

Academy of Medical Sciences response to the House of Commons' International Development Select Committee inquiry into the future of UK aid

Summary

- The reduction in ODA from 0.7% to 0.5% GNI has disproportionately affected research and innovation, with UKRI seeing a £120 million gap between funding and existing commitments in 2021-22.
- The funding shortfall affects over 800 live research projects in the UK and developing countries, threatening the UK's credibility and reputation as partner of choice.
- Even a temporary reduction in ODA will have lasting consequences for the UK science base, for the ability of the UK to act as a global leader in addressing international health challenges, and for achieving the UK's ODA priorities.
- The next Spending Review is an opportunity to reflect on the impact of these cuts on the Government's ODA priorities and on the presence and reputation of Britain globally and to explore options for mitigation.

Introduction

The Academy of Medical Sciences is the independent body in the UK representing the diversity of medical science. Our mission is to promote medical science and its translation into benefits for society. The Academy's elected Fellows are the United Kingdom's leading medical scientists from hospitals, academia, industry, and the public service. We work with them to promote excellence, influence policy to improve health and wealth, nurture the next generation of medical researchers, link academia, industry, and the NHS, seize international opportunities and encourage dialogue about the medical sciences.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the House of Commons' International Development Select Committee's inquiry into the future of UK aid. The following response draws on the expertise of the Academy's Fellowship to provide evidence on the contribution of research and innovation to the Government's ODA priorities, and the impacts of the recent ODA cuts on the Academy of Medical Sciences, across medical research, and on the UK's international reputation.

Contribution of ODA funds to research and innovation

ODA funds have contributed towards R&D since 2015, predominantly through the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and the Newton Research Fund¹. These schemes are delivered by a range of partners, including UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), the national Academies, and the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). Medical research enabled by these schemes have made significant contributions to global health security, identified as a key strategic priority for ODA spend², including supporting the genomic surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 variants overseas and the development of the Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine³. **The decision to temporarily reduce ODA from 0.7% to 0.5% GNI has already had a significant, negative effect on these schemes.**

Impacts of cuts to ODA

1. Impact on the Academy of Medical Sciences

The Academy of Medical Sciences has been asked to cease all calls for new ODA activity and to prioritise existing activity in FY2021-22. We are currently unable to open any further rounds of our Newton International Fellowship, Newton Advanced Fellowship or GCRF Networking Grant schemes

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478834/ODA_strategy_final_web_0905.pdf

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/uk-official-development-assistance-oda-allocations-2021-to-2022-written-ministerial-statement>

³ Else H (2021). Key COVID research hit by cut to UK foreign-aid budget. *Nature* **593**, 20-21.

or to continue with the policy workshop programme with Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) that was funded through the GCRF. As part of our GCRF portfolio, we have been working with international Academies around the world to support evidence-based policy on critical health issues such as universal health coverage, improving malaria control strategies and the COVID-19 pandemic. **Without our GCRF funding our ability to respond to the most critical international health issues is threatened**⁴.

We wrote to the Foreign Secretary in December with the Royal Society, the British Academy, and the Royal Academy of Engineering to highlight the contributions of ODA funded projects to research and innovation, such as our Newton Fund supported study combating non-communicable disease in South Africa⁵. In our joint letter, we raised concerns that **the reduction in investment to these programmes will force us to break hard-won partnerships**, and the UK's credibility and trustworthiness will be threatened – especially where our international partners are also contributing financially and will be unable to proceed without the UK as a partner. **These damaging consequences will threaten the UK's reputation as a partner of choice** and could prove particularly disruptive in the year that the UK acts as President of the G7 and COP 26.

2. Impact across medical research

The impacts of the ODA cuts on the Academy's activities should be set in the wider context of disproportionately large impacts of the cuts on R&D. UKRI has been given a budget of £125 million this year but has £245m in existing funding commitments to grant holders. This compares to a budget of £422 million for 2020-21. In comparison, the overall reduction to ODA is estimated at around 30%. The £120m shortfall means **UKRI is in the process of cutting ongoing research projects in the UK and developing countries**. UKRI has said it can only fund projects until the end of July and that over 800 live projects are affected⁶. Many of these projects enable medical research advances which have contributed to global health, such as developing technologies and education to reduce HIV transmission in sub-Saharan Africa and helping and empowering Brazilian researchers understand and mitigate the impact of Zika virus⁷.

While the Government has indicated that it intends to return to a 0.7% GNI commitment when the fiscal situation allows, the timescale of this remains unclear⁸. Even if the commitment is reinstated, it is not clear whether the amount allocated to the science base will be restored. **Even a temporary reduction in funding for scientific research will compromise the ability of the UK to act as a leader in addressing global challenges and building capacity in research talent**, particularly at a time when COVID-19 has demonstrated the critical need for global collaboration. In our submission to the 2021 Budget, we highlighted that research and innovation will also be central to achieving other stated Government objectives for ODA – including tackling climate change, protecting biodiversity, and promoting international health security – through enhancing our understanding of the problems and the range of solutions, increasing research talent, and through developing new innovations⁹.

3. Impact on international relationships

The GCRF has provided funding for UK research institutions and universities to collaborate internationally and has helped to bolster the UK's place as a world leader in addressing global challenges and a science superpower. The Russell Group, representing 24 leading UK universities, have raised concerns that the immediate cancellation of ongoing projects - which have been a key vehicle for advancing UK influence in R&D internationally for many years - not only risks undoing years of hard work, but **risks damaging the UK's global reputation as an international partner for R&D**¹⁰.

⁴ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/5421/documents/54213/default/>

⁵ <https://acmedsci.ac.uk/file-download/87956942>

⁶ <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/UKRI-150421-ODAreview-questionsandanswers.pdf>

⁷ <https://acmedsci.ac.uk/file-download/87956942>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-britain-in-a-competitive-age-the-integrated-review-of-security-defence-development-and-foreign-policy>

⁹ <https://acmedsci.ac.uk/file-download/6402000>

¹⁰ <https://russellgroup.ac.uk/media/5912/russell-group-briefing-note-on-gcrf-march-2021.pdf>

In 2019, £200 million of GCRF funding was awarded to 12 International Research Hubs over five years to tackle a wide range of global challenges, including population health and pandemic response¹¹. **Many of the hubs are currently reporting reductions in funding of up to 70% for 2021-22, disrupting the collaborative networks they have built internationally**^{12,13,14,15,16,17}. Responses from institutions and researchers from Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries who collaborate on ODA funded research align with these reports¹⁸, and international societies working in ODA funded areas have been vocal in their concern over the impacts of the cuts^{19,20}.

As Government seek to bring about the vision of Global Britain²¹, it is essential that R&D is supported to play a leading role. The pandemic has demonstrated why investing in research is so important, and how UK science can step up to play its part on the global stage. The serious and lasting damage to international relationships and the UK's reputation from cuts to ODA funded research threaten to undermine this ambition. **The next Spending Review is an opportunity to reflect on the impact of these cuts on the Government's ODA priorities** and on the presence and reputation of Britain globally and to explore options for mitigation.

This response was prepared by Sam Usher, Policy Intern, and informed by members of the Academy's Fellowship and staff. For further information, please contact: Tom Livermore (tom.livermore@acmedsci.ac.uk).

Academy of Medical Sciences
41 Portland Place
London, W1B 1QH
+44(0)20 3141 3205
info@acmedsci.ac.uk

Incorporated by Royal Charter. Registration No. RC000905. Registered Charity No. 1185329

¹¹ <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/UKRI-22102020-GCRF-Hub-booklet-June-2019.pdf>

¹² <https://www.watersecurityhub.org/news-events/news/oda-cuts-will-damage-future-uk-science>

¹³ <https://www.onehealthpoultry.org/news/if-the-government-is-serious-about-global-britain-why-is-it-cutting-research-funding/>

¹⁴ <https://africanswift.org/2021/04/07/statement-on-ukri-funding-cuts/>

¹⁵ <https://oneoceanhub.org/one-ocean-hub-unites-to-adapt-to-immediate-unexpected-and-significant-budget-reduction/>

¹⁶ <https://actionagainststunting.org/statement-on-the-120m-ukri-funding-cut-by-professor-claire-heffernan/>

¹⁷ <https://www.tomorrowcities.org/uk-government-cuts-overseas-development-assistance-tomorrows-cities-responses>

¹⁸ Richter et al (2021). What the ODA cuts mean for us. The Lancet **397**, 1168-1170.

¹⁹ <https://microbiologysociety.org/blog/foreign-aid-cuts-now-is-not-the-time-to-step-back.html>

²⁰ https://www.ae-info.org/ae/Acad_Main/News/Recent%20cuts%20to%20the%20UK%20Overseas%20Development%20Aid%20research%20budget

²¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-britain-in-a-competitive-age-the-integrated-review-of-security-defence-development-and-foreign-policy>