

## Written evidence submitted by Paul Abernethy (INR0036)

1. Bond is the UK network for organisations working in international development and humanitarian aid. It unites over 400 organisations, ranging from small specialist charities to large international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) with a worldwide presence.
2. Bond and its members welcome this inquiry by the Foreign Affairs Committee and look forward to using our experience and expertise as organisations working in support of the world's poorest and most vulnerable communities and for sustainable development.
3. The Integrated Review is the first real opportunity for the Government to demonstrate their vision for a 'Global Britain'. The Government should use the Integrated Review process to position the UK as a country which uses its global influence to target poverty and inequality in all its forms, push for decisive action on the climate and nature emergencies, strengthen and defend international rules and norms, and act as a principled and positive force for change in the world.
4. As we begin to consider how the current COVID-19 crisis will affect our shared future, it is clear that the pandemic could lead not only to a global health and humanitarian crisis, but also to a wider economic and social crisis, with the developing world potentially hardest hit. It is exposing and intensifying existing patterns of poverty and inequality, compromising progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and delaying many of the essential steps needed to tackle the ongoing climate and nature emergencies. It is now more important than ever for the UK to demonstrate the global leadership required not only to tackle the challenge of the pandemic, but also to build back better once it has passed.

### The Efficacy of the Review Process

5. Bond and our members welcome the Integrated Review. We support a well-funded and effective aid programme, with poverty reduction and sustainable development as the primary objectives, led by the Department for International Development (DfID) but working closely with other government departments and institutions in support of the poorest and most vulnerable.
6. However, there are concerns amongst many stakeholders in the international development sector that the Integrated Review is potentially an exercise to justify some form of integration of DfID into the Foreign Office in order to increase the Foreign Office's control over, and use of, the aid budget – a proposal that the Prime Minister has discussed publicly on a number of occasions<sup>1</sup>.
7. Principled and adequately resourced diplomacy is critically important for the UK, and delivering this has undoubtedly been made more challenging by sustained funding cuts to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) core budget. However, the

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<sup>1</sup> [Trade and foreign aid: will Boris Johnson bring an end to DfID?](#), The Guardian, July 2019

answer to this underfunding is to restore the FCO's unrestricted funding, not to seek to repurpose aid spending or merge departments. This would allow the FCO to focus on its distinct objectives and core competencies, and the UK to continue to benefit from the expertise and international credibility of an independent DfID.

8. We also have concerns that significant decisions have already been made by the government, away from the Integrated Review process, without adequate and proper public and parliamentary scrutiny. In an oral evidence session with the International Development Select Committee on 28 April 2020, the Secretary of State for International Development stated that "quite a lot of thinking" had already been done with regards to the Integrated Review<sup>2</sup>. There have also been reports of changes to line management and reporting practices, with DfID country directors now reporting to Foreign & Commonwealth Office officials<sup>3</sup>. For these decisions to be made outside the purview of the Integrated Review, which was set up to address issues such as this, calls into question the purpose and credibility of the process.
9. It is essential that the government engages with civil society organisations clearly and pro-actively throughout this review. We know from experience that social dialogue, along with democratic decision making, is most effective when it is inclusive, meaningful and deliberative, and rooted in a well-structured and consistent process that promotes accountability and transparency<sup>4</sup>.
10. Government ministers have stated that they want to consult with a wide range of experts, but have not set out the principles and frameworks within which a meaningful and deliberative engagement with national and international civil society groups will take place. Without this there is a risk of compromising the Integrated Review's legitimacy.
11. Now that the Integrated Review process has officially been put on pause, we urge the Committee to actively engage with ministers and officials to ensure that no key decisions are taken by the government without proper parliamentary scrutiny. We also recommend to the Committee that it looks to gather further detailed evidence once the Integrated Review process has restarted.

### **The Relationship of this Review with other Foreign-Policy Reviews**

12. The Integrated Review needs to complement other government processes including the new International Development Strategy (IDS) being led by DfID, and the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). As with the Integrated Review, the IDS process needs to be open, deliberative and include meaningful engagement with the civil society organisations engaged in delivering development work from the beginning and throughout.

### **The Relationship of the FCO with the other UK Government Departments in Foreign-Policy Strategy**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/327/pdf/>

<sup>3</sup> *DFID country directors told to report to the Foreign Office*, Devex, March 2020

<sup>4</sup> *Ensuring Civil Society's Voice is Heard*, Bond, March 2019,

13. The Government is not doing enough to ensure policy coherence in decision-making. The Government should use the Integrated Review to improve cross-departmental policy coherence, so that policies adopted in one area do not undermine delivery in another.
14. For example, the Government should ensure that foreign, migration and security policies do not hinder development and humanitarian workers who are already operating under the most challenging of conditions. Equally, trade and investment promotion activities must actively promote environmental sustainability, social responsibility and transparency, and respect international agreements and standards.
15. As previously mentioned, we have concerns that the Integrated Review could be used as a vehicle for the government to merge DfID into the FCO. To ensure the effectiveness of UK development cooperation, and protect the UK's global reputation as a leading international development actor, UK aid should not be used to pursue narrowly-defined economic, security or foreign policy objectives. In addition, UK aid objectives should not be compromised or contradicted by other elements of UK foreign, migration, trade, investment or climate policy.
16. Any government systems and structures recommended by the Integrated Review for coordinating and managing the UK's external relations should have a clear remit for promoting UK development cooperation in accordance with the International Development Act principles, and include clear mechanisms for meaningful and deliberative engagement with Parliament and civil society organisations.
17. The FCO, DfID, Ministry of Defence and other outward-facing government departments all have separate roles to play as part of a principled and values-driven UK foreign policy. Greater strategic alignment between these departments is potentially beneficial, so long as the UK government respects the distinct objectives and competencies of each department, and ensures that any UK aid is spent in line with the statutory objectives of promoting poverty reduction and sustainable development.
18. Given its expertise and experience, an independent Department for International Development (DFID) with cabinet-level representation should remain the primary channel for ODA and should also have a coordinating and oversight function in relation to ODA spending by other government departments (OGDs), with responsibility for maintaining coherence and ensuring OGD spending complements the department's existing programmatic focuses.
19. The Integrated Review will also be an opportunity for the UK Government to improve transparency across all of UK aid, including those funds spent by the FCO. Bond member Publish What You Fund's latest rating of UK ODA-spending department's transparency performance (published in January 2020) found that the DFID continued to be the strongest performer on aid transparency, with only DFID, the Department for Health and Social Care and the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy meeting the target of a "Good" ranking or above that the government has previously set for all ODA-spending departments in the 2015

Strategy.<sup>5</sup> Several other aid-spending departments, especially the FCO, continues to perform badly in terms of their overall transparency.

**May 2020**

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<sup>5</sup> The UK Aid Strategy committed departments to achieving a ‘Good’ or ‘Very Good’ rating in the Publish What You Fund (PWYF) Aid Transparency Index by 2020.