

# **ICAI Annual Report 2021-2022**

Report to Parliament's International  
Development Committee

**July 2022**

**The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI)** 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 the government, reporting to Parliament, and our mandate covers all UK official development assistance.



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# Foreword

This report looks back at the third year of this four-year commission. We have continued to face considerable challenges in our operating environment but are finally able to work more normally. The year was affected by continued pandemic-related restrictions, but it was excellent to be able to start resuming country visits partly in person from October 2021. (Thanks to the Government of Sierra Leone and other interlocutors who patiently passed round a phone to enable hybrid interviews!). It is vital to ICAI's understanding of what happens at ground level that we go ourselves to conduct at least some of our research and interviews in person.

We have also continued to face challenges since the merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development, even once new structures and processes were established. A fundamental issue now is that our sponsor department is much larger, with many urgent priorities and has a different culture of information security. This has led to long delays in access to information in some cases, such as our country portfolio review of Afghanistan. The challenges of recruitment of staff to the ICAI Secretariat via Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) systems have also hampered our work. We have had to carry vacancies for long periods and currently have only half of our review team in place.

At the time of writing there is just one year left of the four years of this commission. On top of the delays caused by the factors mentioned above, there have also been last-minute proposals from FCDO to set an annual budget limit for the 2022-23 financial year. This came in May, long after our workplan up to the end of the commission was agreed with the International Development Committee. It would mean that many of our planned reports could be pushed to the last quarter of the commission or even beyond. The workplan contains 17 reports to be published between now and July 2023, including many of great public interest, for instance on transparency, aid for trade and aid for refugees in the UK.

Once again many thanks to my fellow commissioners, the hard-working secretariat team and to all those who have collaborated so well with us, including those in government who recognise the importance of independent scrutiny to keep standards high.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Barton', written in a cursive style.




Dr Tamsyn Barton  
Chief Commissioner

# 1. Highlights of 2021-2022

## The focus of our reviews

The Independent Commission for Aid Impact's (ICAI) programme of reviews is agreed each year with Parliament's International Development Committee. We choose our topics by consulting with a wide range of stakeholders and by using a number of selection criteria including the amount of UK aid involved, relevance to the strategic priorities of UK aid and coverage of the Sustainable Development Goals, the level of risk, and the potential evaluability of the subject and added value of an ICAI review. During the reporting period (April 2021 to March 2022), ICAI published eight reviews: three scored reviews and five rapid reviews. In addition, ICAI published the annual follow-up review and one information note (see **Table 1**).

Table 1: ICAI 2021-2022 reviews and scores

Review title	Review type	Publication date	Score
<a href="#">Tackling fraud in UK aid</a>	Rapid review	April 2021	Not scored
<a href="#">The UK's aid engagement with China</a>	Information note	April 2021	Not scored
<a href="#">Management of the 0.7% ODA spending target in 2020</a>	Rapid review	May 2021	Not scored
<a href="#">ICAI follow-up review of 2019-20 reports</a>	Follow-up	June 2021	That year we rated all three reviews being followed up for the first time as 'inadequate'
<a href="#">UK aid's approach to youth employment in the Middle East and North Africa</a>	Full review	July 2021	
<a href="#">International climate finance: UK aid for halting deforestation and preventing irreversible biodiversity loss</a>	Full review	July 2021	
<a href="#">UK aid's alignment with the Paris Agreement</a>	Rapid review	October 2021	Not scored
<a href="#">The UK aid response to COVID-19</a>	Rapid review	December 2021	Not scored
<a href="#">The UK's approach to safeguarding in the humanitarian sector</a>	Full review	February 2022	
<a href="#">Tackling fraud in UK aid through multilateral organisations</a>	Rapid review	March 2022	Not scored

## Key themes emerging from 2021-2022 reviews

A range of important themes emerged across our reviews.

### Strengthening strategic approaches to work on climate change and environment

During 2020-21, ICAI produced two reviews examining how UK aid is addressing the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss. It was an opportune time to explore these issues, given the UK's hosting of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow and the forthcoming 15th UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15) in Canada in December 2022.

These issues are a high priority for the UK aid programme, with the government maintaining its commitment to deliver £11.6 billion in climate finance during 2021-26 (double the figure from the previous five-year period), despite significant reductions in the overall aid budget. 'Climate change and biodiversity' was the first of seven strategic priorities for UK aid announced by the government in late 2020<sup>1</sup> and was again highlighted in the *International development strategy*.

The first review examined the UK's approach to halting deforestation and preventing irreversible biodiversity loss,<sup>2</sup> while the second assessed progress against the government's commitment to align all UK aid with the Paris climate agreement.<sup>3</sup> The two reviews confirmed that UK aid was taking an ambitious approach to responding to the challenges of climate change and environmental degradation. A diverse range of programming is underway, relationships with international organisations are being deepened, and there is ever closer collaboration between the UK departments working on these issues (the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs).

However, it is also clear that there is room for improvement, to ensure that more targeted and effective interventions can be supported. The review of *International Climate Finance: UK aid for halting deforestation and preventing irreversible biodiversity loss* found that the "lack of a clearly prioritised strategy has contributed to a portfolio that is too widely spread, both geographically and thematically".<sup>4</sup>

The review of *UK aid's alignment with the Paris Agreement* also found areas for improvement. Although it noted that the government had made important progress in integrating its commitments under the Paris Agreement into the aid programme, it highlighted that there was "no roadmap for full operationalisation of the commitment across UK official development assistance (ODA)-spending departments". There was insufficient guidance on Paris alignment at country or portfolio level, and limited emphasis was being put on the delivery responsibilities of departments other than FCDO.<sup>5</sup>

The ICAI information note on *The UK's aid engagement with China* also provided an account of the UK's extensive work with China on climate change. Although the note was not evaluative, it presented the government's strategy for working with China ahead of COP26, the delivery of which was overseen by a cross-government COP26 China Group.<sup>6</sup>

## The strategic importance of multilateral engagement

The ICAI reviews undertaken during 2020-21 illustrate a diverse range of UK strategic and programmatic engagement with multilateral organisations and indicate how important these relationships are to the pursuit of UK development objectives.

ICAI's review of *The UK's approach to safeguarding in the humanitarian sector* examined the UK's efforts to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) of people affected by humanitarian emergencies, after a series of high-profile cases among humanitarian workers in early 2018 drew attention to the scale of the problem.<sup>7</sup> The review found that the UK had worked extensively with partners across the international humanitarian system to strengthen systems and processes for preventing SEA and safeguarding the vulnerable. However, given the difficulties of addressing SEA through top-down reforms, we also found that the UK could be doing more to tackle specific risks in each humanitarian theatre.

The ICAI rapid review of *The UK aid response to COVID-19* highlighted that the UK had channelled most of its support for COVID-19 through the multilateral system – especially the United Nations – so as to promote

1 Letter from Dominic Raab (then foreign secretary) to Sarah Champion (chair of the international Development Select Committee), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, 2 December 2020, [link](#).

2 *International Climate Finance: UK aid for halting deforestation and preventing irreversible biodiversity loss*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, July 2021, p.i, [link](#).

3 *UK aid's alignment with the Paris Agreement*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, October 2021, p.ii, [link](#).

4 *International Climate Finance: UK aid for halting deforestation and preventing irreversible biodiversity loss*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, July 2021, p.i, [link](#).

5 *UK aid's alignment with the Paris Agreement*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, October 2021, p. ii, [link](#).

6 *The UK's aid engagement with China*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, April 2021, p.6, [link](#).

7 *The UK's approach to safeguarding in the humanitarian sector*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, February 2022, p.20, [link](#).

a coordinated international response at the required scale.<sup>8</sup> The use of multilateral channels proved useful in a number of areas – particularly the procurement of medical supplies and personal protective equipment for developing countries, at a time when the UK and other donor countries were competing to procure supplies for their own needs.

The ICAI reviews of *UK aid's alignment with the Paris Agreement* and *International Climate Finance: UK aid for halting deforestation and preventing irreversible biodiversity loss* found that, by working through the multilateral system, the UK was able to leverage other international resources for responding to climate change and environmental degradation. The UK government encouraged the multilateral development banks (MDBs) to put in place concrete plans for aligning with the Paris Agreement, and established a UK-MDB COP26 Working Group and a Like-Minded Shareholder Group on MDB Paris alignment to help generate political momentum on reform of MDB operations. It also used its position as a major contributor to international climate funds to influence the design of their funding instruments, including by improving monitoring and evaluation practices (such as in the Climate Investment Funds) and the emphasis on biodiversity (such as in the World Bank).

The rapid review of *Management of the 0.7% ODA spending target in 2020* described how flexibility in the timing of payments to multilateral organisations was an important way for the UK to achieve its aid spending target without creating value for money risks – although it did note that the UK had not made optimal use of this, by choosing to cut back bilateral programmes too early in that volatile year.

Finally, the review of *UK aid's approach to youth employment in the Middle East and North Africa* highlighted the importance of channelling UK aid through multilateral organisations to address this challenge (particularly the World Bank), given their more significant influence in the region and stronger specialist expertise in relevant areas. This review did, however, also conclude that the UK was not making effective use of its multilateral relationships to promote youth employment in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

### **The importance of strengthening and applying contextual analysis**

UK aid is delivered in diverse and complex environments with many specific challenges, and local contextual knowledge is a key ingredient in the design of effective programmes. ICAI reviews in 2020-21 highlight that, while the importance of contextual knowledge is well understood, more investment is needed in generating and applying this knowledge.

The review of the UK's efforts to halt deforestation and prevent biodiversity loss found that the quality of evidence and contextual analysis applied to relevant programmes was mixed. With UK aid's work on illegal logging and the timber trade, a long-standing focus on this sector had helped to generate a strong understanding of the issues involved. In contrast, its work on alternative livelihoods was more often based on untested assumptions or pursued in ways contrary to the evidence on 'what works'.<sup>9</sup>

The review of the UK's efforts regarding youth employment in the MENA region found that, while the UK's broad approach was evidence-based, programmes lacked a deep understanding of cultural barriers to the employment of young women. As a result, programmes had no significant impact on female labour force participation because underlying social norms were not tackled.<sup>10</sup>

The review of safeguarding in the humanitarian sector found that the presence of a humanitarian adviser in the FCDO Safeguarding Unit and the development of a Safeguarding Champions Network to provide localised support had helped to contextualise the department's support on SEA issues. However, it also found that an emphasis on universal rules and standards was not sufficient, and needed to be complemented by a deeper understanding of risks and vulnerabilities in particular contexts.<sup>11</sup>

8 *The UK aid response to COVID-19*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, February 2022, [link](#).

9 *International Climate Finance: UK aid for halting deforestation and preventing irreversible biodiversity loss*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, July 2021, [link](#).

10 *UK aid's approach to youth employment in the Middle East and North Africa*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, July 2021, p.ii, [link](#).

11 *The UK's approach to safeguarding in the humanitarian sector*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, February 2022, p.33, [link](#).

## Better engaging citizens and affected communities

A key area of practice that can help aid programmes respond to local context and secure local ownership is consultation with citizens and affected communities. ICAI reviews undertaken during 2020-21 identified several examples of strong consultation, but also highlighted the need for consultation to be more consistently pursued across UK aid programmes.

The review of *UK aid's approach to youth employment in the Middle East and North Africa* found that consultations with young people were undertaken in around half of the programmes but were not standard practice. It also found that feedback from consultation does not always shape programme design, despite a commitment made in the former Department for International Development's 2016 Youth Agenda to giving young people a voice in all aspects of programming.<sup>12</sup>

The review of deforestation and biodiversity loss found that some forest programmes worked well with communities that depended on forests, often by linking local organisations to national and international non-governmental organisations.<sup>13</sup> However, it also concluded that there was inconsistent consultation with affected communities and especially with women and indigenous people. This increased the risks that programmes might inadvertently disrupt local livelihoods.<sup>14</sup>

The review of safeguarding in the humanitarian sector found that, although the UK's safeguarding strategy was developed based on wide consultation, there were weaknesses in the systems for routinely consulting with and learning from affected people, particularly victims and survivors.

## Some common challenges for better tackling fraud

During 2021-22 ICAI undertook two reviews on tackling fraud in the UK aid programme. The review of *Tackling fraud in UK aid* explored how fraud is being addressed in relation to the UK's directly managed aid operations, which are managed by five<sup>15</sup> departments overseeing at least £100 million in UK aid spending. The review of *Tackling fraud in UK aid through multilateral organisations* examined how the FCDO ensures the effective management of fraud risks in its core funding to multilateral organisations.

These two reviews revealed several common themes and challenges in this critical area of policy and practice. First, although the reviews found that, in general, systems and processes were broadly relevant and effective in addressing fraud in relation to UK bilateral and multilateral aid, they also both found that there were weaknesses in central oversight and coordination. In relation to bilateral programmes, there was no overarching oversight of ODA fraud risks across all government departments.<sup>16</sup> In relation to multilateral aid, ICAI noted that fraud risks were managed on an organisation-by-organisation basis without oversight of risks across the whole multilateral portfolio.<sup>17</sup>

Second, while both reviews found that valuable learning was being facilitated among counter fraud specialists and those managing multilateral relationships, they also noted that learning activities were not effectively coordinated or systematic. In relation to bilateral programmes, ICAI observed that the lack of a cross-government ODA specialism within the Counter Fraud Function meant that learning risked being ad hoc.<sup>18</sup> In relation to multilateral aid, ICAI found that FCDO has no system for coordinating the learning of its officials seconded to multilateral organisations. This, combined with the lack of quality assurance and peer review processes across the multilateral portfolio, meant that potentially valuable lessons about how to improve counter fraud in multilateral organisations were being lost.<sup>19</sup>

12 *UK aid's approach to youth employment in the Middle East and North Africa*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, July 2021, p.ii, [link](#).

13 *International Climate Finance: UK aid for halting deforestation and preventing irreversible biodiversity loss*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, July 2021, paragraph 4.13, p.9, [link](#).

14 *International Climate Finance: UK aid for halting deforestation and preventing irreversible biodiversity loss*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, July 2021, p.34, [link](#).

15 These are the former Department for International Development (including the UK's development finance institution, CDC), the former Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Home Office, and the Department of Health and Social Care.

16 *Tackling fraud in UK aid*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, April 2021, p.i, [link](#).

17 *Tackling fraud in UK aid through multilateral organisations*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, April 2021, p.i, [link](#).

18 *Tackling fraud in UK aid*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, April 2021, p.ii, [link](#).

19 *Tackling fraud in UK aid through multilateral organisations*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, April 2021, p.ii, [link](#).



## 2. ICAI functions and structure

This chapter sets out the structure and functions of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI).

### ICAI's structure and functions

ICAI was established in May 2011 to scrutinise all UK official development assistance (ODA), irrespective of the spending department. ICAI is an advisory non-departmental public body sponsored by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). It delivers its programme of work independently and reports to Parliament's International Development Committee.

Our remit, re-confirmed by FCDO in December 2020,<sup>20</sup> is to provide independent evaluation and scrutiny of the impact and value for money of UK ODA. To do this, ICAI:

- carries out a few well-prioritised, well-evidenced and credible thematic reviews on strategic issues faced by the UK government's aid spending
- informs and supports Parliament in its role of holding the UK government to account
- ensures it makes its work available to the public.

ICAI is led by a board of independent public appointees (the commissioners) who are supported by a secretariat and external suppliers. These three pillars – commissioners, secretariat and suppliers – work closely together to deliver reviews. **Figure 1** summarises the roles and responsibilities of the three pillars.

### The ICAI team

Dr Tamsyn Barton, ICAI's chief commissioner, leads the board. ICAI's other commissioners are Sir Hugh Bayley and Tarek Rouchdy. The commissioners' biographical details are on the ICAI website.

Ekpe Attah leads ICAI's secretariat of 10.3 full-time-equivalent civil servants, when at full complement. They are responsible for review management (working alongside the external suppliers), supplier contract management, financial control and corporate governance, and communications and engagement. ICAI's office is in Gwydyr House, Whitehall.

ICAI was supported during 2021-22 by an external supplier consortium led by the specialist international development consultancy Agulhas Applied Knowledge. The consortium also included Ecorys, ODI and INTRAC (DAI and HEART provided services outside ICAI's main external supplier contract).

Figure 1: High-level roles and responsibilities



20 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's review of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, FCDO and ICAI, 16 December 2020, [link](#).

## 3. Corporate governance

The Independent Commission for Aid Impact's (ICAI) commissioners, who lead the selection process for all reviews and lead the work on each review, were appointed after a recruitment process regulated by the commissioner for public appointments. They hold quarterly board meetings, the agendas and minutes of which are published on ICAI's website.

ICAI's primary governance objective is to act in accordance with the mandate agreed with the foreign secretary, set out in our Framework Agreement,<sup>21</sup> which is to provide independent evaluation and scrutiny of the impact and value for money of all UK government official development assistance. This involves:

- carrying out a small number of well-prioritised, well-evidenced, credible, thematic reviews on strategic issues faced by the UK government's aid spending
- informing and supporting Parliament in its role of holding the UK government to account
- ensuring our work is made available to the public.

Following the creation of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and its review of ICAI, we have recently agreed a revised Framework Agreement with FCDO.

### Risk management

The ICAI secretariat maintains a corporate risk register which identifies and monitors ICAI's corporate risks. ICAI's risk register includes an assessment of gross and net risk, mitigating actions and assigned risk owners. It includes risks relating to the operating environment and more specific risks inherent to the production of ICAI reviews. The commissioners formally review the risk register eight times during the year, either at a dedicated meeting or as a standing item at the quarterly ICAI board meetings.

### Annual audit

As set out in the Framework Agreement, ICAI is subject to an annual audit, undertaken by FCDO's Internal Audit and Investigations Department. This is to provide assurance to ICAI and FCDO on the effectiveness of our systems and processes in place to manage risk and deliver objectives.

The 2021-22 audit review, which had not concluded at the time of writing, is examining ICAI's engagement with the transition to the next (2023-27) board of commissioners and external supplier(s). Although the review has not yet been finalised, ICAI has received a working draft for comment. We are in agreement with its contents, in the sense that we acknowledge the need to work closely with FCDO – seeking to influence the department where appropriate – to enable as smooth as possible a transition between the 2019-2023 and 2023-2027 phases of ICAI.

### Conflict of interest

ICAI takes conflicts of interest, both actual and perceived, extremely seriously. Our independence is vital for us to achieve real impact.

We publish our conflict of interest and gifts and hospitality policies on our website and update the commissioners' conflict of interests register every six months. We review potential conflicts of interest for all supplier team members before beginning work on reviews.

We manage any conflict of interest transparently and make decisions on a case-by-case basis. The specialist nature of our work, and the requirement for strong technical input, means that we need to weigh the risk of a possible or perceived conflict with the need to ensure that high-quality and knowledgeable teams conduct our reviews.

21 The Framework Agreement is the document that sets out the principles and ways of working for ICAI's relationship with its sponsoring department.

## **Whistleblowing**

ICAI has limited capacity to investigate concerns raised by the public and investigation is not part of our formal mandate. Our whistleblowing policy is on our website.

In line with the policy, if we receive allegations of misconduct, we offer to put the complainant in contact with the relevant department's investigations team, if appropriate, or with the National Audit Office's investigations function.

## **Safeguarding**

ICAI complies with FCDO safeguarding and reporting standards. There have been no reports this year under our safeguarding policy.

## 4. Financial summary

This chapter sets out:

- the overall financial position of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI)
- ICAI's work cycle
- expenditure for the financial year period April 2021 to March 2022
- spending plans for the forthcoming year.

### Overall financial position

The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) and former Department for International Development (DFID) agreed a budget of £15.08 million for the four-year period July 2019 to June 2023 (ICAI Phase 3). In the financial year April 2021 to March 2022, ICAI spent £3.65 million (£2.79 million on programmes and £0.86 million on administration and front-line delivery, with the latter budget underspent due to staff vacancies and limited country visits). This means that the total Phase 3 spend to the end of March 2022 was £9.29 million.

In May 2021, FCDO belatedly proposed a 2021-22 programme budget of £2.8 million. This was not the full budget requested by ICAI. In the event, ICAI only used £2.8 million because of delays in access to information, such as in its review of Afghanistan, which prevented the review from proceeding as planned.

### ICAI's work cycle

ICAI's mandate is to deliver a few well-prioritised, well-evidenced and credible thematic reviews on strategic issues faced by the UK government's aid spending. This means managing a rolling programme of reviews which often span financial reporting years. Consequently, costs payable to suppliers in any one financial year cover both reviews published in that year and initiation costs for reviews due for publication the following year.

### Expenditure from April 2020 to March 2021

**Table 2** provides a breakdown of expenditure for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

Table 2: ICAI expenditure April 2021 to March 2022

Area of spend	Actual expenditure April 2021 to March 2022
Supplier costs	£2,745,469
External engagement activities	£53,087
<b>Total programme spending</b>	<b>£2,798,556</b>
Commissioner honoraria	£213,362
Commissioner expenses	£1,272
Commissioner country visit travel, accommodation and subsistence	£3,954
FLD (front-line delivery) secretariat staff costs	£310,193
FLD staff expenses	£2,336
FLD staff training	£2,441
<b>Total FLD spending</b>	<b>£533,538</b>
Admin secretariat staff costs	£273,483
Admin secretariat training	0
ICAI accommodation and office costs	£50,647
<b>Total administrative spending</b>	<b>£324,130</b>
<b>Total spend</b>	<b>£3,656,224</b>

ICAI spends most of its budget on supplier costs. In 2021-22, these supplier costs (programme spend) were £2.75 million. This included the cost of reviews and information notes, project management, communication activities and consulting with stakeholders to evaluate ICAI’s impact to inform future work plans.

As explained above, some of this cost is for initiating work on reviews due for publication after 1 April 2022 to maintain the pipeline of review production. **Table 3** sets out the amount invoiced against each individually identified review published between April 2021 and March 2022. These costs are paid over several financial years and not solely in the year of publication.

Table 3: Total supplier cost for each review published between April 2021 and March 2022

Review	Supplier cost
<a href="#">Tackling fraud in UK aid</a>	£124,447
<a href="#">The UK’s aid engagement with China</a>	£111,702
<a href="#">Management of the 0.7% ODA spending target in 2020</a>	£95,502
<a href="#">ICAI follow-up review of 2019-20 reports</a>	£116,179
<a href="#">UK aid’s approach to youth employment in the Middle East and North Africa</a>	£373,798
<a href="#">International climate finance: UK aid for halting deforestation and preventing irreversible biodiversity loss</a>	£379,209
<a href="#">UK aid’s alignment with the Paris Agreement</a>	£140,408
<a href="#">The UK aid response to COVID-19</a>	£180,640
<a href="#">The UK’s approach to safeguarding in the humanitarian sector</a>	£384,241
<a href="#">Tackling fraud in UK aid through multilateral organisations</a>	£126,890

Two factors drive the variation in the costs of ICAI reviews: the breadth of the topic under review and the methodological approach required to provide robust and credible scrutiny of the topic (including whether and how many country case studies may be required and the extent of citizen engagement).

We will continue to manage ICAI’s administration and programme budgets carefully to ensure that all expenditure contributes directly to meeting ICAI’s objectives.

## 5. ICAI's performance

This chapter sets out performance during the year against the Independent Commission for Aid Impact's (ICAI) key performance indicators for 2021-22.

Table 4: Performance summary 2021-22

Key performance indicator	Outcome
Proportion of ICAI recommendations accepted or partially accepted by the government	100% of recommendations accepted or partially accepted
Proportion of ICAI recommendations adequately actioned by the government	48%
Change in government practice due to ICAI reviews	Independently verified through assessment of ICAI's impact (see below)
International Development Committee (IDC) satisfaction with ICAI	Parliamentary stakeholders, including the IDC, regard ICAI as key to supporting Parliament's scrutiny role
ICAI communications and engagement activity	ICAI continues to promote its reviews effectively to stakeholders and the public, reaching different audiences through different channels
Media and social media coverage	ICAI continues to achieve accurate media coverage and its social media channels continue to grow
Budgetary control	ICAI operated within its allocated budget <sup>22</sup>

### Government responses to ICAI reviews

The government has six weeks to publish a response to an ICAI review. By the end of March 2022, the government had published responses to all six reviews for which a response was due. All ICAI recommendations were either accepted or partially accepted. The government does not formally respond to information notes.

### Proportion of ICAI recommendations actioned by government

ICAI conducts a follow-up review each year which assesses whether adequate progress has been made on recommendations accepted by government. This year, ICAI's assessment is that 48% of recommendations from reports published in 2020-21 had been adequately taken forward. This is similar to last year, but much lower than in the previous year, when the figure was 79%. Interviewees explained that delays in implementation were linked to disruptions following the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) merger, as well as official development assistance (ODA) reprioritisations and budget reductions.

### Independent assessment of ICAI's impact

In February 2022, ICAI commissioned an independent assessment of our impact which involved interviews with parliamentary, government and non-government stakeholders.

The assessment found that ICAI has impact through two main functions: (i) holding government to account for its management of ODA and (ii) helping government learn through practical advice and recommendations, based on independent expert scrutiny. ICAI reviews are valued by stakeholders within and outside government

22 Noting the points made in the "Overall financial position" sub-section of Chapter 4.

for their depth and rigour, and the varied product range (including rapid reviews and information notes) is valued for its ability to communicate quickly and to a broad audience.

Stakeholders reported that ICAI reviews added value by:

- offering ideas and challenges
- informing programme design
- increasing the profile of the topic or issue under review
- clarifying departmental roles and improving inter-governmental coordination
- reinforcing government priorities through review recommendations.

In addition, the assessment found that ICAI's evidence is largely seen as credible and relevant. This is due to factors such as the rigour and transparency of the review methodology, the quality of the review teams, and the degree to which ICAI reviews are amplified by others, including the media.

The assessment also found a clear and strong perception among stakeholders interviewed that ICAI is independent from both Parliament and government. Interviewees clarified this perception by saying that ICAI does not shy away from being critical of government and is not afraid to address 'difficult' topics.

## Working with the International Development Committee

ICAI's work with the International Development Committee (IDC) plays a vital role in delivering real improvements to how UK aid is spent, through robust and effective scrutiny of our reviews and other evidence.

Commissioners took part in seven evidence sessions with the Committee during the reporting period, through a combination of remote and in-person hearings.

In April 2021, Sir Hugh Bayley gave evidence to the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI on our review of *The UK's approach to tackling modern slavery through the aid programme*. The remote evidence session was chaired by Theo Clarke MP, who also took evidence from civil society and experts from academia. The Committee followed up on this session in June 2021, taking evidence from the independent anti-slavery commissioner and Lord Ahmad, the responsible FCDO minister at the time.

In July 2021, Tarek Rouchdy attended an online Sub-Committee hearing and provided evidence from ICAI's rapid review on fraud, discussing the extent to which the UK government took a robust approach to tackling fraud in its bilateral aid expenditure.

In September 2021, in a return to in-person hearings, both Tamsyn Barton and ICAI's head of secretariat, Ekpe Attah, appeared before the main Committee, chaired by Sarah Champion MP, to give evidence on last year's annual report as well as our follow-up review of reports published in 2019-20. Later that month, Sir Hugh Bayley presented the findings from ICAI's information note on *The UK's aid engagement with China* to the Sub-Committee.

Tamsyn Barton gave evidence to the Sub-Committee, in October 2021, on our review of how UK aid is used to halt deforestation and prevent irreversible biodiversity loss. Shortly after this session, Tarek Rouchdy provided evidence to the Sub-Committee on *UK aid's approach to youth employment in the Middle East and North Africa*. And, in February 2022, Tamsyn Barton attended a hearing in front of the main Committee to provide evidence on our report on *UK aid's alignment with the Paris Agreement*.

During the reporting year, the Committee has built on several of our reviews and evidence sessions, publishing its own reports assessing the former Department for International Development's (DFID) results on nutrition, the UK's approach to tackling modern slavery, and using UK aid to halt deforestation and prevent biodiversity loss. The IDC's reports are available on the UK Parliament website ([link](#)).

The Committee played an even more active role this year in helping to identify the topics for ICAI's workplan to the end of this commission. ICAI continues to work with Parliament to consider how it can further support scrutiny of government aid spending.

## External engagement

Although COVID-19-related restrictions persisted throughout much of the reporting period and ICAI was short-staffed in its engagement team, we have continued to prioritise strategic engagement with our key audiences – the government, Parliament, the aid sector and the public – to promote interest in and the impact of our reviews. Positive and proactive engagement has continued, with aid sector stakeholders regularly consulted at all stages in the review cycle, through open ‘calls for evidence’, evidence-gathering roundtables and workshops, briefings and events.

ICAI has continued to increase its transparency around the review process, promoting activities and meetings from evidence-gathering country visits on social media which has been warmly welcomed by our followers. Following the website restructure in spring 2021, we have continued to look for ways to go beyond the minimum legislated accessibility requirements to ensure that ICAI reports are available to all, both inside and outside the UK.

## Events

ICAI endeavours to run a full programme of external events to maximise the impact of its work and increase understanding and learning around its findings. Although, until March 2022, the pandemic meant that events continued in a largely remote format, ICAI worked successfully with partners to organise external events during the past year, covering five different review topics. We also arranged a variety of evidence-gathering focus groups and pre-publication briefings and took advantage of external speaking opportunities.

In April 2021, ICAI teamed up with Bond and the Foreign Policy Centre to host a high-profile event on our information note on *The UK's aid engagement with China*. Sir Hugh Bayley was joined on the panel by Tobias Ellwood MP, chair of the Defence Committee for a wide-ranging discussion on how to improve UK aid in response to the challenge from China and other emerging donors. The event was attended by interested MPs, academic and civil society experts and government officials. In March 2022, we worked with the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) on another high-profile event to promote the findings of our review of *UK aid's alignment with the Paris Agreement*. Our first hybrid event was attended by a large and international audience. Tamsyn Barton was joined on the panel by Vel Gnanendran, FCDO's climate and environment director; Kevin Kanina Kariuki, vice-president for power, energy, climate and green growth at the African Development Bank Group; as well as Andrew Norton, the director of IIED, and Ebony Holland, an IIED senior researcher.

As part of our drive to increase our engagement with parliamentarians, we provided a private briefing for members of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Nutrition, on our results review of the former DFID's nutrition work. Working with the IDC, we also provided a private briefing on our review of *The UK's approach to safeguarding in the humanitarian sector* ahead of publication. We are committed to providing future briefings such as this for the Committee, to support its scrutiny of the UK aid programme.

Commissioners and ICAI's specialist reviewers also took part in two external speaking engagements in relation to our review of *The UK's approach to tackling modern slavery through the aid programme* and our information note on *Mapping the UK's approach to tackling corruption and illicit financial flows*. Nine pre-publication briefings with stakeholders covered topics such as our rapid reviews of *The UK aid response to COVID-19 and Management of the 0.7% ODA spending target in 2020*, and our review of *UK aid's approach to youth employment in the Middle East and North Africa*. We thank all the panellists and participants for helping to make these events a success.

## Media and digital

ICAI's reviews generated media coverage throughout the year, and the media continues to play an important role in supporting scrutiny, impact and accountability.

In June 2021, the *ICAI follow-up review of 2019-20 reports* resulted in eight pieces of national and international coverage including the BBC, The Independent, The Guardian, The Times, The National and Devex, reaching a



potential audience of over 34 million people. Tamsyn Barton spoke on BBC Radio 4's the Today programme, further boosting ICAI's reach. Similarly, our rapid review of *The UK's aid response to COVID-19* generated seven pieces of media coverage, including prominent pieces online on ITV News, The Independent, The Telegraph, The Daily Mail and The Guardian, reaching a combined audience of over 2.7 million. Our information note on *The UK aid's engagement with China*, our rapid review of *Management of the 0.7% ODA spending target in 2020* and our review of *The UK's approach to safeguarding in the humanitarian sector* also generated strong coverage across sector and national press.

ICAI's social media channels continue to grow, with over 6,800 followers on Twitter and higher than ever monthly tweet impressions, reaching up to 55,000 each month. Our LinkedIn following is up from 632 to 807, an increase of 27%, following a 50% increase in the previous year. ICAI's website also saw more downloads of our reviews, with 3,980 unique review downloads and views, up 240 report views from last year.

### **ICAI's work plan April 2022 to March 2023**

ICAI has a full and ambitious work plan for 2022-23 which is published on our website, and we will update the plan, as necessary, throughout the year.

Worryingly, and for the second consecutive year, in contrast with previous years, FCDO has arbitrarily and without consultation with ICAI or the IDC allocated a budget which is below what is required to complete the work plan (and significantly below the indicative level of our agreed four-year spending ceiling). As an independent arm's-length body, ICAI firmly believes that decisions on how to profile its spend within its overall budget ceiling are for ICAI's board to take. Nor is FCDO's action in this respect in line with the approach to respecting ICAI's operational independence that the department signed up to in the FCDO-ICAI Framework Agreement.

Even though implementing this budget limit would delay completion of the reports, and IDC hearings, we will continue to push ahead with our programme of reviewing UK aid during the coming year, in line with our mandate.



This document can be downloaded from [www.icaei.independent.gov.uk](http://www.icaei.independent.gov.uk).  
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