



*Dear Secretary of State*

20 July 2016

## **International development R&D**

On behalf of the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology, of which I am the chairman, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Secretary of State for International Development.

Last week on 12 July the Committee held two oral evidence sessions on the Government funding of international development research and development. The full transcripts of the session can be viewed here – <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/science-and-technology-committee/other-work/parliament-2015/government-funding-of-international-development-rd/>

We heard much of interest during the sessions which we may follow-up at a later date. There was however one issue which we consider sufficiently pressing for me to write to you about it now. This is the distribution of funding for international development research across different Government departments and how this will be coordinated effectively.

We were greatly encouraged to hear the positive views from our panel of expert witnesses about DFID's funding of international development research. We also heard about the very important leadership role DFID plays in driving thinking on international development. In its Research Advisory Committee, DFID has a robust structure in place for scrutinising its research strategy. It would be useful for this advisory committee to have a more public profile, in recognition of its important role.

We note that in the November 2015 spending review, the Government announced a new Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) of £1.5 billion over 5 years as well as a £1 billion Ross Fund to tackle infectious diseases. This additional funding is to be welcomed. As we heard during our evidence session: "these various funds that have been available for Global Challenges, Ross and sub-groups within that have the ability over the coming years to push the UK's leadership in this space to a new level and actually transform the landscape."<sup>1</sup>

The GCRF is funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills whilst the Ross Fund will be managed by DFID and the Department for Health. These funds mean that other Government departments now fund at least as much international development R&D as

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<sup>1</sup> [O7](#) (Dr Jeremy Farrar)

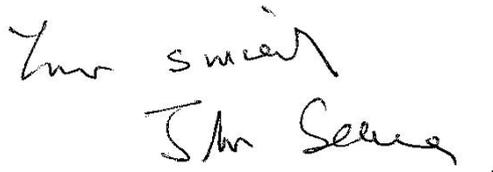
DFID. It is important that these funds are seen as additional to DFID’s own research budget as they will operate in a different way.

The distribution of funding across different Government departments raises questions about cross Government coherence and strategy for international development research. Professor Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, Dr Jeremy Farrar OBE, Professor Sir John Beddington and Professor Melissa Leach all told us that overall scrutiny of this funding is vital. Dr Farrar said there was an “absolutely critical need to have an overarching body that brings together those departments so that there is a co-ordinated mechanism and that these are not seen as siloed elements. We have heard the importance of cross-sectoral work and interdisciplinarity. The danger of giving little bits of larger funds to individual silos, potentially, is that you will not get that joined-up approach.”<sup>2</sup> Professor Sir Leszek Borysiewicz explained that these funds “will need a level of scrutiny that is different from the level of scrutiny that is currently required. That level of scrutiny must be significant enough, because once the funds are transferred they are transferred into the budget lines of ... whichever department it might go to... It then behoves someone to say, “Are these fundamentally being used for the purpose for which they were intended?”<sup>3</sup>

We share the view that there should be a body tasked with scrutinising the funding of international development research across Government. The UK already commands international respect in this field and it is essential – if we are to maintain this enviable position – that the UK is seen to spend this money judiciously and well. We heard that the Office for Strategic Co-ordination of Health Research in the UK offered a good model for this kind of cross-departmental scrutiny. Dr Farrar, whilst declaring an interest as a member of the OSCHR board, told us that it had, “played a very important role in bringing together the various components for health research in England and in the devolved nations to make sure that across the health research piece there is a forum through which these debates can be had and that the different elements are then represented and know what is happening to each other.”<sup>4</sup>

We urge the Government to give careful consideration to how it can ensure its approach to funding international development research is joined up across Government. We do not take a view here as to whether this function should be awarded to a new or an existing group, or on the lines of reporting. We look forward, however, to hearing further from the Government about the arrangements it will be putting in place.

I am copying this letter to Jeremy Hunt, Secretary of State for Health and Greg Clark, Secretary of State for Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The top signature is 'Lord Smith' and the bottom signature is 'Lord Selborne'. Both are written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**EARL OF SELBORNE**

Chairman of the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee

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<sup>2</sup> [Q7](#) (Dr Jeremy Farrar)

<sup>3</sup> [Q7](#) (Professor Sir Leszek Borysiewicz)

<sup>4</sup> [Q7](#) (Dr Jeremy Farrar)

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