

“A force for good”: principles and hallmarks of the new FCDO

In June 2020, the UK Government took the decision to merge the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to create a new department, the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The Secretary of State for International Development stated that the rationale behind the merger was to “*maximise our impact around the world, project our values and be a stronger force for good*” in the world.

The merger comes at a time of major global change – not just from the pandemic, but from shifting geo-politics and the impact of climate change. It presents opportunities for greater policy coherence across government and strategic action on issues that previously straddled the two departments such as human rights, civic space and protection of civilians in conflict. However, there is also a risk that the merger could undermine the UK’s reputation as a global leader on poverty reduction, sustainable development and humanitarian response.

This paper outlines 15 principles for the new department to ensure it makes the most of the opportunities, while mitigating the risks to the UK’s reputation and impact. It also outlines 15 key tests, or hallmarks, that we will use to track how the FCDO is delivering on these principles.

We want the FCDO to be an effective and impactful force for good for those that most need the UK’s support. To do that in a rapidly changing world the UK Government and FCDO must:

1. Deliver on its promises to the poorest and most marginalised and live its values through acting in a principled, consultative, accountable and effective manner. This will show the UK at its best and ensure that it has the greatest impact on the things that matter most.
2. To continue Britain’s positive global role and reputation on Official Development Assistance (ODA), it must lead by example and ensure that ALL UK aid is transparent, accountable and focused on poverty reduction

1. Deliver on the UK’s promises and live its values

To maintain the UK’s strong reputation on development and be a “force for good”, the FCDO must deliver on our existing commitments to the poorest and most marginalised, and live its values through acting in a strategic, principled, consultative, accountable and effective manner. This means:

1. Outlining a strong strategic direction
2. Delivering the Sustainable Development Goals in the UK and abroad
3. Working to ensure that we Leave No One Behind
4. Upholding and promoting key Humanitarian Principles
5. Enhancing policy coherence across UK government interventions
6. Protecting and promoting democracy, human rights and civic space
7. Promoting greater transparency and openness
8. Demonstrating continued leadership on safeguarding
9. Being consultative and inclusive through supporting meaningful stakeholder engagement
10. Retaining expertise and ensuring development is represented at the highest levels

| Principle | Hallmark |
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| <p>1. Strong strategic direction</p> <p>In order to realise gains from having unified objectives, the new department needs a clear and comprehensive strategy that builds on the strengths of the staff from both departments. The strategy should reflect the existing commitments – particularly the SDGs and the focus on people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships. It should also be forward looking so the new department is designed afresh to meet the global challenges we face and underpinned by a diverse staff and inclusive culture.</p> | <p><i>A published strategy that brings together the department goals into five or six clear priorities, that is the result of meaningful consultation with stakeholders in the UK and internationally. The strategy should, as a minimum, deliver the manifesto commitments on ODA and the SDGs.</i></p> |
| <p>2. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)</p> <p>The SDGs are a universal blueprint to deliver peace and prosperity for people and planet – a shared objective of the new department. The government must re-commit to delivering the SDGs both in the UK and abroad, with clear lines of responsibility, accountability and a plan for delivery. Decisions to allocate ODA must be backed by evidence of how it will contribute to the achievement of the SDGs and be reflected in ODA reporting mechanisms.</p> | <p><i>A dedicated sustainable development team is created and maintained within FCDO with the mandate and resources to support mainstreaming of the SDGs across the department.</i></p> |
| <p>3. Leave No One Behind</p> <p>The UK has committed itself to the principle of Leave No One Behind through its 2016 LNOB Promise. This requires a focus within the FCDO on supporting the poorest, most marginalised and excluded people. Existing good practice from DFID on gender equality, disability and inclusion should be retained and strengthened across the FCDO. There are also opportunities to do more on other inclusion areas, particularly mental health, age, faith, ethnicity, LGBT+ and child rights, by building existing strategies, policies and approaches.</p> | <p><i>FCDO adopts and strengthens existing DFID inclusion strategies, especially the Strategic Vision for Gender Equality, Strategy for Disability Inclusive Development and full implementation of the Data Disaggregation Action Plan, and creates dedicated teams on inclusive development, disability and gender equality with the mandate, expertise and resources to implement these strategies across the department.</i></p> |
| <p>4. Humanitarian principles and response</p> <p>To be a ‘force for good’, the UK government must demonstrate an unqualified commitment to International Humanitarian Law, humanitarian principles and the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship, and prioritise timely delivery of aid to frontline, life-saving efforts.</p> | <p><i>FCDO matches DFID’s ranking in global humanitarian indexes such as the ODI Principled Aid Index, accelerates progress towards the UK’s Grand Bargain commitments and increases the percentage of funding directly available to frontline responders, including NGOs.</i></p> |
| <p>5. Policy coherence across government</p> <p>All UK policies, especially trade and investment initiatives, must be aligned with SDGs and international standards and principles supporting sustainable economic development. Any future trade deals must be subject to parliamentary scrutiny, and trade and investment should not undermine human rights or efforts to tackle the climate crisis, poverty reduction and achievement of SDGs.</p> | <p><i>UK Government carries out impact assessments of all its policies ensuring that its international development efforts are not undermined. All trade deals are scrutinised by parliament and all UK trade and investment initiatives meet international labour standards and require compliance with UN guiding principles of business and human rights, UK Modern Slavery Act, SDGs and Paris Agreement Commitments.</i></p> |

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| <p>6. Democracy, human rights and civic space</p> <p>The FCDO must maintain the FCO’s and DFID’s commitment to democracy and human rights. The UK must uphold and contribute to the protection and promotion civil society space and associated rights and freedoms, particularly the right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly, and the right to freedom of expression. Our diplomatic efforts, both bilateral and multilateral, must complement this crucial task.</p> | <p><i>A single departmental strategy on civic space and the protection and promotion of associated rights and freedoms (freedom of expression, freedom of association and peaceful assembly) in relation to other foreign policy issues is developed and its implementation led by a senior official tasked with overseeing civic space issues.</i></p> |
| <p>7. Transparency and openness</p> <p>The UK must continue to exercise global leadership in transparency and the FCDO should adopt DFID’s Transparency Agenda, which includes commitments across open societies, open government, freedom of the press, extractives and natural resource transparency and open budgeting.</p> | <p><i>FCDO adopts the DFID transparency agenda and retains its membership of and continues to support the International Aid Transparency Initiative, Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, Open Government Partnership, Humanitarian Grand Bargain, Open Contracting, and Construction Sector Transparency Initiative.</i></p> |
| <p>8. Safeguarding</p> <p>The government must demonstrate its continued leadership on safeguarding and the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in the aid sector and deliver on the commitments made at the October 2018 Safeguarding Summit. Sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment are fundamentally about power imbalances and inequalities, and long-term commitment and culture change is needed to ensure recent progress is sustained leads to lasting systemic change.</p> | <p><i>FCDO retains a dedicated Safeguarding Unit focused on the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment; flagship initiatives, such as the Resource and Support Hub and the Interpol Project Soteria continue; and current safeguarding standards and funding levels are retained.</i></p> |
| <p>9. Consultation and engagement</p> <p>Government programmes and policies are most powerful when they are shaped by a diverse range of voices both in the UK and the countries in which they operate. For any foreign policy or development strategy or project, engagement with civil society is essential and stakeholders should be engaged in a meaningful, inclusive and deliberative manner, bringing in a diversity of voices and ideas.</p> | <p><i>Regular and structured engagement with international, national and local civil society takes place across all FCDO teams at a UK and country level. Meaningful, inclusive and timely consultation processes are established to enable external stakeholders to contribute to strategic policy and decision-making processes and high-level events, in line with the principles of the Compact agreed between successive governments and UK civil society.</i></p> |
| <p>10. Expertise and representation</p> <p>The expertise built up by DFID as a world leader in its field must be maintained, with a specific cadre of development and humanitarian experts and continued operation of DFID country offices supported by long term, evidence-based, country-specific strategies accountable to the communities they seek to serve. To ensure this expertise is utilised at the highest levels, there should be Cabinet level representation of international development and representation at the National Security Council– bringing an important perspective to a whole government approach.</p> | <p><i>A Chief Secretary for International Development who attends Cabinet and sits on the National Security Council, in addition to the Foreign Secretary. A central department that supports the delivery of long-term development priorities, alongside the existence of in-country strategies. An equal balance of FCO and DFID staff in the new department leadership team.</i></p> |

2. Lead by example on UK aid

The FCDO will set the agenda for UK aid and be by far the biggest spender of the UK’s ODA budget, fixed at 0.7% of GNI under UK law. To continue Britain’s positive global role and reputation, it must lead by example and ensure that all UK aid is transparent, accountable and focused on poverty reduction. This means:

1. Ensuring all aid spending is transparent and accountable to the UK taxpayer
2. Ensuring UK ODA is sufficient and focused on poverty reduction and sustainable development
3. Prioritising people living in Fragile and Conflict Affected States (FCAS)
4. Supporting action on climate and nature by aligning all ODA to the Paris Agreement
5. Providing opportunities and direct support for civil society in the Global South

| Principle | Hallmark |
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| <p>1. Accountability and transparency</p> <p>The FCDO and all UK ODA must be accountable to the British taxpayer, and to those it seeks to assist. Effective parliamentary scrutiny must be maintained and strengthened, with a new cross-government parliamentary committee able to examine all aid spend across Whitehall. The critical role of ICAI must be protected and strengthened to ensure value for money. Aid transparency is key to this. All UK ODA must be fully transparent and all departments that provide ODA must meet the UK’s commitments on aid transparency, promote the use of International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) open data with country government partners and civil society and continue to support partners and suppliers to match their own transparency by publishing open data using the IATI data standard.</p> | <p><i>Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) retained and a new cross-government parliamentary committee formed with a remit to examine all aid spend across Whitehall, and all UK aid spending departments, including the FCDO, achieve a standard of “good” or “very good” in the Aid Transparency Index by 2022.</i></p> |
| <p>2. Aid sufficient and focused on poverty</p> <p>The UK Government can be proud of its commitment to 0.7% of GNI and this must be upheld. With this comes substantial responsibility to ensure that the ODA budget is spent in line with its intended purpose in law, to promote poverty reduction and sustainable development. All UK ODA must have poverty reduction and sustainable development as its primary focus, adhering to the OECD Development Assistance Committee rules and complying with both the existing provisions under the International Development Acts and the Gender Equality Act.</p> | <p><i>The UK continues to provide at least 0.7% of GNI as Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) under the internationally-agreed definition and at least half of all ODA goes to Least Developed Countries.</i></p> |
| <p>3. Fragile and Conflict Affected States</p> <p>To meet the UK’s promise to Leave No One Behind will require programming in fragile and conflict affected states across the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus. These countries must remain a priority for UK ODA with 50% of the budget committed to those countries. The UK should seek to improve conflict sensitivity of aid in these contexts and efforts to support conflict prevention and address the root causes of conflict.</p> | <p><i>At least half of all ODA is spent in fragile and conflict affected states with an increase in the level of funding targeted at interventions that break cycles of conflict and violence through prevention and addressing root causes.</i></p> |

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| <p>4. Climate and nature</p> <p>Combining the diplomatic strengths of the FCO with DFID’s expertise in assisting those most vulnerable to its impacts, gives an opportunity to break the cycle of climate change and environmental degradation exacerbating poverty, and vice versa. This requires a re-prioritisation of sustainable development in UK ODA, placing social and environmental factors on a par with economic interests. No UK ODA should harm the environment or climate system as the lives and livelihoods, especially of the poorest and most vulnerable, depend upon them.</p> | <p><i>All UK ODA is aligned with the Paris Agreement and efforts to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C, and assessed against a sustainable development framework, with environmental impact assessments conducted for all spending.</i></p> |
| <p>5. Support for civil society in the Global South</p> <p>To get to long term sustainable outcomes and deliver value for money, the new department should further the process of shifting power and resources to civil society activists, organisations and movements in the global south who are rooted within local communities and networks. Ensuring that ODA-funded development programmes recognise, respect and build on local resources and assets, rather than overlooking, undermining or displacing them is essential and will build strong relationships for the UK, based on mutual respect.</p> | <p><i>At least 25% of humanitarian funding goes as directly as possible to local and national civil society organisations in line with our Grand Bargain Commitments and an increase in percentage of direct funding to civil society activists, organisations and movements in the Global South.</i></p> |