUA numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Action for Global Health Network (Katie Hesselby, Coordinator) ([EUA0047](#))
- 2 ActionAid UK (Mr Bruce Warwick, Government Relations and Advocacy Adviser) ([EUA0040](#))
- 3 Adam Smith International (Mr Jonathan Pell, Chief Executive Officer) ([EUA0050](#))
- 4 APPG on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (Mr Anthony Mangnall, Chair) ([EUA0021](#))
- 5 Bond (Paul Abernethy, Government Relations and Public Affairs Adviser) ([EUA0064](#))
- 6 Bond Child Rights Working Group (Ms Alice Whitehead, Advocacy and Parliamentary Coordinator) ([EUA0034](#))
- 7 Bond Conflict Policy Group (Ms Alice Whitehead, Advocacy and Parliamentary Coordinator) ([EUA0031](#))
- 8 Bond Disability and Development Group (Ms Jazz Shaban, Co-Chair) ([EUA0038](#))
- 9 The British Council (Mr Calum Mulligan, Policy and Parliamentary Officer) ([EUA0022](#))
- 10 British Red Cross ([EUA0073](#))
- 11 CAFOD ([EUA0069](#))
- 12 CAFOD, RSPB, Oxfam GB, Christian Aid, WWF-UK, andII (Head of Public Policy Graham Gordon) ([EUA0025](#))
- 13 CBM UK (Ms Rachel Aston, Policy Manager) ([EUA0006](#))
- 14 Center for Global Development (Mr Ian Mitchell, Senior Policy Fellow and Co-director, Europe) ([EUA0020](#))
- 15 Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, University of Cambridge ([EUA0068](#))
- 16 Charities Aid Foundation ([EUA0053](#))
- 17 Concordis International (Mr. Peter Marsden, Chief Executive) ([EUA0016](#))
- 18 The Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi) (Ms. Michelle Childs, Global Head Policy and Advocacy) ([EUA0019](#))
- 19 E3G (Mr. Chris Dixon O'Mara, Policy Advisor) ([EUA0057](#))
- 20 FIA Foundation (Mr Richard Clarke, Researcher) ([EUA0052](#))
- 21 The Five Foundation (Mr Brendan Wynne, Co-founder) ([EUA0004](#))
- 22 Global Antibiotic Research and Development Partnership (Mr Matthew Doherty, Head of External Relations) ([EUA0067](#))
- 23 Global Coalition for Youth Employment (Woolcombe, David and Lefroy, Jeremy) ([EUA0003](#))
- 24 Global Justice Now (Dr Daniel Willis, Policy & Campaigns Manager) ([EUA0014](#))
- 25 Global Witness (Mr Adam McGibbon, Senior Campaigner) ([EUA0051](#))
- 26 The HALO Trust (Mr Chris Loughran, Senior Policy & Advocacy Advisor) ([EUA0036](#))
- 27 Health Poverty Action (Tess Woolfenden, Policy and Campaigns Officer) ([EUA0012](#))

- 28 The Henry Jackson Society (Mr James Rogers, Director of the Global Britain Programme) ([EUA0037](#))
- 29 Human Rights Watch ([EUA0060](#))
- 30 IAVI (B Coates, Advocacy) ([EUA0015](#))
- 31 Independent Commission for Aid Impact (Dr Tamsyn Barton, Chief Commissioner) ([EUA0028](#))
- 32 Institute of Development Studies ([EUA0078](#))
- 33 Institute of Development Studies (Sophie Robinson, External Affairs Officer) ([EUA0013](#))
- 34 International Alert (Gemma Kelly, Policy Officer) ([EUA0054](#))
- 35 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) ([EUA0070](#))
- 36 International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) (Vice President, Global Growth and Outreach Catherine Barnes, Vice President, Global Growth and Outreach) ([EUA0056](#))
- 37 International Justice Mission (IJM) UK (Mr Euan Fraser, Public and Corporate Affairs Manager) ([EUA0010](#))
- 38 Leonard Cheshire (Elaine Green, Head of Influencing) ([EUA0035](#))
- 39 Li, Jie Sheng ([EUA0002](#))
- 40 London, Mr ([EUA0011](#))
- 41 Malaria No More UK (Miss Charlotte Dixie, UK Advocacy Manager) ([EUA0045](#))
- 42 Marie Stopes International (Marie Stopes International Bethan Cobley, Director, External Affairs) ([EUA0008](#))
- 43 Mawdsley, Dr Emma ([EUA0039](#))
- 44 Medicines for Malaria Venture (MMV) (Associate Director, External Relations Ivana Sirovic, donor relations) ([EUA0044](#))
- 45 Mercy Corps (Miranda Hurst, Senior Policy Advisor) ([EUA0055](#))
- 46 Mines Advisory Group (Michael Boyce, Humanitarian Policy Advisor) ([EUA0026](#))
- 47 Mines Advisory Group (Michael Boyce, Humanitarian Policy Advisor) ([EUA0027](#))
- 48 National Audit Office ([EUA0075](#))
- 49 Oil Change International (Laurie van der Burg, Senior Campaigner) ([EUA0043](#))
- 50 ONE Campaign (Miss Nasim Salad, Policy and Advocacy Coordinator) ([EUA0059](#))
- 51 Overseas Development Institute ([EUA0071](#))
- 52 Oxfam GB ([EUA0077](#))
- 53 PATH (Mariana Becerra, Senior Policy & Advocacy Associate) ([EUA0061](#))
- 54 People and Nature campaign (Amy Hammond, Consultant) ([EUA0065](#))
- 55 Publish What You Fund - The Global Campaign for Aid Transparency (Mr Gary Forster, Chief Executive) ([EUA0007](#))
- 56 Results UK (Ms Lucy Drescher, Head of Parliamentary Advocacy) ([EUA0049](#))
- 57 Rethinking Security (Richard Reeve, Coordinator) ([EUA0023](#))
- 58 Save the Children (Mr Alastair Russell, Senior Public Affairs Adviser) ([EUA0030](#))
- 59 Save the Children ([EUA0079](#))

- 60 Sazani (Mr Mark Proctor, CEO) ([EUA0001](#))
- 61 Sightsavers (Alex Voce, Parliamentary Adviser) ([EUA0066](#))
- 62 Sir Bobby Charlton Foundation (Mr Nigel Ellway, Advisor) ([EUA0009](#))
- 63 STOPAIDS (Ms Jenny Vaughan, Senior Advocacy Advisor) ([EUA0058](#))
- 64 Taxpayers' Alliance (Mr Jeremy Hutton, Policy Analyst) ([EUA0029](#))
- 65 TB Alliance ([EUA0072](#))
- 66 Terre des Hommes UK (Mr Tom Fitzpatrick, Business Development Officer) ([EUA0018](#))
- 67 U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Center at the Chr. Michelsen Institute (Mr David Aled Williams, Senior Adviser) ([EUA0017](#))
- 68 UK Collaborative on Development Research (UKCDR) (Laura Scott, Senior Research and Policy Officer) ([EUA0042](#))
- 69 UK Sustainability & Transitions Working Group, STOPAIDS, and Results UK (Mr James Cole) ([EUA0062](#))
- 70 UK Youth Climate Coalition (Ben Gilbey, Organiser) ([EUA0046](#))
- 71 VSO (Heather Alcock, External Affairs and Advocacy Manager) ([EUA0032](#))
- 72 Written questions & answers in lieu of oral evidence, May 2020 ([EUA0076](#))
- 73 Written questions & answers in lieu of oral evidence, April 2020 ([EUA0074](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website. The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

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First Report	Humanitarian crises monitoring: the Rohingya	HC 259
Second Report	Effectiveness of UK aid: interim findings	HC 215
Third Report	The Newton Fund Review: report of the Sub-Committee of the work on the work of ICAI	
First Special Report	Follow up: sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector: Government Response to the First Report of the Committee	HC 127