

AE Statement on the recent UK Government decision to cut research funding for overseas collaborative research development projects.

To whom it may concern.

The Academia Europaea [The Academy of Europe] is the Pan-European Academy of over 4,500 eminent scholars drawn from the whole continent of Europe covering all disciplines and founded in 1988. Our registered head office is in London. The Academia Europaea seeks to address matters that relate to international scholarship and research excellence.

The UK has provided long-term support to development projects, through high-quality research funding of in-country institutions and capacity building through collaboration¹. This support has generated long-term benefits that impact on us all. We face critical global challenges - emerging threats to human health; the resilience of populations to the impacts of man-made climate change; food and natural resource sustainability. Ongoing support from developed countries, is essential for our collective futures.

We were therefore disappointed, to see the recent decision taken by the UK Government to abandon (even if temporarily) its commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on development aid (now down to 0.5% of GNI [Gross National Income]). For ongoing projects and new commitments for 2021-2022, some 120 million Pounds Sterling from the Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) research for development budget has been removed, amounting to almost half of the ODA funding for research and development. Cuts in ODA expenditure have fallen disproportionately on this sector.

The planned reduction will terminate existing and future research projects. This runs counter to the government's stated commitment to increase investment in R&D to position the UK as a scientific superpower. It makes little sense given the contribution that UK scientists [funded through ODA-funded projects] have made towards supporting the country through the current Covid-19 pandemic. This is similar to the views expressed in the BMJ.²

The money at the centre of this particular decision though a large sum in itself, is relatively small if set against the vast sums the UK has spent on the current pandemic. We are concerned that the negative consequences resulting from the loss of this funding could have significant impacts given the target countries for these projects. These include: an immediate loss of jobs for younger researchers (both in the UK and recipient countries); disruption of fragile research infrastructures in developing countries, jeopardising research data and knowledge that will feed into solutions to these global issues which are to the benefit of us all.

The Academia Europaea therefore asks the UK Government to urgently reconsider this ill-conceived decision.



ACADEMIA EUROPAEA

Room 251, Senate House
University of London
Malet Street
London WC1E 7HU
Tel: +44 (0) 207 862 5784
execsec@acadeuro.org
www.ae-info.org

President:
Professor Sierd Cloetingh
Registered at Companies
House: 7028223
Registered in England
as a not-for-profit charity:
1133902

¹ The UK historically has been one of the largest national providers of ODA funds in the world. It enshrined in law in 2015 a commitment to provide 0.7% of GNI in ODA - and was one of only five countries in the world to meet this target in 2019 (the other countries being Denmark, Luxembourg, Norway and Sweden.

² <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Pages/cuts-oda-limit-uk-universities-role-solving-global-challenges.aspx>