

DFID-FCO merger: Talking points

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has announced (16 June) that the Department for International Development (DFID) will be merged with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) from September. RESULTS UK believes this decision is wrong and that it will undermine the effectiveness of UK aid spending and its focus on helping the world's poorest and most marginalised people.

If you have already booked a virtual meeting with your MP, or if you hope to do so, on the topic of the June grassroots campaign action (the Global Fund's COVID-19 Response Mechanism), these talking points should help you raise this merger as an additional issue of concern, should you choose to do so.

'EPIC' Pitch – What can you say to your MP in 5 minutes?

Engage audience: Did you know that UK aid is currently helping countries with weak health systems fight COVID-19 and other deadly infectious diseases? Helping mothers in poor communities give birth safely? Training teachers and enabling millions to get a quality education? Our constituency alone has helped save XXX amount of lives (use ONE's ['From Your Town with Love'](#) tool to calculate the lives saved by your area's financial contribution to UK aid, through its taxes). Choose a UK Aid example that speaks to you, or one you know your MP cares about.

Problem statement: The PM is merging the FCO and DFID, but aid and foreign policy are not the same thing. This merger risks the quality and transparency of UK aid, and moves the focus away from poverty reduction. Well spent aid is especially important right now, given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and a predicted global recession.

Inform on solution: Retaining separate departments is the best way to keep UK aid focused and effective. As a minimum though, aid should only be spent on reducing poverty. Aid and development should have a Cabinet-level Minister who champions poverty reduction and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Aid spending should also be scrutinised by its own Parliamentary Committee, separately from foreign policy.

Call to Action – Please represent my views as a constituent by signing this [Early Day Motion](#) opposing the merger / Thank you for your support of this Early Day Motion opposing the merger – cross party support for aid is vital at this time. I will write to you soon with specific requests I'd like you to pass on to the Prime Minister.

Key messages

- The DFID/FCO merger is wrong and will not serve the interests of the world's poorest and most marginalised people. The new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) will have a [dual mandate](#) to look after the UK's national interest and international development, so the [focus of UK aid on poverty reduction](#) will be reduced.
- Aid spending is also likely to become less effective. The FCO has a much [poorer track record](#) of spending aid transparently or effectively, whereas DFID is rated highly for its transparency, effectiveness, expertise and global leadership.
- The Prime Minister's re-commitment to spending 0.7% of the UK's national income on aid must be backed up by action. A high rating for transparency and effectiveness should be achieved by all Government departments that spend UK aid money.
- UK aid must be focused firmly on poverty reduction. With a likely recession caused by COVID-19, a reduction in the size of the UK aid budget is [widely predicted](#). This makes it more essential than ever that the UK aid budget is firmly focused on where it can have the most impact.
- To ensure the UK public is reassured that UK aid is spent as well as it can be, [effective Parliamentary scrutiny](#) is essential. The excellent work of the Parliament's International Development Committee (IDC) and the Independent Commission on Aid Impact (ICAI) must continue in some way (as the IDC is likely to be scrapped in its current form). A single Foreign Affairs Select Committee will not be adequate to review aid spending in depth.
- Cabinet-level responsibility for aid spending is likewise essential. With his broad remit for foreign affairs and diplomacy in the national interest, the Foreign Secretary alone will not be able to perform this task, and a Cabinet Minister with a sole focus on international development is needed to ensure the focus of UK aid on poverty reduction and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.
- At a minimum, all Government aid spending must meet the internationally agreed definition of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) and it is not acceptable to spend UK aid on security or the national interest. In other countries where there have been similar mergers between the Government's foreign affairs and aid functions, such as Australia and Canada, there have been concerns around the ability of the development agency to keep a sufficient focus on poverty alleviation.

Note that the July monthly campaign action will be to write to your MP asking them to take action on the topic, so if by then you have already discussed this with them, you could use the July materials (which we will email to you soon) to write a follow-up letter, thanking them for meeting you, and asking them to write to the Prime Minister about your concerns.