

## **House of Commons**

### **International Development Select Committee Definition and administration of ODA**

#### **Written evidence from the British Council**

**15 December 2017**

#### **Contents**

1. Summary
2. The British Council
3. UK's Proposed Changes to OECD/DAC rules on ODA
4. Administration of ODA by departments other than DFID

Annex 1 – British Council Strategy

## **1. SUMMARY**

1.1 The British Council manages ODA through its core grant-in-aid (via the Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and through contracts and partnerships with government, including with DFID, DCMS and BEIS.

1.2 We believe that the OECD rules on ODA are helpful but the understanding of them has changed significantly since they were developed. As they stand, they miss the valuable role that culture can play.

1.3 Sustainable development should be prioritised alongside poverty reduction in order to ensure that these rules align with the Sustainable Development Goals. This supports more long term poverty reduction.

1.4 We also believe that the rules should be more flexible in order for the UK and other countries to be able to target more poverty-stricken regions and communities in emerging economies. It should be noted that in a few years India and China will fall into the list of countries no longer eligible for ODA.

## **2. THE BRITISH COUNCIL**

2.1 The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries. We do this by making a positive contribution to the UK and the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust. This enhances the security, prosperity and influence of the UK and, in so doing, helps make the world a better, safer place.

2.2 The British Council's contribution to UK Official Development Assistance (ODA) is long-standing and has been formally recognised since the 1970s. The British Council manages ODA through its core grant-in-aid (via the Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and through contracts and partnerships with government, including with DFID, DCMS and BEIS.

2.3 Increasingly the core grant-in-aid is focused on ODA. In 2016/17 £119m out of a total grant of £158m is delivering ODA. By 2019/20 all our grant – £167m – will be delivering ODA. It is a critical source of funding for the British Council to deliver its cultural relations programmes, which result in developmental benefits in ODA countries and also support the UK's long term prosperity, security and influence globally.

## **3. UK'S PROPOSED CHANGES TO OECD/DAC RULES ON ODA**

3.1 The statutory duty for the UK Government to set its ODA amount to 0.7% of GNI ensures that there is a substantial sum available to spend in countries on the DAC list. This is welcome, and the UK's commitment to this has been cited by many as demonstrating the UK's leading role in international development, and therefore building the UK's soft power

and standing in the world<sup>1</sup>. It is therefore imperative that the UK Government ensures that this is being spent effectively and having the greatest impact possible.

3.2 The OECD rules are a helpful guide and have helped lead the way on global international development. However, our understanding of development assistance has changed significantly since these rules were first developed in 1969 and we believe that as they stand, they miss the valuable role that culture can play. ODA eligibility for cultural programmes as outlined in the OECD Statistical Reporting Directives (April 2017) are focused on capacity building benefits and do not reflect the critical role culture plays in supporting social and economic development and how arts and culture is used to address issues such as inequality and identity. Nor do the directives address the protection of cultural heritage or the use of inspirational and exceptional art to inspire a different view of the world – how as part of a structured programme, it can transform and promote positive social change.

3.3 We also think it is important to ensure that UK ODA expenditure looks to create sustainable development for the future and align with the definitions of development as stated in the Sustainable Development Goals. One of the effects of this would be to balance the focus on reducing poverty (SDG 1) with other development goals. Many of our programmes are aligned to the targets of the SDGs such as SDG 4 (Quality Education); SDG 5 (Gender Equality); SDG 10 (Reducing Inequalities); SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities); and SDG 16 (Peaceful Inclusive Societies and Institutions). These latter Sustainable Development Goals support the ultimate aim of poverty reduction. If through cultural and educational interventions, we are able to support prosperous and stable societies, this will lead to poverty reduction across the spectrum, and can also prevent fragile states from becoming more unstable or entering cycles of violence and increases in poverty such as has occurred in Libya and Syria.

3.4 This wider understanding of the way in which ODA is spent has been highlighted by a number of recent reports. Respublica concluded in its report 'Britain's Global Future: Harnessing the soft power capital of UK institutions'<sup>2</sup>, "opening access to higher education is not only a crucial driver of economic growth and the fight against poverty but is also included in the UN Sustainable Development Goals; while a strong civil society helps to promote national stability and prosperity, and protects human rights". The British Council All Party Parliamentary Group, in the report concluding its inquiry into 'Building Young People's Resilience to Violent Extremism in the Middle East and North Africa'<sup>3</sup> said "the main goal [when aiming to prevent violent extremism] should be to create safe, inclusive and prosperous societies, which do not foster violence. A key part of the UK's role in supporting MENA to build the resilience of its population lies in supporting populations through cultural and educational contributions".

3.5 We think that it is right for the UK Government to be considering the ability to direct ODA

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<sup>1</sup> House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power, *Persuasion and Power in the Modern World - Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence* <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201314/ldselect/ldsoftpower/150/15008.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Respublica, *Britain's Global Future: Harnessing the soft power capital of UK institutions* <http://www.respublica.org.uk/our-work/publications/britains-global-future-harnessing-soft-power-capital-uk-institutions/>

<sup>3</sup> British Council All Party Parliamentary Group, *Building Young People's Resilience to Violent Extremism in the Middle East and North Africa* <https://appg.britishcouncil.org/appg-inquiry-final-report>

to poverty-stricken regions and communities within middle income countries. In a financial environment where non-ODA funding is increasingly scarce, ODA funding is extremely important not only in fragile and developing countries but in the richer emerging economies, including India, China, South Africa, Mexico, Nigeria, Brazil. These are not only important countries for the UK, but emerging economies are home to five of the world's seven billion people and 73% of the world's poor<sup>4</sup>. In spite of high economic growth rates, they are characterised by high levels of inequality, above-average socio-political instability, high unemployment and greater dependence on the informal economy for jobs. This will become increasingly more important as India and China, currently DAC list members, are likely to move off the list within the next ten years. While the overall GNI of these countries will have grown significantly, we expect this growth to be unequal, and therefore a more targeted approach to development in these countries will be necessary.

3.6 We would also advocate caution in terms of the way in which the UK seeks to change these rules. The UK should not be seen to be trying to alter the rules in its favour, but simply seek to make evidence based changes that will improve the way in which international development aid is administered. In research by Ipsos Mori on behalf of the British Council, of young people in each of the G20 countries, only 42% of people thought that the UK Government contributes its fair share to aiding development in poorer countries<sup>5</sup>, despite the fact that the UK is one of the top international development donors globally. The UK should be aware of this perception of its impact in this area, and not undermine an already low perception through tackling this issue in a way that looks to be self-serving.

#### **4. ADMINISTRATION OF ODA BY DEPARTMENTS OTHER THAN DFID**

4.1 The British Council has always worked according to the principle of mutuality so that our ODA interventions benefit ODA countries (primary benefit) and the UK (secondary benefit). We have an excellent track record with regards to ODA funded programmes, across the full portfolio of sectors in which we work.

4.2 We use external evaluations to assess the impact of our programmes and those we deliver on behalf of others. Overall 92% of the evaluations conducted by DFID in 2016/17 were judged as Grade A or better. Our customer satisfaction score of 86% helps to demonstrate that a significant majority of our customers we work with agree or strongly agree that our programmes are of high quality.

4.3 The British Council focuses its ODA spending on those countries on the OECD DAC list and in line with the OECD Aid principles. We further prioritise our work in line with UK government and devolved administration strategies, including the 2015 Aid Strategy, strengthening global peace, security and governance; strengthening resilience and response to crises; and, promoting global prosperity. This broader focus enables the design of innovative programmes which support both primary developmental outcomes in ODA countries and secondary benefits for the UK to help build the UK's influence in the World over the longer term, to support UK's priorities for prosperity and security. Some examples of work include:

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<sup>4</sup> The World Bank, *Middle Income Countries Overview*. Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mic/overview>

<sup>5</sup> Ipsos MORI survey for the British Council. Sample of 19,010 participants from the 19 countries of the G20 aged 18–34 carried out 8 September – 16 October 2016. In British Council, *From the Outside In*, Available at: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/policy-insight-research/research/fromtheoutsidein>

#### **4.4 Prosperity and Development**

4.4.1 The second phase of our international schools programme, **Connecting Classrooms 2: building global awareness and cross-cultural learning among young people**, co-funded with DFID, ended in 2015. Rated A+ (exceeding expectations) in DFID's annual review process, the programme reached over 18,000 schools. Of those, over 70 per cent reported improvements in the teaching skills of their staff and 75 per cent reported enhanced global citizenship content in the curriculum and the development of a more global ethos across the school. The third phase of the programme in partnership with DFID, focussing on supporting the development of core skills and competencies amongst young people, is performing equally as strongly and due to complete in summer 2018. Discussions with DFID are currently underway regarding a successor programme running beyond 2018.

4.4.2 The British Council is a key partner in the **UK-India Education and Research Initiative (UKIERI)** that aims to enhance educational links between India and the UK. UKIERI has helped to create 1,000 UK-India partnerships in education and research that have the potential to deliver substantial, long term prosperity benefits for both countries. It has enabled 25,000 exchanges of academics, researchers, staff and students creating lifelong links between the UK and India. It has also benefitted 35 million young people who have been reached via train the trainer programmes.

4.4.3 We are one of the 15 UK delivery partners for the **Newton Fund**. This initiative builds research and innovation partnerships with 16 partner countries to support their economic development and social welfare, and to develop their research and innovation capacity for long-term sustainable growth. It has a total UK Government investment of £735 million up until 2021, with matched resources from the partner countries. The Newton Fund is managed by the UK Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), and delivered through 15 UK delivery partners, which include the Research Councils, the UK Academies, the British Council, Innovate UK and the Met Office.

4.4.4 The **Bihar Language Initiative for Secondary Schools (BLISS)** ran from 2012-2015 and was funded by DFID and the British Council and aimed to address the needs of the teacher educators, teachers, learners and the wider community in Bihar by providing access to high quality teaching and learning materials as well as increased awareness of the value of English for employability. A 2016 DFID commissioned external evaluation of their technical assistance education portfolio conducted in India reviewed BLISS and concluded that it had a first-rate monitoring and evaluation strategy. The report stated that "given the increasing importance accorded to learning achievement and the dearth of studies which unpack pedagogic processes, the BLISS approach is a potentially important exemplar for DFID's future education strategy".

4.4.5 The British Council has worked with over 2,200 teacher educators in 24 teacher training colleges in Burma to raise English proficiency and improve teaching methodology, through the **English for Education College Trainers (EfECT)** project, funded by DFID and the British Council. An external evaluation completed this year confirmed that it had met all of its targets to date. Of the teachers who were trained during the project's first year, 93 per cent improved their English proficiency, as measured by the British Council's Aptis test, and participants overwhelmingly rated their confidence in English as improved.

## 4.5 Security and Stability

4.5.1 The British Council's **Young Arab Voices** programme launched in October 2011 in response to the needs of young people in the wake of the uprisings in the MENA region. The programme leads youth-led debate and dialogue in CSOs, universities and schools to develop critical cognitive skills, challenging established and dangerous beliefs and gaining skills for self-directed and social action. Across MENA 90,000 people have participated in YAV so far; in Tunisia alone 720 debate clubs have been formed. A 2014 evaluation reported "Young Arab Voices is the only source of support in many cities across the region for debate training and debate activities. It is because of this support that debate opportunities exist at all".

4.5.2 Through our award winning **Pyoe Pin** project in Burma, funded by DFID and the Swedish International Development Agency, we support local organisations and individuals to act co-operatively in addressing the needs of the country's people. The project's first phase engaged over 8,000 individuals and 1,000 organisations, and over 185,000 individuals have directly benefited from the project.

4.5.3 Through **Justice for All (J4A)**, a DFID-funded programme, we are supporting people working to develop the justice and security sectors in Nigeria. This has led to the successful introduction of community-based policing through the establishment of over 70 modern police stations and the setting up of five centres for victims of sexual assault. We are also supporting policymakers to instigate justice sector reform across 21 of Nigeria's 36 states.

4.5.4 Our **Culture and Development** agenda draws on the strengths of UK Arts and Creativity sector and uniquely combines it with work in education, society and language. An external recently commissioned evaluation report summarised that the "programme has enabled human rights to be realised, including the promotion of diversity and freedom of expression, in a number of important ways. The programme supported projects which challenged accepted cultural norms, promoted and enabled freedom of expression and self-determination and encouraged participation from women, girls and other groups often under-represented in cultural and community activities."

4.5.5 As part of our Culture and Development work, we manage the **Cultural Protection Fund** in partnership with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. This £30 million fund supports efforts to keep cultural heritage sites and objects safe, as well as the recording, conservation and restoration of cultural heritage. Two round of grants have now been awarded to small and large recipients including: (In 2017) Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University, SOAS, Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation, University of Liverpool, The Virtual Experience Company, The British Institute at Ankara, WMF Britain, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, HYDEA, (in 2016) Turquoise Mountain Trust, University of Oxford, Durham University, The Friends of Basrah Museum, University of Manchester and Environmental Quality International.

4.5.6 We are working to mitigate some of the effects of refugee displacement by providing Syrian refugee children with better access to education in more inclusive, nurturing learning environments. Through our **Language for Resilience** learning and teaching programmes in

Jordan, the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey we have worked with over 120,000 Syrians and members of host communities since the start of the crisis. Evaluation reports indicate a clear change in perceptions of diversity from both teachers and students, with students fostering a greater sense of belonging and self-esteem through the strengthening of pluralistic identity in the classroom.

4.7 British Council ODA expenditure, as with all other ODA expenditure by the UK Government, is subject to strict scrutiny by ICAI. This body was established in order to fulfil independent analysis on whether expenditure is effectively meeting ODA objectives. In addition, the British Council, as a Non Departmental Public Body, is signed up to an international agreement to report aid expenditure according to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). This level of reporting enables the press, and more importantly public, to hold the British Council to account for the way in which it spends ODA.

4.8 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is the British Council's sponsor department, and as such scrutinises all British Council activity, including its ODA expenditure. As such, we are also accountable to the Foreign Affairs select committee in Parliament, and ensure that we submit evidence to all relevant select committee inquiries, including those led by the International Development select committee, to facilitate further transparency.

4.9 We believe that provided that ODA expenditure is scrutinised by ICAI all Government departments have the capability to ensure effective spending of ODA.

## ANNEX 1 – BRITISH COUNCIL STRATEGY

| Security and stability   |  | Prosperity and development                      |   | Influence and attraction                    |  |
|--|--|---|---|---|--|
| Voice and opportunity for young people                                 | Alternative pathways for young people at risk                            | Civil society and access to justice             | English, education, science and skills for growth | English as the world's preferred language   | Promoting UK education, culture and values           |
| English for peacekeeping   | Connecting with the next generation in Russia and neighbouring countries | Art for prosperity                              | Culture and development                           | Creating global networks and digital spaces | Supporting future global leaders                     |
| Changing lives and life chances through sport, creativity and the arts | Tackling the causes and effects of migration                             | Skills, confidence, chances for women and girls | Growing social enterprise and investment          | Connecting global cities: UK and overseas   | Sharing UK professional standards and qualifications |