

Annual Report 2023-2024

Report to Parliament's International
Development Committee

July 2024

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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Contents

Foreword	i
1. Reviews published during 2023-24	1
2. ICAI functions and structure	6
3. Corporate governance	7
4. Financial summary	9
5. ICAI's performance	12

Foreword from the Chief Commissioner

This time last year, we expected the Third Commission to end at the end of September, following a three-month extension. Our Commission had faced much disruption over the preceding year, with problems recruiting staff following the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) merger, which had led to a pile-up of reviews to be published at the end of the Commission.

In the event, we were asked to extend a further nine months because of a failed recruitment for my successor as Chief Commissioner. Had we agreed a shorter extension, this would have led to a longer gap in scrutiny. As it was, because the extension had to be signed off personally by the Prime Minister, we had to try to squeeze in the equivalent of a year's reports in less than nine months. We felt it important to carry out some full reviews, involving visits to see and hear from people the impacts of UK aid ourselves.

We are pleased with what we managed to achieve in this extension. Although we summed up our view of UK aid during the time of our Commission in our synthesis report *UK aid under pressure* published in September 2023, there were a number of lines of enquiry we pursued of significant public interest in this year.

We were able to cover the important theme of UK aid to tackle climate change by a combination of high-level scrutiny examining the UK's progress towards the commitments made by Prime Minister Johnson to International Climate Finance, with a look at how the money was being used mainly by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) in the *Blue Planet Fund* and by several departments on Sustainable Cities. Our work on research, the subject of detailed reviews in the second Commission and covered partially in the Agriculture review, was complemented by a review on the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)'s use of aid for global health research, the DHSC being the third-largest spender of aid funds after FCDO and the Home Office. Overall there was good coverage of non-FCDO spending, which has gone up to 36.3% of the total.

At the same time, the pressure from our reviews of FCDO in areas like transparency and the Programme Operating Framework helped to restore standards of aid management which had declined following the Department for International Development (DFID) / Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) merger. At the time of writing, however, as noted in our follow-up review, retaining expertise in the merged department continues to be a severe problem.

In our follow-up, we also returned to the use of funds for asylum seekers and refugees in the UK and found the situation had worsened, but that the Treasury had continued to use the flexibility we had recommended in our earlier reviews of the management of the aid-spending target. There was also the opportunity once again to scrutinise BII, which has received a major capital injection in recent years – and unfortunately our India follow-up showed a lack of oversight of intermediated investments and a failure to deliver on commitments made to the International Development Committee. We continued our detailed updates on how aid to China is being used. We refocused departments on the practicalities of tackling fraud in the aid programme by looking at what happens in-country. We provided a complement to the Committee's enquiry on humanitarian aid to Gaza. And finally, after years of pressing for it, Hugh Bayley was able to visit Afghanistan in person to see how the UK's aid funding is being used.

As we prepare to hand over to our successors, we are happy that the Secretariat is now fully staffed, that the engagement with our sponsor department has been strong in this year (including pre-release access to statistics data), and that we have finally seen an increase in the number of our recommendations adequately implemented. At the time of writing, however, the recruitment of my successor has been paused because a general election has been called.

My thanks go to my fellow Commissioners, to the Secretariat and to all those involved in producing our reports.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'T. Barton'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dr Tamsyn Barton
Chief Commissioner

1. Reviews published during 2023-24

The Independent Commission for Aid Impact's (ICAI) programme of reviews is agreed each year with Parliament's International Development Committee (IDC). 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 a wide range of Sustainable Development Goals; the level of risk; the potential evaluability of the subject and added value of an ICAI review.

During the reporting period (April 2023 to March 2024), ICAI issued 12 publications – two full reviews, three rapid reviews, a supplementary review, a synthesis of the reviews over the years 2019-23, the annual follow-up review and four information notes.

ICAI also published a review on *UK aid to Ukraine* at the end of April 2024 and an information note on *UK humanitarian aid to Gaza* in May 2024. ICAI plans to publish reviews on UK aid for sustainable cities, the UK Department of Health and Social Care's aid-funded global health research and innovation, and a further information note (an update on *UK aid to Afghanistan*) in July.

Table 1: ICAI 2023-24 reviews and scores

Review title	Review type	Publication date	Score
The FCDO's Programme Operating Framework	Rapid review	April 2023	Not scored
UK humanitarian aid to Afghanistan 2021-23	Information note	May 2023	Not scored
UK aid for trade	Full review	June 2023	
UK aid to agriculture in a time of climate change	Full review	June 2023	
Update on the UK's aid engagement with China	Information note	July 2023	Not scored
ICAI follow-up review of 2021-22 reports	Follow-up	July 2023	58% of review recommendations adequately addressed
Update on ODA eligibility of funding for refugees in the UK	Information note	September 2023	Not scored
UK aid under pressure: a synthesis of ICAI findings from 2019 to 2023	Synthesis	September 2023	Not scored
Blue Planet Fund	Rapid review	November 2023	Not scored
UK aid's international climate finance commitments	Rapid review	February 2024	Not scored
Tackling fraud in UK aid: country case studies	Supplementary review	March 2024	Not scored
The UK's aid relationship with China up to 2023-24	Information note	March 2024	Not scored

Themes of the year

Key themes emerging from 2023-24 reviews

In September 2023, ICAI produced a synthesis of key findings across reviews since 2019 to mark the end of the third Commission.¹ Unexpectedly, an extension period was announced just before the synthesis report was published, and thus we committed to continue the scrutiny of UK aid on some of the priority themes that had emerged over the period of the Commission as well as maximise our coverage of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for example through the review of UK aid to sustainable cities. This account builds on the 2023 ICAI synthesis report and picks up some of the emerging issues across our reviews from April 2023 to March 2024.

Women and girls

ICAI's internal mapping of coverage across the SDGs shows a strong focus on gender across our reviews. The 2023 ICAI synthesis report found that supporting women and girls had been a consistent priority for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) aid during the third ICAI Commission, demonstrating some strong results, but that other aid-spending departments showed more mixed results.² The review found that the former Department for International Development (DFID), and subsequently FCDO, had made progress on mainstreaming gender equality across policies, programmes and influencing work in many areas.³ In ICAI's April 2023 rapid review of the FCDO Programme Operating Framework (PrOF),⁴ the intent of ensuring that gender perspectives are integrated into design and decision-making processes was clear. However, even with integration into design, there are challenges in making lasting change. The June 2023 review of *UK aid for trade*⁵ highlights that programmes often focused on supporting women-owned businesses and increasing the participation of women in trade, contributing to positive results, but it also indicates challenges in bringing these benefits to scale and sustaining them over time.⁶ Worryingly, the citizen engagement research revealed reports about sexual harassment at an industrial park which illustrate the day-to-day risks that women may face even as they benefit from export-driven employment.⁷

The May 2023 *aid to Afghanistan* information note⁸ followed up on the 2022 Afghanistan country portfolio review to provide a factual account of how the situation had evolved in terms of humanitarian needs and the UK's response. This report noted significant regression in the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan since the Taliban's assumption of power, including reversing earlier pledges and imposing further restrictions on education, employment and movement which severely limit their freedoms and opportunities. These changes have had widespread implications for women's participation in society and the workforce. Taliban restrictions have disrupted aid operations, leading to the cessation, or scaling back, of many activities. Following the Taliban's December 2022 edict on women, the UK played a key role in brokering consensus in the international community about continuing funding and pressing for the continuation of women's participation in aid delivery, which is key to women receiving aid.⁹

Since publication of the ICAI synthesis report, in November 2023 ICAI completed a rapid review of the £500 million Blue Planet Fund,¹⁰ managed jointly by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and FCDO. The Fund is intended "to help developing countries protect marine ecosystems and reduce poverty through the sustainable management of the ocean and its resources".¹¹ While both Defra and FCDO have guidance and tools on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI), there is limited evidence of their application in the administration of the Fund. Moreover, gender is not included as a separate investment criterion but is rather 'folded in' under criteria such as poverty reduction potential and 'do no harm'. The review found significant variability in the level of attention paid to gender across different projects, particularly in terms of programme design, highlighting the need for more emphasis on gender equality both in the Fund's specific investment criteria and in the guidance documents.¹²

1 *UK aid under pressure: a synthesis of ICAI findings from 2019 to 2023*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, September 2023, [link](#).

2 *UK aid under pressure: a synthesis of ICAI findings from 2019 to 2023*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, September 2023, p. 17, [link](#).

3 *UK aid under pressure: a synthesis of ICAI findings from 2019 to 2023*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, September 2023, p. 17, [link](#).

4 *The FCDO's Programme Operating Framework*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, April 2023, [link](#).

5 *UK aid for trade*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, June 2023, [link](#).

6 *UK aid for trade*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, June 2023, pp. 24-25, [link](#).

7 *UK aid for trade*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, June 2023, p. 27, [link](#).

8 *UK humanitarian aid to Afghanistan 2021-23*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, May 2023, [link](#).

9 *UK humanitarian aid to Afghanistan 2021-23*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, May 2023, p.9, [link](#).

10 *Blue Planet Fund*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, November 2023, [link](#).

11 *Blue Planet Fund*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, November 2023, p. i, [link](#).

12 *Blue Planet Fund*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, November 2023, p.19, [link](#).

Furthermore, while the UK government has identified women and girls as high priority in its 2023 White Paper¹³ and has produced an *'International Women and Girls Strategy 2023-2030'*,¹⁴ the ICAI February 2024 rapid review of the UK's International Climate Finance (ICF) commitments¹⁵ notes that the UK has not championed gender issues or gender-sensitive approaches through ICF. The report found that 48% of ICF programmes do not apply the gender marker, and the use of gender-disaggregated data remains limited, meaning there is insufficient information available regarding the gender-specific impacts or outcomes of ICF programmes.¹⁶

Climate and nature

ICAI's 2023-24 portfolio of reviews continued to examine how UK aid was being used to address climate change and biodiversity loss, acknowledging the pressing global challenge and emphasising that integrating climate and nature considerations into UK aid programmes needs robust strategies, evidence-based decision-making, and transparent financing. ICAI reviews have identified where progress has been made, while also underscoring areas where further action is urgently required to meet the UK's international commitments.

The June 2023 review of *UK aid to agriculture in a time of climate change*¹⁷ found growing recognition of the importance of addressing climate change within agricultural programmes but highlighted that increased attention is not always well integrated into programme design and implementation. Despite the positive examples highlighted in the synthesis report,¹⁸ many agricultural programmes still exhibit limited climate ambition, focusing on promoting specific climate adaptations rather than strengthening systemic resilience to help ensure sustainability and productivity.¹⁹

The November 2023 review of the Blue Planet Fund²⁰ found a "mixed picture" with regards to Fund activities that were demand-led and context-responsive,²¹ although FCDO's flagship Climate and Ocean Adaptation and Sustainable Transition (COAST) programme was highlighted as being strongly evidence-based in its design.²² The review noted that an expedited launch also required Defra to make allocations to existing programmes and channels, which limited the potential to design a portfolio focused on countries with the greatest needs.²³ Moreover, the lack of an effective system to track overall results at the Fund portfolio level will make it challenging to demonstrate impact and value for money when assessing whether the Fund is helping to meet the UK's wider international climate finance objectives.²⁴

The February 2024 rapid review of the UK's international climate finance commitments²⁵ found that while the UK government has reiterated its commitment to delivering on its £11.6 billion pledge by 2025-26, meeting this commitment is now contingent upon several changes made in 2023 to the way the UK accounts for its ICF spend. These changes allow more existing aid spending to be counted as ICF²⁶ and reduce the trade-offs between ICF and non-ICF official development assistance (ODA) spend through the inclusion of spend related to fixed proportion of humanitarian funding to countries most vulnerable to climate change.²⁷ Despite these methodological changes, serious concerns remain over whether the backloaded ICF spending plan can still be delivered in line with the UK's global pledge. Changes in the UK's domestic net zero commitments and concerns about its ability to meet the ICF target have adversely impacted its global leadership position on climate, and this decline in reputation could affect the UK's ability to encourage others to commit to more ambitious climate finance targets.²⁸

13 *International development in a contested world: ending extreme poverty and tackling climate change. A white paper on international development*, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, November 2023, [link](#).

14 *International Women and Girls Strategy 2023-2030*, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, March 2023, [link](#).

15 *UK aid's international climate finance commitments*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, February 2024, [link](#).

16 *UK aid's international climate finance commitments*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, February 2024, p. 21, [link](#).

17 *UK aid to agriculture in a time of climate change*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, June 2023, [link](#).

18 *UK aid under pressure: a synthesis of ICAI findings from 2019 to 2023*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, September 2023, p. 17, [link](#).

19 *UK aid to agriculture in a time of climate change*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, June 2023, pp. 20-21, [link](#).

20 *Blue Planet Fund*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, November 2023, [link](#).

21 *Blue Planet Fund*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, November 2023, p. 8, [link](#).

22 *Blue Planet Fund*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, November 2023, p. 8, [link](#).

23 *Blue Planet Fund*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, November 2023, pp. 8-10, [link](#).

24 *Blue Planet Fund*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, November 2023, p. 22, [link](#).

25 *UK aid's international climate finance commitments*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, February 2024, [link](#).

26 *UK aid's international climate finance commitments*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, February 2024, p. 11, [link](#).

27 *UK aid's international climate finance commitments*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, February 2024, p. 10, [link](#).

28 *UK aid's international climate finance commitments*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, February 2024, pp. 17-19, [link](#).

Addressing the needs of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people

While ICAI has identified efforts to address UK aid poverty reduction goals through inclusive approaches and targeted interventions in a number of 2023-24 reviews, challenges – and trade-offs – in effectively reaching and benefiting marginalised and vulnerable populations remain, whether through the changing patterns of allocation in favour of middle-income countries (MICs) highlighted in the synthesis review,²⁹ or simply in the design and execution of aid programmes.

The 2023 ICAI synthesis report³⁰ outlined the significant contribution of UK aid for trade and aid for agriculture programming towards economic growth and sustainable livelihoods in developing countries. The June 2023 review of *UK aid for trade*³¹ found there was recognition of the importance of gender inclusion in trade initiatives.³² However, while efforts were being made to support women-owned businesses and increase women's participation in trade, there was limited emphasis on reaching other marginalised groups such as people with disabilities.³³ The report also highlighted important examples of negative effects experienced by local communities as a result of trade and investment interventions, such as job losses and gender-based violence, and suggests more could be done to identify and mitigate risks for marginalised communities surrounding industrial projects and trade initiatives.³⁴ The review also identified an apparent shift in focus towards larger and more developed economies in Africa, where potential trading opportunities are stronger.³⁵

In addition, the UK aid for agriculture review³⁶ found that despite efforts to target inclusive growth and poverty reduction, some agricultural programmes have limited focus on marginalised groups, particularly in relation to climate vulnerability.³⁷ Insufficient monitoring of the outcomes and impacts of agricultural programmes on marginalised groups makes it challenging to assess the effectiveness of these interventions. For example, nutritional outcomes of agricultural programmes are often inferred as deriving from income and job creation, rather than directly monitored. This indirect approach may overlook the specific nutritional needs of marginalised or vulnerable groups.³⁸

The *Blue Planet Fund* rapid review³⁹ highlighted a lack of consultation with developing countries in the early stages of the Fund's development,⁴⁰ resulting in a portfolio impacting the Fund's ability to effectively target and reach the most vulnerable coastal populations.⁴¹ The ICF rapid review⁴² found that the UK's approach to ICF has shifted towards relying on multilateral development banks (MDBs) as an important funding channel, which may also be unsuitable for supporting the least developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS) that are most vulnerable to climate change. MDBs will mainly pass UK grants on through concessional loan terms, which are not the preferred modality of LDCs and SIDS.⁴³

It is worth repeating that the synthesis review notes that a significant proportion of the aid budget has been channelled through British International Investment (BII) in recent years, which also represents a move away from direct poverty reduction. There are limits to what can be achieved with loans or equity investment for the private sector, given that BII needs to make a return on its investments.⁴⁴

Both the July 2023 information note on UK aid to China,⁴⁵ and the March 2024 update,⁴⁶ highlight that while UK bilateral ODA to China has significantly declined since 2019 to around £8 million a year, it is not poverty-

29 *UK aid under pressure: a synthesis of ICAI findings from 2019 to 2023*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, September 2023, p.10, [link](#).

30 *UK aid under pressure: a synthesis of ICAI findings from 2019 to 2023*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, September 2023, [link](#).

31 *UK aid for trade*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, June 2023, [link](#).

32 *UK aid for trade*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, June 2023, p. 26, [link](#).

33 *UK aid for trade*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, June 2023, pp. 16-17, [link](#).

34 *UK aid for trade*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, June 2023, pp. 26-28, [link](#).

35 *UK aid for trade*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, June 2023, p. 19, [link](#).

36 *UK aid to agriculture in a time of climate change*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, June 2023, [link](#).

37 *UK aid to agriculture in a time of climate change*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, June 2023, pp. 24-25, [link](#).

38 *UK aid to agriculture in a time of climate change*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, June 2023, p. 23, [link](#).

39 *Blue Planet Fund*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, November 2023, [link](#).

40 *Blue Planet Fund*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, November 2023, pp. 7-8, [link](#).

41 *Blue Planet Fund*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, November 2023, pp. 18-19, [link](#).

42 *UK aid's international climate finance commitments*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, February 2024, [link](#).

43 *UK aid's international climate finance commitments*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, February 2024, pp. 19-20 [link](#).

44 *UK aid under pressure: a synthesis of ICAI findings from 2019 to 2023*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, September 2023, pp. 16-17, [link](#).

45 *Update on the UK's aid relationship with China*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, July 2023, [link](#).

46 *The UK's aid relationship with China up to 2023-24*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, March 2024, [link](#).

reduction-focused as it is channelled mainly through the British Council,⁴⁷ and is expected to continue at current levels for as long as the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD-DAC) deems China eligible to receive ODA funding.⁴⁸ As noted in the synthesis review, aid to India continued at much higher levels, although much of it was in the form of equity investment and loans rather than grants, and grants were mainly used for research and technical assistance. This increase was in line with the trend on aid to MICs noted in the synthesis review,⁴⁹ and in the context of reduced budget availability with a lower aid-spending commitment and diversion towards asylum seekers and refugees in the UK,⁵⁰ which has meant reduced funding to low-income countries.⁵¹ However, the 2023 White Paper signalled plans to reverse this strategic direction to a degree.⁵²

47 *The UK's aid relationship with China up to 2023-24*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, March 2024, p. 4, [link](#).

48 *The UK's aid relationship with China up to 2023-24*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, March 2024, p. 5, [link](#).

49 *UK aid under pressure: a synthesis of ICAI findings from 2019 to 2023*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, September 2023, p. 10, [link](#).

50 *ODA eligibility update to ICAI's March 2023 rapid review of UK aid to refugees in the UK*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, September 2023, [link](#).

51 *ODA eligibility update to ICAI's March 2023 rapid review of UK aid to refugees in the UK*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, September 2023, p. 50, [link](#).

52 *International development in a contested world: ending extreme poverty and tackling climate change. A white paper on international development*, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, November 2023, [link](#).

2. ICAI functions and structure

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 (IDC).

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

- carries out a small number of 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 teams – commissioners, secretariat, and suppliers – work closely together to deliver reviews. **Figure 1** summarises the roles and responsibilities of the three parts of ICAI.

The ICAI team

Dr Tamsyn Barton, ICAI's chief commissioner, leads the board of commissioners. ICAI's other commissioners are Sir Hugh Bayley and Tarek Rouchdy. The commissioners' biographies are on the ICAI website.⁵³

Ekpe Attah leads ICAI's secretariat of ten full-time-equivalent civil servants. 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 in the research for its reports during 2023-24 by an external supplier consortium led by the specialist international development consultancy Agulhas Applied Knowledge. The consortium also included Ecorys, ODI (Overseas Development Institute) and INTRAC. DAI, 3B Impact and Oxford Policy Management provided additional services outside ICAI's main external supplier contract.

Figure 1: High-level roles and responsibilities



3. Corporate governance

ICAI's commissioners, who lead both the selection process for all reviews and the work on each review, were appointed after an open recruitment process regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. They hold quarterly board meetings, the 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. ICAI's remit is to provide independent evaluation and scrutiny of the impact and value for money of all UK government ODA. This involves:

- carrying out a small number of well-prioritised, well-evidenced and credible thematic reviews on the UK government's strategic objectives for 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.

A copy of the Framework Agreement can be found [here](#).

Transition to ICAI's Fourth Commission

Our sponsoring department, FCDO, is responsible for appointing successive boards of ICAI commissioners and overseeing the procurement of our external supplier(s).

As FCDO continued to undertake the recruitment of the new commissioners for the Fourth Commission of ICAI, in September 2023 – to ensure there was no gap in the scrutiny of ODA – the department announced that it was extending the Third Commission of ICAI to the end of June 2024 and all three current commissioners would be continuing in their roles until that time.

The appointments of Liz Ditchburn and Harold Freeman as new commissioners, with effect from 1 July 2024, were [announced on 12 February](#). The appointment of the next chief commissioner was paused due to the general election campaign and is ongoing.

FCDO launched the tender process for the Fourth Commission external supplier(s) in May 2023. The process concluded in June 2024 with the signing of the supplier contract for the Phase 4 Commission. The external supplier consortium for the Fourth Commission of ICAI will again be led by Agulhas Applied Knowledge.

Risk management

The ICAI secretariat maintains a risk register which identifies and monitors ICAI's corporate risks. It is reviewed regularly by commissioners, including at every board meeting. ICAI's risk register includes an assessment of gross and net risk, mitigating actions and assigned risk owners. It includes both risks relating to the operating environment and risks inherent to the production of ICAI reviews.

Annual audit

Annually, ICAI agrees internal audit coverage based on governance, risk management and control issues. A review is then carried out by FCDO's Internal Audit Department. To ensure ICAI's operational independence is maintained, ICAI internal audit reviews are considered by FCDO's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee as part of a closed-door session.

The 2023 audit, which was finalised in July 2023, focused on ICAI's performance management of its external service provider. It found that ICAI maintains an adequate supplier performance management process, which forms part of the framework to oversee the service provision. ICAI provides challenge and scrutiny on the contractual deliverables, ensuring quality, timeliness, and veracity of information prior to the approval of milestone payments.

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 potential conflicts of interest 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.

Whistleblowing

ICAI has limited capacity to investigate concerns raised by the public and this is not part of our 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 investigation function.

Safeguarding

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

Complaint handling

Although, historically, ICAI has not been the subject of complaints, to comply more explicitly with our Framework Agreement and best practice we introduced a discrete [complaints handling process](#) in December 2023. This process is designed to be both proportionate to our role and size, and distinct from our established procedures for reporting fraud and safeguarding concerns.

As of 31 March 2024, we had received no complaints under the new procedure.

4. Financial summary

This chapter sets out:

- the overall financial position of ICAI
- expenditure for the financial year April 2023 to March 2024
- the cost of each ICAI review published in the financial year April 2023 to March 2024
- the forecast outturn to the end of Q1 2024-25 to cover the period up to the end of the Third Commission.

Overall financial position

In the financial year April 2023 to March 2024, ICAI spent £2.956 million (£1.98 million on programmes and £0.976 million on administration). This was within the FCDO-approved budget for ICAI for 2023-24, which included the costs of extending the Third Commission. This means that the total spend for the Commission from July 2019 to the end of March 2024 was £15.841 million.

Discharging ICAI's remit 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 those due for publication the following year.

Expenditure from April 2023 to March 2024

Table 2 provides a breakdown of expenditure for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

Table 2: ICAI expenditure April 2023 to March 2024

Area of spend	Actual expenditure April 2023 to March 2024
Supplier costs	£1,956,492
External engagement activities	£23,417
Total programme spending	£1,979,909
Secretariat pay costs	£670,600
Commissioners' pay and honoraria costs	£229,890
Office rent costs*	£44,000
Travel costs	£25,400
Office costs including training and stationery	£6,721
Total admin costs	£976,611
Total spend	£2,956,520

*Due to the ICAI lease moving from the Wales Office to the Government Property Agency (and the time taken to finalise the new lease), ICAI was obliged to accrue (an estimate of) £44,000 for office rental costs (rates and service). The full cost for 2023-24 is expected to be £94,000 and the balance will be paid in 2024-25.

ICAI spends most of its budget on supplier costs. In 2023-24, these supplier costs (programme spend) were £1.98 million. This included the cost of reviews and information notes, project management and communication activities.

As explained above, some of this cost is for work on reviews for publication after March 2024 to maintain the pipeline of review production. **Table 3** sets out the supplier costs to date directly attributed to each review published between April 2023 and March 2024. This includes costs paid to all suppliers involved in the production of the review. 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 April 2023 to March 2024

Review	Supplier cost
The FCDO's Programme Operating Framework (Rapid review)	£141,313
UK humanitarian aid to Afghanistan 2021-23 (Information note)	£39,117
UK aid for trade (Full review)	£383,909
UK aid to agriculture in a time of climate change (Full review)	£387,806
ICAI follow-up review of 2021-22 reports and Update on the UK's aid engagement with China	£182,543
Update on ODA eligibility of funding for refugees in the UK	£12,500
UK aid under pressure: a synthesis of ICAI findings from 2019 to 2023	£123,816
Blue Planet Fund (Rapid review)	£77,564
UK aid's international climate finance commitments (Rapid review)	£106,739
Tackling fraud in UK aid: country case studies	£162,010
The UK's aid relationship with China up to 2023-24*	£1,938

*This review was completed by the ICAI secretariat, and an external supplier undertook the design of the final document.

The variation in the costs of ICAI reviews is driven by 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 and visits may be required and the extent of citizen engagement research to discover the views of people affected by UK aid).

Forecast for remainder of Third Commission, April 2024 – June 2024

As the Third Commission ended on 30 June 2024, we have included in this year's annual report our forecast spend for April to June 2024.

Table 4: ICAI forecast expenditure April 2024 to June 2024

Area of spend	Actual expenditure April 2024 to June 2024
Supplier costs	£322,580
External engagement activities	£13,671
Total programme spending	£336,251
Secretariat pay costs	£242,500
Commissioners' pay and honoraria costs	£66,806
Office rent costs	£23,386
Travel costs	£12,699
Office costs including training and stationery	£7,788
Total admin costs	£353,179
Total spend	£689,430

Table 5: Forecast supplier cost for each review published April 2024 to June 2024

Review	Supplier cost
UK aid to Ukraine (Rapid review)	£179,992
UK aid for sustainable cities (Full review)	£352,312
The UK Department of Health and Social Care's aid-funded global health research and innovation (Full review)	£360,103
Afghanistan update information note	£32,454
UK humanitarian aid to Gaza information note	£61,077
ICAI follow-up review of 2022-23 reports	£191,948

These are the forecast full costs for each review published between April and June 2024. As mentioned above, some of these costs may have been paid in previous financial years.

5. ICAI's performance

This chapter sets out performance during the year against ICAI's key performance indicators for 2023-24.

Table 6: Performance summary 2023-24

Key performance indicator	Outcome
Proportion of ICAI recommendations accepted or partially accepted by the government	91% of recommendations were accepted or partially accepted by the government (82% were accepted and 9% partially accepted)
Proportion of ICAI recommendations actioned by the government	Progress on 57% of recommendations rated as adequate based on the 2024 follow-up review
Change in government practice due to ICAI reviews	Verified through the follow-up review process (and set out in more detail in the annual follow-up review)
International Development Committee (IDC) satisfaction with ICAI	Parliamentary stakeholders, including 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 budget

Government responses to ICAI reviews

The government has six weeks to publish a response to an ICAI review. By the end of March 2024, we had received responses from the government for five of our reviews published during 2023-24.⁵⁴ The government does not formally respond to information notes. In government responses received by ICAI in 2023-24, the government accepted 19 of ICAI's recommendations, partially accepted two and rejected two.

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. Based on the follow-up review published in May 2024, ICAI's assessment is that 57% of recommendations had been adequately progressed and 43% had not. ICAI will publish its next follow-up review in 2025.

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 hearings in relation to our reviews or contributions to IDC inquiry evidence sessions.

Commissioners took part in two evidence sessions with the Committee during the reporting period.

In April 2023, Chief Commissioner Tamsyn Barton gave evidence to the IDC in a general session on the work of ICAI, covering its budget, staffing, independence and future, as well as discussing reviews including *The UK's approach to democracy and human rights* and *The UK's approaches to peacebuilding*. Tamsyn Barton appeared before the IDC again in January 2024 to give evidence on our review, *UK aid under pressure: a synthesis of ICAI findings from 2019 to 2023*. Both sessions were chaired by Theo Clarke MP.

54 Government responses to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) reports - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

ICAI continues to work with Parliament to consider how it can continue to support scrutiny by MPs and Peers of government aid spending. Over the past year we have provided private briefings for the IDC on the findings of ICAI reviews. We also continue to work with other Parliamentary Committees and All-Party Parliamentary Groups, to brief them on the findings of relevant ICAI reviews, and proactively share our work with the Parliamentary Libraries to help inform their briefings.

External engagement

ICAI's remit includes ensuring our work is accessible to the public. ICAI has continued to prioritise strategic engagement with all its key audiences – the government, Parliament, the aid sector, and the public – to promote interest in and the impact of its reviews. Positive and proactive engagement has taken place for each ICAI publication, with aid sector stakeholders regularly consulted at all stages in the review cycle, through evidence-gathering roundtables and workshops, briefings, and events.

Events

ICAI endeavours to run a full programme of events to maximise the impact of its work and increase understanding and learning around its findings. We participated in or arranged more than 15 events over the past year.

ICAI worked successfully with partners to organise external events, covering several review topics. In July 2023, Sir Hugh Bayley hosted the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) and colleagues for an event with the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) looking at lessons to be learned from Afghanistan that could be applied to other conflicts around the world. Sir Hugh Bayley and SIGAR also addressed MPs and Peers on the topic at a briefing hosted by the UK Delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

In September 2023, we partnered with the University of Glasgow and Farm Africa to organise an event on ICAI's review of *UK aid to agriculture in a time of climate change*, led by Tamsyn Barton.

Commissioners also took part in staff learning events for FCDO, with Tamsyn Barton discussing our synthesis review in September 2023, looking at developments in UK aid between 2019 and 2023. In November 2023, Tarek Rouchdy spoke at an event on our review of FCDO's Programme Operating Framework.

In addition, we arranged a variety of evidence-gathering focus groups and pre-publication briefings and took advantage of external speaking opportunities. For example, in June 2023, Sir Hugh Bayley took part in a water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) symposium at Imperial College London, discussing ICAI's information note on this topic. In February 2024, Tamsyn Barton gave opening remarks at an event on the UK's role in global health, co-hosted by the Center for Global Development and the British Medical Journal. In March 2024, Tamsyn Barton participated in an event for SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) students alongside Carsten Staur, Chair of the OECD Development Assistance Committee.

During the year we arranged nine pre-publication briefings with stakeholders working throughout the development sector, for reviews and information notes on topics including *UK humanitarian aid to Afghanistan*, *UK aid for trade*, and the implications of the Illegal Migration Act for aid funding for refugees in the UK.

More recently, we organised an event on our review of *UK aid's international climate finance commitments* in partnership with British Expertise International (BEI) in April 2024.

We are grateful to all our panellists and partner organisations for helping to make our 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 May 2023, our information note on humanitarian aid to Afghanistan was covered by outlets including the Press Association, Politico and the Independent, with a potential reach of more than 1.5 million people. In June 2023, our review of *UK aid for trade* was covered by Devex and the Morning Star.

In July 2023, our update on UK aid engagement with China was widely covered by national and trade media, generating eight media articles in outlets such as the Daily Mail, the Independent, Devex, the Daily Express and the Daily Telegraph. Sir Hugh Bayley was interviewed about the report on LBC's breakfast show.

Our work on aid funding for refugees in the UK also continued to attract strong media attention in the past year. An update on the issue we published in September 2023 was widely covered across national, regional and trade media including the Financial Times, the Daily Mail, the Times, and BBC Radio 4's Today programme. Our report was also the lead story on an episode of the News Agents, a podcast from the Global media company that frequently tops UK charts, introducing ICAI's work to new and wider audiences.

In September 2023, our synthesis review that drew together themes from the past four years of scrutinising UK aid was featured on the BBC's Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg, during which the presenter questioned the then foreign secretary on its findings. Along with coverage by the Press Association that was picked up across national and regional media, as well as write-ups by trade outlets Civil Service World and UK Fundraising, this review reached a potential audience of more than two million people.

Most recently, our February 2024 review of *UK aid's international climate finance commitments* was covered by the Guardian, the Press Association (picked up across many regional titles) and the Independent, as well as trade outlets Devex, Edie, Carbon Brief, Climate Home News and Business Green, reaching as many as two million people.

Our work on aid to China also continued to attract significant interest, with our March 2024 update covered by national newspapers including the Daily Mail, the Daily Express, the Daily Telegraph and the Independent.

ICAI's social media channels continue to grow, with around 7,100 followers on X (formerly Twitter) and more than 1,500 followers on LinkedIn, up 400 on last year.

More than 118,000 people visited our website in the last year. Our most viewed web page was our country portfolio review of UK aid to India, published in the previous reporting year, with 38,000 views driven by traffic from Google searches. Of publications this reporting year, the most viewed was our news story about the July 2023 *Update on the UK's aid engagement with China*, with around 3,000 views.

ICAI's work plan April 2024 to March 2025

ICAI's Fourth Commission will run from July 2024 until June 2028 and the work plan will be determined by the incoming board. Between April and July 2024 ICAI had a full work programme, published on our [website](#), which included reviews on sustainable cities, global health research and innovation, UK aid to Ukraine and information notes on UK aid to Gaza and Afghanistan.



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

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