

Corporate Strategy

2015/16 - 2018/19

April 2016

The **Independent Commission for Aid Impact** works to improve the quality of UK development assistance through robust, independent scrutiny. We provide assurance to the UK taxpayer by conducting independent reviews of the effectiveness and value for money of UK aid.

We operate independently of government, reporting to Parliament, and our mandate covers all UK official development assistance.



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Foreword

The previous year has been important for international development. As the Millennium Development Goals drew to a close, the UN agreed the Global Goals that provided a roadmap through to 2030. In the UK, the International Development (Official Development Assistance (ODA) Target) Act committed the Government to spending 0.7% of gross national income on ODA. These changes reinforced the strong, enduring need for accountability to Parliament for how the UK government uses public funds to deliver its aid programme.

Our independent scrutiny provides Parliament and the UK public with assurance that the UK aid programme is making a real difference. It contributes to the annual independent evaluation of UK ODA spend that the Secretary of State for International Development is required by statute to make.

Our paper 'UK aid in a changing world: implications for ICAI' set out some of our thinking on the challenges ahead for the government, and for us, including a shift towards a greater proportion of ODA funds being spent by other government departments and cross-government funds. It has guided our strategic programme choices as to which themes and issues to prioritise. We will be flexible and will align our reviews with the shifts in government policy and spend to remain relevant to Parliament and to the public.

Our corporate plan sets out why and how we are reshaping ICAI. We have engaged with the International Development Committee, the Department for International Development and with our stakeholders to develop our plans and welcome their contributions to our evolved design.

We have increased our capacity and our capability in order to deliver the programme and to develop our approaches. As the aid budget grows, we will continue to adapt to meet the scrutiny challenge.

Ann 5mm

Dr Alison Evans Chief Commissioner



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) was established in 2011 to scrutinise Official Development Assistance (ODA) expenditure on behalf of the UK taxpayer, by examining whether UK aid is delivering value for money.
- 1.2 Over the four years from 2011/12 to 2014/15, we produced 46 reports examining different aspects of the UK aid programme. This was a critical period for UK aid, which grew by nearly 40% over the life of the last parliament. We paid close attention to the Department for International Development's (DFID's) systems and business processes, to ensure they delivered effectively and were value for money.
- 1.3 We also examined inter-departmental delivery mechanisms, including the Conflict Pool and the International Climate Fund. Across programme, sector and thematic reviews, we used a standard Assessment Framework that emphasised good practice throughout the programme cycle.
- 1.4 Over the course of these reviews, we built up a body of knowledge that enabled us to draw connections between DFID's organisational capacity and the effectiveness of its programmes.
- 1.5 Over the coming years, we will build on this work with reviews that continue to probe the quality of DFID's programming and its fitness for purpose as a department, while also considering how the UK aid programme is responding to new challenges.
- 1.6 It is important that ICAI's independent scrutiny remains relevant and robust. We will continue to provide Parliament and the public with the assurance that UK aid is reaching those it is intended to help and achieving genuine impact and value for money. At the same time, we will need to take on board the fact that aid is increasingly being packaged with other forms of development cooperation to achieve sustainable impact. We will need to pay close attention to the way DFID uses its resources to leverage other development finance and how it operates as a development partner, at both the global and country levels. We will also need to examine how DFID and other spending departments work together in response to fast moving humanitarian and development challenges.
- 1.7 With other government departments playing an increasingly important role in spending ODA, ICAI will play a more prominent scrutiny role across government. According to the 2015 law that prescribed the 0.7% ODA target, the Secretary of State must 'make arrangements for the independent evaluation of the extent to which ODA provided by the UK represents value for money in relation to the purposes for which it is provided.' Likewise, the Aid Strategy commits the government to 'sharpen oversight and monitoring' of ODA and makes it clear that ICAI has a remit to review all aid, irrespective of spending department.
- 1.8 We have consulted with the government, the International Development Committee and other stakeholders to develop our approach and how we should address the challenges that the future holds. This plan sets out our future approach and the resources that we have available to deliver our work.

2. Who we are and what we do

- 2.1 ICAI's independent scrutiny role is vital to the UK aid programme. We provide Parliament and the public with the assurance that UK aid is achieving genuine impact and value for money.
- 2.2 We provide oversight of how DFID and other government departments spend UK aid. We do this by undertaking independent reviews of UK aid spending and its contribution to development results.
- 2.3 We operate independently of government and report to the International Development Committee of the UK Parliament, chaired by Stephen Twigg MP through its sub-committee, chaired by Fiona Bruce MP.
- 2.4 Our work is led by a board of commissioners, headed by the Chief Commissioner, Dr Alison Evans, appointed by the Secretary of State for International Development. The commissioners are: Francesca Del Mese, Richard Gledhill and Tina Fahm.
- 2.5 ICAI is an Advisory Non-Departmental Public Body.

Our vision

- 2.6 Our vision is to improve the impact and value for money of UK aid through robust, independent scrutiny.
- 2.7 We will deliver this vision by probing the quality, impact and value for money of different types of programming and the instruments and channels through which aid is spent.

Our objectives

2.8 The commissioners have established a set of objectives which will underpin our vision and are guided by the findings of the 2013 <u>Triennial Review of ICAI</u> (see 5.2). The objectives are impact, accountability and learning, as well as our drive to be an efficient organisation with good governance.

Impact: Our work makes a positive difference to the impact and value for money of UK aid.

Effective accountability: We support Parliament to hold government to account by producing a credible body of independent evidence on the effectiveness of UK aid.

Effective learning: We contribute effectively to learning and to the wider aid debate, with government and with other development stakeholders.

Efficiency: ICAI operates efficiently and with good governance.

3. Our approach

- 3.1 We aim to improve the quality, impact and value for money of UK aid programmes, ensuring aid is targeted at those who need it most and providing assurance to UK tax payers that it is being spent efficiently and effectively. We recognise that many factors will influence this desired impact. In broad terms, we undertake two main areas of activity to deliver against our overall aim:
 - Formal accountability: we produce independent and robust reports to scrutinise UK
 aid. These reports trigger a formal accountability mechanism designed to bring about
 improvements in UK aid where needed. The UK government is required to respond
 formally to ICAI recommendations. The IDC plays a crucial role, and we have a core
 aim to build a credible body of evidence to support the Committee in holding
 government to account.
 - **Engagement with stakeholders**¹: we recognise that many aid evaluation products remain "on the shelf" after they are produced. To be fully effective, we need to be engaging proactively with our different stakeholder groups to share and discuss our findings. Through engagement, we will increase the transparency of UK aid and contribute more broadly to learning around what is and is not effective about UK aid.
- 3.2 Achieving our long-term vision requires reinforcing action by multiple actors: the IDC, the UK government, development stakeholders and the wider public. Achieving positive and effective change requires systematic uptake of our evidence-driven recommendations by UK government.

Our methodology

- 3.3 Our review programme will be both strategic in orientation and flexible in the approaches and methods it employs. Previously, ICAI used a standard assessment framework that emphasised good practice through the programme cycle. We are introducing more variety into our reviews to reflect the dynamic context of development.
- 3.4 We will undertake three different types of review, each with a distinctive approach:
 - Impact reviews will involve a thorough assessment of what underlies DFID's results claims and the significance of its development impact. They will include a strong focus on evidence of results and the quality of the systems that DFID uses to capture that evidence.
 - **Performance reviews** will take a robust look at the effectiveness and value for money of aid programmes, with a strong focus on accountability. They will also explore the adequacy of DFID's systems, processes and capacity, exploring how these are linked to patterns of performance in different sectors and areas.

¹ Key stakeholders include the International Development Committee, other parliamentarians and politicians, DFID, other government departments, the National Audit Office, the public, journalists, academics and the international development community.

- Learning reviews will explore new and emerging areas of the aid programme to capture emerging learning and inform future decision-making. They will pay particular attention to how well DFID generates and shares knowledge on how to tackle new challenges. While part of the independent scrutiny process, these reviews will involve close interaction with DFID to promote the uptake of lessons learned.
- 3.5 Rather than using a standard review framework, we will formulate review questions that are appropriate to the subject matter and type of review, drawing on the OECD Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) evaluation criteria. We will pay close attention to the use of evidence across all three types of review, from DFID's investments in research and knowledge generation through to the way evidence is used to inform programme design and the quality of monitoring, evaluation and learning.
- 3.6 We see our primary role as probing the evidence base behind DFID's programming choices, rather than generating our own evidence. We will use a range of review techniques to do this, with a focus on triangulating across different sources. The beneficiary perspective will remain an essential part of ICAI's approach, although we will be primarily concerned with scrutinising how well DFID takes account of the voices and viewpoints of beneficiaries in all aspects of its work.
- 3.7 Our Approach Papers will be published early in the review cycle, so that stakeholders can form their own judgements on the weight of evidence behind our findings. We will also increase our level of engagement with government and other stakeholders during the scoping, conduct and follow-up to our reviews, to maximise the uptake of our findings.
- 3.8 To ensure that our review programme addresses the most pressing issues, we have identified a set of five strategic themes to guide our selection:
 - **Inclusive growth**, including economic development, support for the private sector, economic infrastructure and the increasing role of capital investment in the aid budget.
 - **Leaving no-one behind**, including the remaining MDG agenda on basic services, social safety nets and the new Global Goals commitments on meeting the basic needs of the poorest.
 - Crisis, resilience and stability, covering areas such as humanitarian emergencies, protracted crises, post-conflict stabilisation and building resilience, including through adaptation to climate change.
 - Transparency, accountability and empowerment, including good governance, political participation, fighting corruption, empowering women and promoting human rights.

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² These criteria are relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. See the <u>OECD website</u> for the meaning of these terms in evaluation practice.

- **Beyond aid**, including other forms of development cooperation on issues such as trade, migration, economic development and taxation.
- 3.9 We will build up a body of evidence about the UK's development contribution across these areas. We will examine how well DFID and other spending departments perform in core operational areas, including programme delivery, risk and financial management, use of evidence, gender equality, partnerships and cross-government working. We will also continue to engage actively with Parliament, DFID and a wide range of stakeholders, and ensure that our reports are accessible to the public, so as to promote wider understanding of the nature and achievements of UK development assistance.
- 3.10 Our paper, 'UK aid in a changing world: implications for ICAI' provides greater detail on our methodology and the dynamic context within which we work.

4. Our Consultation and 2015/16 Workplan

- 4.1 Over the summer of 2015, we carried out a series of public consultations to inform the development of our future review programme. We received 11 written submissions from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and private individuals. We held meetings with the Chair of the IDC, senior stakeholders, and representatives from the CSO and private sectors. We also conducted a number of meetings with DFID at senior, centre and country levels. We are grateful for their interest and time, and offer thanks for their contributions.
- 4.2 Our consultation demonstrated that there is support for our approach. It became clear during discussions with stakeholders that there was a need to add the strategic theme of inclusive growth, which had previously been included in the beyond aid theme. As a result we increased the number of strategic themes to five.
- 4.3 We noted during the consultation that there were recurring areas of interest in both written submissions and in discussion. These were:
 - The need for a close oversight of the 'inclusive growth' agenda, with particular focus on inclusivity
 - Reviews of what the UK is doing on transparency, accountability and empowerment
 - Payment by results and the value for money agenda were particular areas of concern across both NGOs and the private sector
 - Cross-government coordination on humanitarian, conflict and climate change
 - The processes used by DFID and other government departments on programme delivery, monitoring and evaluation, with a focus on the importance of longer programme cycles and greater flexibility
 - A continuing interest in traditional human development and poverty reduction topics, including education, health, agriculture, water and sanitation
- 4.4 These suggestions have been reflected in ICAI's themes and core issues, and will be explored through our work programme.
- 4.5 Our consultation response is available in the annex.

Our workplan

- 4.6 ICAI has a rolling review programme which is approved by the IDC. ICAI reviews cover a broad cross-section of UK development programmes and we choose our review topics on the basis of four selection criteria:
 - The relevance of the topic to new and emerging challenges for the UK aid programme or interest to stakeholders
 - The materiality of the topic in terms of scale of expenditure
 - The level of risk associated with the expenditure
 - The contribution of the review to ICAI's coverage of the UK aid programme

4.7 To ensure that ICAI remains agile and responsive to the aid landscape, we will publish a 12 month review work plan by ICAI year (July-June). Our workplan for 2015/16 is detailed in the table below.

Strategic theme	Reviews and reports	
Leaving no one behind	Assessing UK Aid's Results in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH).	
Crises, resilience and stability	Achieving impact and value for money in conflict affected states: Fiduciary risk	
Transparency, accountability and empowerment	DFID's efforts to eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls	
Beyond aid	UK aid's contribution to tackling tax avoidance and evasion	
Non-thematic ICAI products	UK aid in a changing world: implications for ICAI Information note to the IDC on DFID's Allocation processes Follow up review 2015 and ODA mapping (part of Annual Report)	

- 4.8 We will separately publish our workplans for 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19 prior to commencement of each new ICAI year (July), ensuring we include a flexible review space to respond to changing events.
- 4.9 All reviews will consider some core issues and we will investigate these as appropriate:
 - Approaches to financial and risk management
 - Approaches to programme delivery
 - Cross-government working
 - Working with and through partners
 - Gender and inequality
 - The quality of evidence and its use in enhancing development impact

5. Our success indicators

- 5.1 We have developed a Performance Framework against which we will measure our success. We believe that performance management will give:
 - Clarity to our objectives: everyone involved with ICAI will be clear about what we are aiming to achieve and the balance between different objectives
 - More transparency and accountability: we will be able to be more transparent about our performance to Parliament and to the taxpayer
 - Assurance to the Secretary of State for International Development: measuring our performance proactively will provide assurance to the Secretary of State that we are fulfilling our duties
- 5.2 The 2013 <u>Triennial Review of ICAI</u> slightly revised, and set out our mandate. Our performance will be measured, in part, against that mandate. The review states that ICAI should:
 - Carry out a small number of independent in-depth thematic reviews addressing strategic development issues faced by the UK government's development programmes, combined with additional short reviews (where needed) to address specific issues of interest/concern to key stakeholders.
 - Produce high quality and professionally credible reports which are independent of the UK government and provide evidence and analysis of the impact and value for money of the government's development programmes.
 - Support Parliament in its role of holding the UK government to account.
 - Make information on the UK government's development programme available to the public, based on its analyses.
- 5.3 As a scrutiny body, we believe that it is important that we are accountable for our management and efficiency. We have set additional performance indicators which will rate our organisational effectiveness.
- 5.4 We will regularly monitor progress against the delivery of our objectives. In each Annual Report, we will report on our performance against the indicators. The Annual Report is scrutinised by the IDC which will hold us to account. Should we make any amendments to our objectives or our indicators, we will do so transparently.

Organisational objectives & indicators

5.5 In 2015/16, we intend to create a baseline which will allow us to set targets for subsequent years. The following table sets out our organisational objectives and indicators.

Objectives	Key Performance Indicators	Measurement Criteria
Impact ICAI's work makes a positive difference to the impact and value for money of UK aid.	Proportion of ICAI recommendations taken on board	Measured through our follow up process yearly
Effective accountability ICAI supports Parliament to hold government to account by producing a credible body of independent evidence on the effectiveness of UK aid.	Select Committee satisfaction with our work overall, and with our i) relevance to challenges for UK aid ii) quality of evidence base produced and iii) independence of operations and reviews	Measured through feedback from committee members and clerks
	Publish 6-8 reviews a year, accompanied by approach papers to explain methodological approach	Measured through number of reports published
Effective learning ICAI contributes effectively to learning and the wider aid debate, with government and other development stakeholders	Broaden and increase our engagement with stakeholders to maximise impact	Measured through number of events held every six months, and number of followers on ICAI Twitter every two months
	Number of times reviews are read	Measured by website views after each review
	Number of times reviews are mentioned in media or social media	Measured by media mentions up to two months after review publication and number of mentions on Twitter every two months
Efficiency ICAI operates efficiently and with good governance	Expand our range of products, as set out in this strategy, to reflect the dynamic context of development	Measured by production of different styles of review
	Manage our reviews within overall budget	Measured by meeting our overall budget for the four year period of the current Commission

Long term success

5.6 In the long term, ICAI will judge its success through an external validation processes which we undertake. We will also look for evidence our vision has been achieved through examples of positive changes to UK aid as a result of our contribution.

6. Our resources

Our people

- 6.1 Our people are vital to achieving our vision and are our most important resource. We are committed to developing staff and being an inclusive employer.
- 6.2 The ICAI Secretariat is responsible for review oversight, engagement, business and programme management. Our Secretariat comprises nine members of staff on loan from other government departments or on fixed term contracts.
- 6.3 In 2015, we appointed a service provider to carry out work on our behalf. This work is led by Agulhas Applied Knowledge, a specialist international development consultancy. Agulhas is joined by Integrity, a development consultancy which specialises in working in complex environments, and by Ecorys, an international company providing research, consultancy and management services.

Our resource requirements

6.4 We have secured over £13m from DFID to undertake reviews for the period from July 2015 to June 2019, which covers the four year period of the tenure of current Commissioners. We are reviewing our budget allocation with DFID in light of the work we have and continue to do to adapt our products so that they take account of shifts in government policy and spend, and so that we remain relevant to Parliament and the public.

7. Risks

7.1 As with any corporate strategy there are risks to ICAI's approach which could impact our ability to achieve our objectives. The following table sets out some of the high level risks to our corporate strategy, and the actions we are taking to mitigate or reduce these risks.

Risk	Risk level		Mitigating action	Revised risk level	
	Likelihood	Impact		Likelihood	Impact
Lack of available evidence leads to uninfluential reviews	Medium	High	ICAI publishes and is transparent about its review selection criteria ICAI publishes and is transparent about the methodological approach for its reviews ICAI publishes and is transparent about its scoring approach and the scores it provides for its review questions ICAI implements Quality Assurance processes throughout the review cycle	Low	High
Realigning ICAI to the new Aid Strategy results in our resources being overly stretched	Medium	Medium	ICAI will incorporate reviews on OGDs and cross-government funds within the existing resource envelope and proportionately to the distribution of ODA across government ICAI will seek to review its budget allocation	Medium	Medium
Lack of uptake of report findings results in low impact	Medium	High	ICAI will produce engagement plans for each review, focusing on key areas of learning ICAI reports will continue to require a management response and an IDC hearing, assuring dissemination of findings and accountability	Low	Medium

Annex - Consultation response

The consultation

In July 2015, ICAI launched a consultation, 'Independent Commission for Aid Impact Workplan Consultation'. It sought views on two issues: the themes and core issues which we proposed to use to decide the workplan, and the specific lines of inquiry that should be undertaken.

The consultation closed on 21 September 2015. ICAI received eleven submissions from a range of organisations and individuals. Commissioners also held a number of roundtable discussions in London. Chapter two of this document summarises the views of respondents to the consultation.

We are grateful to everyone who responded to, or participated in the consultation process. A list of respondent organisations is set out in Annex A.

Next steps

This document sets out our response to the consultation.

ICAI is committed to engaging with stakeholders and the public to ensure that our work plan is both relevant and strategic. The responses have led to an amendment to our themes and contributed to the workplan. We plan to use the responses to inform our future reviews as part of a rolling workplan.

While the consultation has ended, we welcome proposals for future studies.

Summary of responses

The consultation sought views on our approach and proposals for future study. This section provides a summary of the key points made by participants and provides our response.

Question 1: Have we identified the right themes and core issues?

Some respondents questioned whether inclusive growth, which initially sat under the theme 'beyond aid' should become a theme in its own right given the priority that the government is giving to economic development and prosperity.

The vast majority of respondents agreed that the core issues were useful for the assessment of UK aid. There were some suggestions of additional issues that should be addressed including issues around allocative choice; DFID's own evidence and evaluative systems; and comparisons with other international actors.

Our response

We recognise that inclusive growth is a priority area for DFID and for cross-government initiatives. This has been demonstrated in the government's Aid Strategy, the Strategic Defence and Security Review and the Comprehensive Spending Review. Given the importance and spend on inclusive growth, we have made it an additional theme.

In our paper, <u>UK aid in a changing world: implications for ICAI</u>, we give more detail on the core issues which address some of the additional points made by respondents. We are focused on UK aid spend and therefore we will not make comparisons with other international actors.

Question 2: Where should ICAI focus its attention over the coming years?

In both written submissions and in discussions, our stakeholders identified many of the issues that face UK aid in today's dynamic context as being areas for ICAI's attention.

There were recurring issues that were identified across the consultation. These were:

- The need for close oversight of the Inclusive Growth agenda, with particular focus on inclusivity
- Reviews of what the UK is doing on transparency, accountability and empowerment
- Payment by results and the value for money agenda were particular areas of concern across both NGOs and the private sector
- Cross-government coordination on humanitarian, conflict and climate change
- The processes used by DFID and other departments on programme delivery, monitoring and evaluation, with a focus on the importance of longer programme cycles and greater flexibility
- A continuing interest in traditional human development and poverty reduction topics, including education, health, agriculture, water and sanitation
- UK Aid's role in fragile and conflict affected states

Other common areas of suggested focus included: the effectiveness of climate change programmes and diplomacy; tax avoidance; graduation; DFID's choice of delivery partners; allocative choice; policy coherence; use of evidence; the use of development capital; and disability in development.

Our response

We have considered the areas of focus suggested by our stakeholders and taken into account the government's new Aid Strategy, Strategic Defence and Security Review and Comprehensive Spending Review. As a result of this analysis, we identified a number of areas for study. Our 2015/16 work programme inculdes looking at violence against women and girls, WASH programming, tax avoidance; and fiduciary risk.

Our intention is to conduct a rolling programme of reviews that are relevant and strategic. The submissions made to the consultation and the suggestions made at roundtables will continue to contribute to our thinking and plans. We will continue to engage with our stakeholders as we form our programme and to test our thinking.

The consultation has been a useful exercise that has helped to shape our 2015/16 workplan. The responses that have been submitted will continue to inform our future rolling plan.

List of respondents

The commissioners are grateful to all of those who took the time to respond in writing to this consultation.

ADD International

BOND

BOND Development and Environment Group

BOND Private Sector working group

CAFOD

Conscience

Health Poverty Action

International Alert

International Institute for Environment and Development

UK Aid Network

We also received two responses from individual respondents.



This document can be downloaded from www.icai.independent.gov.uk
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