

## **Submission from Save the Children on the establishment of the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office**

Save the Children was founded in London in 1919 and today works in 120 countries to ensure that every child has the chance to survive, learn and be protected. We have a long track record of partnering with the UK Government, including in delivering on priorities such as the Girls' Education Challenge and responding to crises such as the West African Ebola Outbreak and the current COVID-19 pandemic. We also enjoy a deep relationship with the British public, 13,000 of whom volunteer for us across the United Kingdom, including in our 127 local shops.

The establishment of a new department to lead the Government's work on both foreign policy and international development presents opportunities and challenges in delivering on the UK's priorities around the world, in particular for the Government's manifesto commitments on child survival and girls' education and our shared priority of protecting women and children in conflict. While not an exhaustive blueprint for the new department, this paper seeks to highlight ways in which the merger could take advantage of these opportunities and overcome the challenges.

### **Founding Principles**

We recognise the Government's wish to create a fundamentally new Department. It will be vital to the success of this new Department to set out its overarching mission and priority objectives clearly. Its success should be judged against these goals.

Whilst focusing on the future, this new Department's mission should build on the best elements of its predecessors. It will need to encompass DFID's work to eradicate poverty and inequality and respond to crises alongside the FCO's work to promote British values and interests on the world stage. The trade-off between national self-interest and global goods is not as stark as some argue, especially over the longer term. Moreover, with many powerful nations stepping back from international cooperation, or caught up in bilateral disputes, there is more need and more opportunity for Britain to exercise global leadership. The UK's core values make it exceptionally well placed to drive global action in a way that balances people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships, as set out in the 2030 Agenda for Action.

Given the complexity of aligning the work of two departments, the new department needs a clear mission statement that can unite its staff behind one mission and, critically, engage the public with something that feels relevant to their lives. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a universal blueprint to deliver peace and prosperity for people and the planet. Delivering the SDGs, to secure peace and prosperity for the people of the United Kingdom and the world, would be a fitting mission for a new department designed to meet global challenges.

This would maintain the best of the old – the FCO's legacy of promoting British values and seeking global stability, along with DFID's track-record of helping people in poverty and caught up in crises – whilst building something new, showing that this is not a 'take-over' or a return to a previous time. This would help fulfil the Prime Minister's commitment to "do even more to tackle poverty and deprivation around the world" through the merger.

A second principle should be a commitment to a human rights-based approach. In practice that would mean i) the primacy of human rights and human development over commercial interests whenever these conflict in the work of the department, ii) a focus on the most deprived and marginalised communities in decisions about both spending and country engagement and iii) an

explicit and indivisible commitment to the full body of international humanitarian and human rights law, and the promotion of same in all bilateral and multilateral engagement by the new department.

A final founding principle should be the retention of the core capabilities of each department. The Foreign Office's influence in capitals around the world should now be put to the task of development as well as diplomacy. There is a huge opportunity to capitalise on the FCO's relationships, global footprint, languages and agility. DFID, meanwhile, is a world-leader in its commitment to testing and learning, building evidence-based policy and holding itself to high standards of transparency. As we have seen over the course of the COVID-19 crisis, the department also holds extraordinary research capability and scientific expertise.

The Department must also look beyond its two predecessors to ensure that responsibilities are appropriately shared across Whitehall. For example there is an opportunity for it take a wider view in leading the UK's approach to global challenges, collaborating closely with the Home Office on issues of security and international crime, or with the Department of Health and Social Care on pandemic preparedness and vaccine development. The foundation of the Department should not be bound by existing Whitehall demarcations for the sake of convenience ,but should be rooted in achieving maximum impact on the world stage on the United Kingdom's behalf in this new decade.

If the new FCDO is able to combine the best of both from its predecessors, as well as looking beyond them, with a cohesive new culture and clear new mission statement, it will be well placed to meet the challenges of the 2020s.

### **In-country presence**

Current and former ministers in both departments have expressed frustration that each lacks a 'country-eye view' that really informs Whitehall decision-making, so it is vital that the blueprint for how the new department will deliver greatest impact starts at country level. It is reasonable that the precise model will differ on a country by country basis, however it is important to set out principles that guide the approach to establishing new, effective UK missions.

FCDO missions should operate on the basis of a single country plan that sets out clearly the UK's presence and purpose in that country and how different resources will be harnessed to achieve intended objectives whilst ensuring policy coherence. These plans should be long-term (minimum 5 years) and focus on intended outputs and outcomes, rather than short-term inputs. Updates and progress reports should be made public. Plans should recognise where other departments (such as the Home Office, DIT or BEIS) are also engaged, to ensure a cohesive approach. These plans should provide full transparency on UK aid spending in the country, including aid resources earmarked for the country even if spent through central funds or via multilaterals.

While country plans will be overseen by the National Security Council, it is vital that the Head of Mission and their team are empowered to develop them in a way that takes account of the local context. This should include a formal process of engagement with local stakeholders including civil society. The plans should set out how the UK's work will support empowerment of local organisations as a core principle for action. Their development should allow for the meaningful participation of children and youth, particularly concerning the contribution the UK can make in each country to meeting the manifesto commitments around child survival and girls' education.

Given the universal nature of the Sustainable Development Goals, all country plans should include an analysis of how the UK's planned interventions will contribute to the achievement of these goals. All plans for countries classified as Least Development Countries (LDCs) or low-income (as defined by the World Bank's IDA definition) should have poverty reduction as a primary objective. For any countries in receipt of ODA, the plan should set out how the UK intends to contribute to humanitarian and longer-term development needs directly and/or as part of the wider system, with tangible targets and indicators for the poverty reduction impact and equity focus of all interventions.

The Mission's staffing should match the intended objectives. Where there is currently a DFID office, we expect the new Mission to include significant humanitarian and development expertise, including at senior leadership level. Current DFID staff should be considered for Heads of Mission posts on an equal basis with FCO staff. The new FCDO Missions should commit to open advertisement of all posts recruited in country, and clear career paths for national and non-British staff that recognise their valuable role within the Mission.

### **Partnerships & Funding**

International cooperation and consensus building should be at the core of the new department's approach. Many of the issues that matter so much to the UK can only be achieved through global cooperation, including action on climate change, tackling conflict, insecurity and abuse of human rights, targeting pandemics and ensure global prosperity. As a leading member of NATO and the UN Security Council, the UK should use its position of power to strengthen alliances for the greater good and to amplify the voices of the most vulnerable.

As the UK chairs the G7 in 2021, the Department has a crucial opportunity to build a consensus amongst world leaders behind an approach to building back better from the COVID-19 pandemic that focusses on leaving no-one behind. This should include getting children back to school (especially girls and other marginalised groups who are most at risk of dropping out and staying out); targeting weaknesses in health systems, including by investing in community-led approaches that have proven so valuable in the pandemic; helping families to rebuild their finances to cope with the hardship they are now facing and to become more resilient to future shocks, including through universal social protection schemes; and working with Governments and the private sector to kick-start growth and tackle unsustainable debt burdens. The Department should ensure that its diplomatic efforts over its first year are geared towards gaining maximum traction against these priorities as chair of the G7. COP 26 provides a similar opportunity, in collaboration with the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, and the new department will benefit not only from the FCO's experience of climate diplomacy but also DFID's expertise in assisting those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

The UK's commitment to multilateralism should not, however, mean a default to multilateral aid spending. This should be looked at carefully, to ensure it is the best way for the UK to achieve its intended objective. The UK's funding to many multilaterals is good value for money. The UK's core funding to agencies like the WHO or the Global Fund or Gavi helps them to fulfil specialist mandates. Investments in the Multilateral Development Banks leverage the UK's contributions many times over through the markets. Pooled funds can help drive economies of scale or buy specialist expertise that the UK doesn't have. But multilateral agencies should not be the default, even when the UK wants to achieve scale and especially where speed is of the essence. In the current Covid-19 crisis, for example, the UK has relied heavily on funding via the UN system. 4-months on, little of this has reached communities most in need. By contrast,

DFID funding distributed through the START Network of international and local NGOs was being spent on prevention and mitigation activities within 72 hours.

One of the objectives of the new department should be to bring the best that Britain has to offer to everything it does. In development this will give it a pool of world-leading organisations to work with, from charities large and small to the private sector, the emergency services and armed forces. Civil society not only brings decades of expertise working across the world, but also the support and engagement of the British public. The merger presents opportunities to rethink how such partnerships work and to bring together innovative partnerships, such as the proposed UK Emergency Responders' Platform, which could deploy at speed to any humanitarian crisis.

The new Department will need a transparent relationship management system to avoid blurred lines between development and commercial relationships, but this should not stop action to overcome unhelpful silos.

The FCDO should retain the best of DFID's aid management systems and continue to apply world class standards on safeguarding, modern slavery, gender and the environment. The new department, however, is an important opportunity to consider how to streamline these, so that they achieve their purpose but do not stop SMEs or smaller organisations from being able to engage. Streamlining also has the potential to increase the amount of aid that reaches those its intended for, by helping implementing organisations to reduce their own overheads. This is not about contracting out: perverse Government accounting rules mean that DFID already makes extensive use of private sector contractors to do things that it could probably do better and cheaper in-house.

### **Political leadership**

The success of the department relies on committed political leadership. Not only will this require the Foreign Secretary to engage with a fundamentally changed role and make a clear public case for how their new department differs from their old, but will require changes to junior ministerial roles beyond their current cross-department working.

While junior ministers currently work across DFID and the FCO, their portfolios remain divided into issues for which the respective departments are responsible. The genuine blending of these departments will also require the blending of portfolios. One way of doing this would be to assign ministerial responsibility on the basis of the Government's international commitments, for example a Minister for Children & Youth responsible for the Government's commitment to girls' education, alongside child rights and the 'Children And Armed Conflict' agenda, radicalisation and youth unemployment, or a Minister for Human Rights, responsible for promoting media freedom, LGBTQ equality and disability inclusion and a Minister for the Climate and Environment, responsible for climate diplomacy including around COP26, protecting biodiversity and aid programmes aimed at mitigating the impact of climate change on the most vulnerable communities. Such portfolios would regroup issues that currently fall across departments into coherent groups to allow ministers to drive a clear agenda on which they can be committed campaigners and become experts. This approach would not necessarily preclude ministers also retaining geographic responsibilities alongside a thematic purview.

The nature of ODA, bound both by legislation and the OECD DAC rules, means there would be value in appointing a minister accountable for aid spending, with oversight of ODA across all

departments, accountable for ensuring adherence to legal and multilateral commitments and reporting to Parliament on them. Given the role of the National Security Council in overseeing all aid spending, it would be logical for this Minister to sit on the Council and attend Cabinet. They could also be the accountable minister for the UK's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals, and attending Cabinet would be valuable in driving this agenda across Government.

While the retention of two Permanent Secretaries would run counter to the intention to integrate the departments, it is important that the distribution of Director General roles, and the departments that sit below them, reflect the balance of the department's priorities, rather than sidelining development as a fringe issue. Retaining expert civil servants in Whitehall will require ensuring there are not distinctions of status between the staff of the former departments, and DFID's technical and thematic specialists are a key part of setting country or regional strategies.

### **Scrutiny & Transparency**

The success of the new department will be to a great extent down to public consent for its mission, and support for its objectives. Transparency is the key to building public and press confidence in the department's work, and independent and parliamentary scrutiny are essential to learning from mistakes to improve results.

One of the biggest changes between the FCDO and either of its predecessors is that it will be responsible for significant spending of both ODA and non-ODA budgets. This distinction increases the importance of transparency, to ensure that funds accounted as ODA are not used for ineligible purposes.

Country plans and thematic strategies will blend initiatives funded from across these budgets, so it will be important to learn from the experience of the cross-government funds in managing blended funding, but significant improvements will be required on the low levels of transparency that either the CSSF or the Prosperity Fund has achieved.

The Government's commitment to secure a 'Good' or 'Very Good' aid transparency rating for all UK ODA is overdue, but more important than ever, as the new department must embed DFID's highly commended transparency practices rather than operating at the FCO's level (while it is important to acknowledge the recent improvements made by that department).

Initiatives such as the Devtracker website should be rolled out across all UK ODA, and the department's default assumption should be to publish details of all its ODA-funded work. The Department should be responsible for administering the non-ODA contingency fund for crisis response currently controlled by the Treasury, so that it can deploy its expertise in humanitarian assistance even when it is not in an ODA-eligible country, and pay for it with its own non-ODA resources – such as in the case of responding to the 2017 hurricanes in the Caribbean.

The Foreign Secretary's commitment that he wants scrutiny to be enhanced rather than diminished by the merger is very welcome. To make this happen, parliamentary scrutiny of the new department will require new mechanisms. In practice it is not feasible for one departmental select committee to adequately cover the breadth of its work, for the practical reason of the need to travel as well as the need to have deep understanding across a wide range of complex issues. Given ODA will continue to be spent across various departments, there is value in the proposal that an ODA committee is set up, to which the Independent Commission on Aid Impact (ICAI) would report, on the same model as the relationship between the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office. This would allow the FCDO Committee to focus on the

UK's engagement with other states, but save it the added task of scrutinising all aid spending. UK aid is amongst the best scrutinised in the world, and the disestablishment of ICAI or the downgrading of select committee coverage of ODA would diminish that.