

CHI ONWURAH MP
Newcastle upon Tyne Central

24, 7-15 Pink Lane
Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 5DW
Tel: (0191) 232 5838
Email: chi.onwurah.mp@parliament.uk
Twitter: ChiOnwurah

Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng MP
Secretary of State
Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy
1 Victoria St
Westminster
London
SW1H 0ET

BY EMAIL: beiscorrespondence@beis.gov.uk

06 May 2021

Dear Kwasi,

ODA cuts and research funding

I am writing to set out my concerns on the impact on research funding of cuts to the foreign aid budget and the Official Development Assistance budget. My colleague, Matt Western MP, Shadow Minister for Universities, and I held a roundtable for university research leaders. They reported that major international, collaborative research projects now hang in the balance due to these cuts.

Following the Chancellor's decision to drop overseas aid spending from 0.7% to 0.5% of gross national income, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) has confirmed a reduction in the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget that will lead initially to a £120 million shortfall for this current year, 2021–22, impacting programmes such as the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and Newton Fund. These cuts fall heavily on UK universities, severely limiting their ability to combat pressing global challenges. The cuts also contradict the Government's stated commitment to science and R&D investment.

I give three examples of the immediate impacts of these cuts from our roundtable:

- At Warwick, a project to support remote consulting in doctors' surgeries across Sub-Saharan Africa (for the first time) has been halted just as it had begun to assess the effectiveness of the consultations.
- Newcastle University is one of the most exposed to the cuts with its two Global Challenge hubs on water sustainability and river deltas involving nearly 300 researchers at 90 partners across 24 low-middle income countries. They had budgeted for GCRF funding of £8.6m, this has been cut by a staggering £5.8m (67.4%).

- Coventry University reported they have lost three major projects already, on important issues like preventing conflict in countries like Afghanistan, Colombia and South Sudan. Other projects face crippling cuts.

The decision to cut the foreign aid budget has led to an unprecedented situation where the UKRI has been forced to *pull funding from already awarded grants* like the examples above. Universities themselves already match funding for these grants (usually around 30%) and are now trying to find ways to plug the gaps despite facing severe budget constraints. I am writing to you to ask if you have considered the following changes which were raised in our roundtable, and would at the very least mitigate the impacts on existing research projects:

- Reclassifying research spending within the UK as 'domestic' rather than ODA research, to allow UKRI to use alternative funds to meet a substantial proportion of the shortfall and allow universities to mitigate the cuts in funding to international partners.
- Removing the ODA target as a cap on spending to allow underspends accumulated during the Covid-19 pandemic to be carried forward.
- Deploying the ODA International Climate Fund to support relevant research in the UKRI ODA portfolio. This would mitigate the disproportionate reduction in the UKRI ODA budget which resulted from the instruction to protect the climate fund.
- A commitment to funding the £120million shortfall in 2021-22 for existing research projects caused by the Chancellors decision, preserving jobs in the U.K. and with our international partners.

Universities want to know what it is you will be doing to fund outstanding research projects hit by the foreign aid cuts. Britain's global reputation stands to be irreparably harmed if you do not act to stop this scientific vandalism.



Chi Onwurah
Labour MP for Newcastle upon Tyne Central
Shadow Minister for Digital, Science and Technology