



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Andrew Mitchell MP  
Minister for Development and Africa  
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office  
King Charles Street  
London  
SW1A 2AH

Our reference: BS28148

14 September 2023

By email: [DevelopmentWhitePaper@fcdo.gov.uk](mailto:DevelopmentWhitePaper@fcdo.gov.uk); [fcdo.correspondence@fcdo.gov.uk](mailto:fcdo.correspondence@fcdo.gov.uk)

Dear Andrew,

I write in response to your call for evidence in relation the UK international development white paper (the “Call for Evidence”).

The ability of the UK to realise international cooperation in areas of vital importance such as climate change, research and innovation, and increasing access to education are policy priorities of which I am strongly supportive. Many of the challenges we face are not defined by, or limited to, national borders. It is by working together on these issues that we can achieve the best results for all.

Recent international events have also highlighted how the UK’s security – from an economic, energy, military or climate perspective – is intrinsically linked with that of the international community. The war in Ukraine has led to inflation in global energy and food prices, and exposed vulnerabilities in supply chains for essential commodities and products. We need to ensure that our approach to international development supports our security by building supply chains and supporting green industries and initiatives with our partners in the developing world and beyond.

We know that in times of financial challenge resource for overseas aid is constrained, and this can have a real impact on communities around the world in dire need. Ensuring an efficient, co-ordinated programme which can deliver maximum output in a sustainable way must therefore be a priority. Development aid must be focused in a way which not only delivers help where it is most needed, but in a way which fosters cooperation to help the UK to achieve its vital international aims, as set out in the International Development Strategy and the Integrated Review Refresh 2023.

I also wish to address some of the more detailed issues in your Call for Evidence, as set out below.

### **Multilateral and bilateral action**

Many of the global issues we face; climate change, illness and disease, and food and energy security, will rely on science and tech for solutions. These sectors cannot operate in domestic siloes, and international co-operation will be required.

In this regard, I welcome the Government’s support for Britain’s role as a research and science superpower. I am delighted by the news that the UK is rejoining the Horizon research programme. I have consistently called for the UK to have access to this programme, raising the matter with the Chancellor, Science Minister and the Prime Minister directly. This development will boost our science and tech sector, as well as support growth, innovation and international cooperation to meet the global challenges we face.

The UK already has thriving local and national centres of research and innovation including Royal Holloway University within my constituency. Rejoining Horizon means that the UK is better placed to encourage development and co-operation in this area through supporting these sectors in developing nations.

One key area within our work to tackle climate change and achieve Net Zero is the challenge around the aviation sector. As you know, my constituency is situated in close proximity to Heathrow airport. Both I and my constituents are acutely aware of the economic and environmental impacts of the UK's vibrant aviation industry, with Heathrow at its centre.

The International Energy Agency estimates that, in 2022, aviation accounted for 2% of global energy-related CO2 emissions, having grown faster in recent decades than rail, road or shipping. Decarbonising this form of transport will play a vital role in tackling climate change.

Against this background, I recently responded to the Government's consultation on a pathway to Net Zero Aviation and developing the UK sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) mandate, a copy of which is enclosed. In my response, I highlighted that international cooperation is crucial for achieving the Government's ambitious aims to decarbonise the aviation sector, as well as the ability of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to realise its commitment to a goal of net zero CO2 emissions from international aviation by 2050.

Planes using SAF will of course need to refuel abroad, and there will need to be joint agreements and common standards to ensure that airlines cannot opt to use tankering, i.e. taking on additional fuel to avoid having to pay the additional SAF costs from refuelling in the UK or other jurisdictions where an SAF mandate is in effect. It is concerning that the independent analysis of the EU SAF mandate indicates that tankering could reduce the emissions savings by 27% in 2035 if no provisions to reduce tankering are introduced.

The Call for Evidence rightly recognises that there is often tension between development and environmental aims. Pathways must be created to incentivise participation in the adoption of SAF at a global scale. One way in which this could be achieved is by examining the investment opportunities for lower and middle-income countries to foster industries to support sustainable aviation.

A recent paper by the International Air Transport Association IATA (which can be found here: [www.iata.org/en/iata-repository/pressroom/presentations/sustainable-aviation-fuel-agm-2023/](http://www.iata.org/en/iata-repository/pressroom/presentations/sustainable-aviation-fuel-agm-2023/)) highlights the need for diversification of SAF feedstocks, and a particular need to support robust feedstock supply chains deriving from forestry residues and food/municipal solid waste.

Support for the establishment and growth of these industries in developing countries is one way in which these countries can be supported to share equally in the economic and environmental benefits which will flow from reform in this key area of reform.

### **Big Ideas and Innovation**

The Call for Evidence identifies the key potential that new technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) have for supporting our international development aims.

The UK is quickly forging its role as a key international player in innovation, regulation, and cooperation in the field of AI. The UK is currently one of only three countries in the world to have a tech industry valued at more than \$1 trillion. Of course, our world-leading universities and research institutions play a vital role in this. I am strongly supportive of the Prime Minister's work in this area which has led to the UK being host of the first major global summit on AI safety this autumn.

The capacity of technological innovation to achieve positive environmental and social outcomes is an issue which is extremely important to me and my constituency. Runnymede and Weybridge is home to a number of high-tech companies operating in the field of greener technology, including Octopus EV and several Tesla sites.

My local university, Royal Holloway (RHUL), has a proud history of AI research. Its Department of Computer Science is one of the oldest computer science departments in the world, and includes world-leading researchers in algorithms and complexity, artificial intelligence, bioinformatics, distributed and global computing, machine learning, software language engineering and type theory.

RHUL recently submitted a response to the Government's consultation on regulation of the AI industry. In its response, RHUL highlights the huge potential for AI to contribute positively to meeting the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, including in relation to health, safety, security, education, environmental sustainability and future prosperity.

I have attached a copy of RHUL's consultation response and I have written to the university to make them aware of this Call for Evidence and to suggest convening a meeting with your department to discuss how AI tools could be deployed in practice to support the UK to meet its development objectives. I will write to you further on this when I have received a response.

### **Climate and development: Support for tech and renewables supply chains**

The Call for Evidence identifies the supply chain vulnerabilities that have been exposed by the conflict in Ukraine and the covid pandemic. Ongoing tensions in the South China Sea also represent a concern for supply chains related to our technology security. These issues highlight the importance of strengthening our trading partnerships for everyday goods such as food and energy as well as the raw materials to fuel our tech industries.

As highlighted, our science and tech industries will be vital to our future economy and our ability to address a number of critical challenges we face, such as supporting and growing our renewable energy industries, developing sustainable and plentiful food production to reduce hunger, and combatting the threat of future pandemics and disease.

In addition to greater investment and co-operation, we therefore also need to ensure that the resource required, and key supply chains, are both protected and enhanced. Where our development strategies can also bolster our supply chains for commodities such as rare earth metals - which are vital to our tech, renewables and construction industries - this will represent a double-win.

A recent paper by the British Foreign Policy Group highlights the potential to expand on our existing trade relationship with Vietnam, as the world's largest exporter of Rare Earth Elements (REE) in the form of ores which have multiple applications across the energy transition, net zero and supply chain resilience areas of national security. Although the report is high level, and further detail is required, it highlights the clear potential for investment in areas such as the processing of REE ores to increase yield and export capacity. The report can be viewed here: [www.bfpg.co.uk/2023/03/rare-earths-a-case-for-closer-trading-relationships-between-uk-vietnam/](http://www.bfpg.co.uk/2023/03/rare-earths-a-case-for-closer-trading-relationships-between-uk-vietnam/)

This aligns clearly with the robust work that the Government has done in securing our pivot towards the Indo-Pacific region in accordance with the Integrated Review, including securing Dialogue Partner status with ASEAN and acceding to the CPTPP free trade agreement.

In summary, I am fully supportive of the Government's vision for aligning its development strategy with the UK's key international aims including tackling climate change, securing and building our international partnerships to withstand aggression and disruption, and securing our supply chains. A co-ordinated approach in these areas will not only support the UK's key economic and diplomatic aims, but will also help to ensure that increased prosperity and security is shared with our partners in the developing world.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to discuss the issues raised in this response in further detail.

Yours ever,

*BEN SPENCER*

**Dr Ben Spencer MP**  
**Runnymede and Weybridge**