

Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP  
First Secretary of State and Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs  
Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office  
King Charles Street  
London  
SW1A 2AH  
United Kingdom

4 December 2020

Dear Secretary of State

We write to you as the four Presidents of the UK National Academies to emphasise the importance and value of funding for research and innovation activities through the UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget.

Any reduction in the levels of activity will directly harm the UK's ability to maintain its global position in terms of science and research. We realise that the economic outlook necessitates difficult decisions. However, we are extremely concerned that 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. We emphasise that the decisions you take now should not jeopardise the ODA-funded R&D programmes operating either within, or outside of, your department. To do so would risk compromising the impacts of these programmes and causing serious and lasting damage to relationships and reputation that will take years to rebuild.

UK-funded research and innovation has contributed to significant global advances, including a dramatic reduction of child deaths from malaria, eradication of the devastating livestock disease rinderpest, reduction of gender-based violence and building the case for climate action. These contributions demonstrate the critical role of research and innovation in supporting the objectives you laid out in your statement to the House last week and the need to ensure these activities continue to be funded.

Last week you outlined your priorities for ODA investment to tackle climate change, protect biodiversity, promote international health security, prioritise girls' education, and increase UK partnerships in science research and technology to help resolve conflicts, alleviating humanitarian crises, defending open societies and promoting trade and investment.

We support your ambition to address these areas and welcome the inclusion of partnerships in research and innovation as a key pillar of your approach. Investing in research and innovation represents value for money in building future capacity in research talent, catalysing networks and partnerships, and leveraging further research funding. Research and innovation will also be central to achieving your other objectives, through enhancing our understanding of the problems and the range of solutions; increasing research talent and through developing new innovations. Moreover, many existing research programmes across a range of Government departments are already supporting these objectives.

For example, research funded by the Department for International Development was vital to containing the West African Ebola outbreak. Funds overseen by the Department of Business,

Energy and Industrial Strategy such as the Global Challenges Research Fund and the Newton Fund have played a role in 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 virus.

Programmes in sub-Saharan Africa and across the Commonwealth have developed new networks which are beginning to deliver results in fields such as climate change and biodiversity protection. Meanwhile, the National Institute for Health Research's "Global Health Research Programme" have made major contributions to addressing health challenges such as mental health in South Asia. We have included further case studies in the attached Annex on the "Role of R&D in supporting ODA objectives".

We are concerned that any 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 would 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.

We strongly encourage you to reflect on the important role of R&D in achieving your objectives for ODA and urge you to ensure that the allocation process builds and strengthens the UK's reputation as a global research and innovation leader, through mechanisms such as the Global Challenges Research Fund and the Newton Fund. We would be happy to speak about this in more detail.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dame Anne Johnson PMedSci  
President, Academy of Medical Sciences



Professor Sir David Cannadine FBA  
President, British Academy



Professor Sir Jim McDonald FREng FRSE  
President, Royal Academy of Engineering



Sir Adrian Smith PRS  
President, Royal Society

Cc: Amanda Solloway MP, Minister for Science, Research and Innovation; Sir Patrick Vallance FRS FMedSci FRCP, GCSA; Professor Chris Whitty FMedSci, CMO; Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser DBE FRS, CEO UKRI