

The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Affairs
& Minister for Women and Equalities
Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
King Charles Street
London
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19 October 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

We write as the Presidents of the four UK National Academies to congratulate you on your appointment as Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Affairs and request a meeting with you. We would welcome the chance to discuss your plans and how we can support you to implement the Integrated Review and our ambitions to become a scientific superpower by 2030. We share your vision to strengthen our global position in research, unleash a new wave of innovation and revitalise our international ties.

We applaud these ambitions and are keen to work with you to realise it through the rest of this decade, including laying the foundations in the current spending review. 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.

The UK has comparative advantage in many areas of research, technology and innovation. This comparative advantage in research and innovation has helped the UK be a leader in providing robust evidence for development on the most pressing global development challenges. Maintaining these strengths through continued research and innovation ODA and non-ODA funding is key to ensuring that the UK remains best placed to deliver internationally.

The UK National Academies are well-placed to deliver a range of high-achieving instruments when it comes to international collaborations and partnerships. These include capacity building and knowledge systems strengthening, cutting-edge global development challenges research, and fostering new partnerships and collaborations with key partners in the Global South.

ODA investment we have delivered through the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) to build scientific capacity in South Africa has supported greater research and innovation activity and developed, attracted and retained skilled people who have chosen to undertake cutting-edge scientific research in that country. This scientific capacity both benefits the local economy and its citizens, but also ensured the rapid identification of the Beta COVID-19 variant within South Africa, informing responses around the world.

This is but one example of hundreds where the research and innovation community has spent years building and maintaining significant and deep international partnerships with research and innovation partners all over the world, enabled by UK government funding. The cliff-edge reduction in investment to ODA programmes this year, and last-minute nature of this communication, has damaged the UK's credibility and trustworthiness as it has forced us to break hard-won partnerships, especially where our international partners are also contributing financially and will be unable to proceed without the UK as a partner.

Ensuring the UK is a partner of choice should be a focus moving forward. The recent cuts have damaged that reputation with all our partners worldwide, not simply those in developing countries. An objective of building the UK as a research and innovation superpower by 2030 requires that the UK is an attractive partner for all our partners internationally and that funding for international research and innovation, including international development, is resourced fully, sustainably and with trust that it will be maintained and delivered by government.

To deliver on this, the 10-year vision of the Integrated Review should be matched by a similar long-term international research and innovation funding commitment, including for ODA research and innovation. If a research project is cancelled mid-way through it may not be able to deliver any of its intended benefit, so ensuring a reliable, multi-year funding stream is essential for these to support the realisation of the UK's policy goals. This is especially key to ensure that we are able to support genuinely equitable partnerships with our partners internationally.

We are keen to work with you to ensure our joint visions are realised – offering the experience and insights of our Fellowships, who together represent over 5,000 of the world's most distinguished researchers and innovators across the full range of disciplines in academia, industry, charities and the public sector.

We look forward to the chance to meet with you soon, to discuss how to release the potential of our whole system of research and innovation for the benefit of everyone – to tackle our biggest challenges and ensure we develop a Global Britain.


Yours sincerely,



Professor Dame Anne Johnson PMedSci,
President Academy of Medical Sciences



Professor Julia Black PBA,
President, The British Academy



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



Sir Adrian Smith PRS,
President, Royal Society

CC: George Freeman MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Science, Research and Innovation)