

Official Development Assistance & Research: Eligibility & Good Practice

This document is aimed at researchers across UCL — especially those new to research tackling development challenges and collaborative research with partners from developing countries — who are applying for funding under the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) or the Newton Fund (NF) and other funding which is Official Development Assistance (ODA) compliant. It provides a list of useful questions to consider when putting together proposals to either of these Funds (Boxes 1-4), which highlight particular features of the GCRF and NF: ODA compliance, importance & impact, and good & ethical practice. If you are unsure as to what the answers to any of these questions should be, you are strongly encouraged to discuss them with your relevant Research Coordinator or Facilitator within the Office of the Vice-Provost: Research¹ (OVPR).

Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) & the Newton Fund

1. Research supporting overseas development is becoming an increasingly significant component of the overall UK Science Budget. After the introduction of the **Newton Fund** in 2014, supporting research in partnership with 17 developing countries, the UK Government launched the **Global Challenges Research Fund** (GCRF) in 2016. The GCRF, to be delivered by the Research Councils, the National Academies and Research England, will be worth around £1.5B over 5 years (2016/17 — 2020/21). The budget for the Newton Fund for the same period is £435M. Importantly, all research supported by the two Funds will need to qualify, under rules set down by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as **Official Development Assistance** (ODA). Together, the two Funds provide an opportunity for UK based researchers from a wide range of disciplines — including those that have never done before — to engage in research that supports overseas development.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) Definition

2. To be counted as **Official Development Assistance (ODA)** all activities, research or otherwise, must qualify under [rules](#) (a definition and a list of directives) set down by the [OECD](#). To do so the activity must have the establishment of economic development and welfare of one or more developing countries as its **primary** objective. Funding must be provided by an official government agency, and must be concessional in nature (i.e. primarily in the form of grants rather than loans). Military aid is excluded, as is support for refugees from developing countries beyond the first 12 months staying in a high income country.
3. In particular, to be ODA-eligible, the OECD [states](#) that **research projects** should be "directly and **primarily** related to the problems of developing countries". It also states that "costs may still be counted as ODA if the research is carried out in a developed country". For the purposes of ODA, developing countries are defined by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD. The **DAC list of developing countries**, categorised from low income to middle income, can be found [here](#). The list is updated every three years so countries may move on and off the list. The current list will govern ODA flows in 2018, 2019 and 2020.
4. The **key questions** to consider when assessing whether a particular project is compliant with ODA rules are as follows in Box 1:

- Is the project or activity addressing the economic development and welfare of one or more developing countries? Is this its primary motivation?
- Is the developing country in question on the OECD-DAC list?
- Is the primary beneficiary developing countries OR developing *and* developed countries?
- Also consider: Is the country likely to be remain on the DAC list for the entire timescale of the funding?

¹ For contact details, see "Useful links"

Box 1: Essential questions to consider in determining whether your proposal is ODA compliant

5. In both the GCRF and Newton Fund, ODA compliance checks will likely be carried out by the relevant funder both before and during peer review. Under many GCRF and Newton Fund schemes, funders will likely request a specific statement in which applicants outline their case for ODA eligibility. Proposals that funders judge not to meet ODA eligibility may be rejected without reference to peer review.

Interpretation of the ODA definition

6. Despite the OECD definition of ODA, there is still some room for variation in how it will be interpreted by different funders with respect to the research activities they fund. It is always worth referring to the specific guidance for the relevant funder and call before applying. For example, In 2016 RCUK (now UKRI) and the Academies published [joint guidance on ODA eligibility](#) relevant to the GCRF. The guidance reiterates that research funded under the GCRF must have as its "**primary purpose**" to "promote the economic development and welfare of a developing counties or countries". It states that applicants should:

- Seek to investigate a specific problem or seek a specific outcome which will have an impact on a developing country or countries on the DAC list;
- Provide evidence as to why this is a problem for the developing country or countries;
- Address the issue identified effectively and efficiently;
- Use the strengths of the UK to address the issue, working in collaboration with others as appropriate;
- Demonstrate that the research is of an internationally excellent standard;
- Identify appropriate pathways to impact to ensure that the developing country benefits from the research.

7. There are two areas, in particular, in which the interpretation of ODA eligibility might vary across funders:
8. The **first** is in terms of how the requirement for "**primary**" **relevance** to development challenges is interpreted. Proposals clearly addressing challenges primarily relevant to developing country contexts (e.g. illiteracy, tuberculosis, malaria) will generally qualify, as would research addressing challenges also faced by the developed world where the resulting knowledge or solution is specifically tailored to a particular developing country context. Examples of the latter would be a project on brownfield site remediation where technology was being developed to remove a toxic chemical particular prevalent in China or India; or a project looking to inform treatments for type II diabetes in the context of particular socio-cultural factors in Bangladesh.
9. The **second** area of potential ambiguity is in terms of whether research **capacity building activities** (i.e. aimed at developing research skills, knowledge and infrastructure in one or more developing countries) are, in themselves, allowable as ODA. For example, the UKRI guidance states that: "The fund can support research capacity building to address development issues, for example, to increase the skills and knowledge base and support the development of the research capability within developing countries. Capacity building should be aimed at improving the ability to undertake and disseminate research *"in order to promote the welfare and economic development of the developing countries."* However, under that definition, there still remains ambiguity as to whether all areas of research are seen to "promote the welfare and economic development" of the relevant country or countries, or whether capacity building activities should be limited to areas of research which meet the primary relevance criterion above. Under the widest interpretation, capacity building activities would be eligible irrespective of the area of research, and would include (for example) fellowships in pure mathematics and particle physics. This is the approach taken, for example, by the Royal Society under

the Newton Fund. However, other funding agencies have taken the narrower definition².

10. Where there is ambiguity as to whether a proposal qualifies as ODA, it is likely that funders will defer decisions to reviewers and panel members. However, in most cases, the burden will be on the applicant to make a clear case in their proposal for why their proposed project or activity does qualify as ODA.

Impact & importance

11. Within the UK, peer reviewers for the Research Councils and other major funders are experienced in making judgments of **impact and importance**: what is the nature and scale of the potential benefit of the proposed project to society and the economy, and how appropriate are the plans laid out in the proposals to maximise the chance that those benefits will be realised. Because of the overall intention of the GCRF and the Newton Fund to contribute to global development challenges, it is likely that criteria related to impact and importance are going to be weighted even more heavily than usual within peer review assessments. Therefore, beyond demonstrating ODA compliance, all applicants will have to make a clear case for the relative importance of their proposed activity, and show that they have identified clear pathways to impact.
12. Depending on the scope of the specific funding opportunity, peer reviewer panels could end up having to make difficult decisions between projects — of comparable research excellence and intellectual merit — which tackle completely different development challenges (e.g. water infrastructure vs. energy infrastructure, malaria vs. TB, and so on). In making the case for the relative **importance** of a project or activity, applicants should consider the following:

- Is the project or activity driven by developmental needs of one or more developing country/ies? Is there clear evidence of that developmental need? Is the research in line with the national development priorities and strategies of the developing country or countries in question? Can you provide references for these (e.g., reports, websites)?
- How many people in how many countries does the relevant development challenge affect?
- Is the project consistent with UK international development strategy?
- Is the project consistent with international development strategies (e.g., UN Sustainable Development Goals, UN Paris 2015 Climate Change agreement, UN Agreement on Disaster Risk Reduction)?
- Who are the primary beneficiaries of the project within the country? Will the primary benefit of the project be to the poorest people in the country or countries in question? Would the project lead to a reduction in poverty? Will the project lead to benefits which are fairly distributed?
- Will the project or activity be sustainable?
- Will the research help build skills in areas of need identified by the country, in terms of addressing development challenges in future?
- Is the area of research in question a strategic priority for the country or countries in question in terms of capacity building? What are the priority areas of the country's research funding agencies?
- Is the project consistent with the research priorities of the relevant UK funder, both specifically for the GCRF and Newton Fund, and in general?
- Is this the project about finding a new problem and context for an existing technological solution? If so, is the technology going to be appropriate for the context? Is there likely to be a cheaper solution in practice, which might be non-technical?
- Is the project about taking an existing model or research methodology and looking for a new context in which to apply it (less important), or does it start with the needs of the relevant developing country (more important)?

Box 2: Questions to consider in making the case for the importance of a GCRF or Newton Fund project

² However, whether or not it is allowable as a primary objective, capacity building in developing countries is still likely to be encouraged by all funders as a secondary objective of activities under the GCRF and Newton Fund.

13. In terms of showing clear plans for delivering **impact**, as well as following general good practice, applicants should consider the following:

- What would success for this activity look like? How will success or impact be measured and monitored?
- Is there a clear pathway, or pathways, to development impact?
- Have you thought about the local context (relevant organisations, governing bodies, language(s), culture etc.) in terms of your knowledge exchange and dissemination strategy?
- Have individuals and stakeholders from one or more developing countries been involved in developing ideas for the project? Do you have sufficient understanding of the relevant local context for the research?
- Will there be participation in the project from developing country researchers or other stakeholders? Have you found the most appropriate developing country partners to work with or the easiest?
- Is the partnership with the developing country a dialogue involving the exchange of information in both directions? How will knowledge be co-produced?
- What are your plans for maximising the benefit of the activity in terms of building research capacity?
- Have you got the right balance between research and impact activities in the overall project? Is there too much focus on the former or the latter?

Box 3: Questions to consider in developing and presenting pathways to impact

Good & ethical practice

14. Within the Newton Fund and the GCRF, there is potential for **tensions** to arise between notions of importance to developing countries, and importance and impact to the UK. This has the potential to lead to tensions between the usual requirements of a particular funder (for example, the requirement of all EPSRC proposals to include a statement on "National Importance"), and the specific requirements of the GCRF. A particular example of this is around the handling and exploitation of intellectual property. For example, where there is likely to be resultant IP, most funders would expect the UK to own and exploit that IP for national economic advantage. However, that is unlikely to be appropriate in the context of the GCRF. It will be important for applicants to be aware of these tensions, and try and balance them appropriately.
15. While the UK ODA spend remains 0.7% of Gross national income (GNI), the establishment of GCRF will see diversion of funding from other development activities to research, potentially diverting traditional support away from the world's poorest. As such, some peer reviewers may feel that applicants have a **moral responsibility** to undertake research under the Newton Fund and the GCRF which is not only excellent but which is also **ethical, genuinely beneficial, and impactful**. In general, working with people from different countries, particularly developing countries, may bring additional considerations beyond national codes of research ethics.
16. Within the Newton Fund and the GCRF, **partnership** with local organisations will generally be very important in terms of understanding context, leveraging support and expertise, providing pathways to impact, enabling larger and wider interventions, and so on. It will be important to build trust with new partners and to establish a common sense of purpose, and this will take time. Colleagues already doing work within the relevant country may be able to help with identifying partners, as should the regional Partnership Manager in the UCL Global Engagement Office, and the OVPR's ODA Partnerships Officer. The Universities UK International Unit, for example, also provides a partner finding service (see Useful Links below).
17. In general, in considering **good and ethical practice** with respect to research in a developing country context, applicants should consider the following:

- Have you taken enough time to really understand the development challenge and the context for the research?
- Is your project consistent with international good research practice? Have you considered both UK and local ethical issues in terms of carrying out research within the relevant country? How will you manage any tensions between the two?
- Have you considered whether your research methods are appropriate? Will the developing country context require challenging existing research methods and practice?
- If there is IP development involved in the project, will the country in question be able to exploit or benefit from that IP (e.g. through co-ownership of foreground IP or licencing on cost-free or privileged terms)?
- Will engaging or employing particular skilled individuals from the developing country on the project take them away from other important duties or responsibilities? Does the project have the potential to exhaust limited research capacity or expertise in the particular country or location?
- How will you manage expectations, especially of local participants in the research, of what your research project will actually deliver and what benefit it will bring to them in the short term?
- Have you identified the *right* local partners? Is there potential for harm to come from working with local researchers or organisations that are not the most suitable?
- Is the partnership with the developing country a dialogue involving the exchange of information in both directions? How will knowledge be co-produced?
- How will you manage any tension between national interests and the needs of developing countries? Is national UK interest subordinated to that of the developing country in question?

Box 4: Questions to consider in terms of good & ethical practice when working on development challenges in a developing country context

Other practicalities

18. *UCL Worktribe*: When completing Worktribe for a research project it is important that applicants or the supporting administrator capture ODA funding sources by selecting the relevant tag in worktribe.

19. *Due diligence*: Recipients of ODA funding are required to carry out appropriate due diligence checks on third parties (overseas partners) who undertake activities funded by a grant.

UCL Due Diligence Process is integrated with Risk Assessment in Worktribe. On the Worktribe Risk Assessment it is important to include information with regard to your overseas partners under Q6. A full UCL Due Diligence Policy is expected to be launched in early 2019. Please contact your school research facilitation team or UCL Research Services for further guidance and information.

20. *Working with international partners*: in particular those in lower income countries, entails a particular set of practical and administrative challenges. Once the grant is awarded, this might include issues around the payment and monitoring of subcontracts, drawing up suitable collaboration agreements and handling any IP, making payments overseas, exchange rate fluctuations, acquiring visas for visiting researchers, travel insurance booking tickets and accommodation, and so on. It is recommended that you discuss these issues early with your departmental administrators and other relevant professional services staff. The ODA Due Diligence Officer also may be able to help you determine the risks associated with initiating research with a particular institution or country.

21. *Project Management*: Given the nature of the work and the complexities of managing the administrative processes that are integral to projects with ODA funding we **recommend** including project management costs as part of your application if this is an allowable cost. In many cases these costs are eligible under the terms and conditions within these funding streams, particularly for GCRF funding. Duties could include, for example, third party financial and administrative oversight, health and safety and duty of care monitoring, monitoring of ODA compliance and supporting the highly complex, large-scale, multi-partner nature of the work.

ODA reporting

22. Governments report all ODA spend to OECD on a calendar year basis. For funders, under the GCRF and Newton Fund, this entails a strand of reporting which is separate to the usual financial reporting to BEIS and the Treasury on a financial year basis. Therefore, it is worth noting that research funding under the GCRF will likely entail additional reporting, beyond the usual reporting requirements of the relevant funder. These should be outlined in the relevant conditions of any grant award.

Useful links

Funding Opportunities

- GCRF: <https://www.ukri.org/research/global-challenges-research-fund/>
- Newton: <https://www.newtonfund.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/>
- Other calls with an international element: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/International/funding-and-opportunities/Pages/gateway-to-international-opportunities.aspx>
- UCL ODA Funding [Mailing List](#).
Newsletters includes details of any major funding calls, funder events and internal and external policy or process changes. Sent approximately twice a term

UCL Office for the Vice-Provost (Research): <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/research>

- BEAMS School Research Coordination Office: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/research/beamsfunding>
- SLASH / IoE Research Facilitators: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/research/contact/teams/slash-rf>
- SLMS Research Coordinators and Facilitators: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/school-life-medical-sciences/about-slms/office-vice-provost-health/research-coordination-office/who-we-are>
- Contact details for all OVPR staff: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/research/contact>

UCL Global Engagement Office: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/global>

- Searchable map of current UCL research collaborations by country (data from IRIS): <http://iris.ucl.ac.uk/iris/browse/map/world>
- Contact details for Regional Partnership Managers: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/global/contact-us>

OECD: <http://www.oecd.org>

- DAC list of Lower & Middle Income (ODA eligible) countries: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/daclist.htm>
- Official ODA definition and coverage: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/officialdevelopmentassisteddefinitionandcoverage.htm>
- Further guidance on ODA including directives on research: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/34086975.pdf>

United Nations: <http://www.un.org>

- United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>
- UN Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction: <https://www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/wcdrr>

HM Government: <https://www.gov.uk>

- UK Aid Strategy 2015: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478834/ODA_strategy_final_web_0905.pdf
- Department for International Development: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-international-development>
- UK Science Budget (including overall GCRF budget allocation): https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/505308/bis-16-160-allocation-science-research-funding-2016-17-2019-20.pdf

UKRI Global Challenges Research Fund: <https://www.ukri.org/research/global-challenges-research-fund>

- Challenge Leaders: <https://www.ukri.org/research/global-challenges-research-fund/gcrf-challenge-leaders/>
- ODA Guidance: <https://www.ukri.org/files/legacy/international/gcrfodaguidance-pdf/>

- Due Diligence Guidance <https://www.ukri.org/files/funding/due-diligence-guidance-for-ukros-pdf/>
- UK Strategy for the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) <https://www.ukri.org/files/legacy/research/gcrf-strategy-june-2017/>

Newton Fund: <http://www.newtonfund.ac.uk>

- List of funding opportunities across the Fund: <http://www.newtonfund.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities>
- Guidance on ODA: <http://www.newtonfund.ac.uk/about/what-is-oda>
- Royal Academy of Engineering schemes: <http://www.raeng.org.uk/grants-and-prizes/international-research-and-collaborations/newton-fund-programmes>
- Royal Society schemes: <https://royalsociety.org/grants-schemes-awards>
- British Academy schemes: <http://www.britac.ac.uk/tag/newton-fund>
- British Council schemes: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/science/newton>
- Academy of Medical Sciences schemes: <https://acmedsci.ac.uk/grants-and-schemes/grant-schemes>

UK Collaborative on Development Research (UKCDR): <https://www.ukcdr.org.uk/>

- "Researcher Hub" (Support for researchers involved in development science): <https://www.ukcdr.org.uk/guidance/researcher-hub/>

Overview of major funding opportunities in development research (including GCRF, DFID and Newton Fund): <https://www.ukcdr.org.uk/funding-landscape/major-funding-programmes/>

Universities UK International Unit: <http://www.international.ac.uk>

- Support for finding a collaborator (with the British Council): <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/International/funding-and-opportunities/newton/Pages/finding-a-collaborator-form.aspx>
- Newton Fund "Network": <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/International/funding-and-opportunities/Pages/newton-fund.aspx>

We would be very grateful for any comments or suggestions for improvements to this document. Please send them to:

SLASH / IOE: Henriette Bruun, Director of Research Facilitation - h.bruun@ucl.ac.uk

Jacob Leveridge, Deputy Director of Research Facilitation - j.leveridge@ucl.ac.uk

Steve Morrison, School Research Facilitator – s.morrison@ucl.ac.uk

SLMS: Helen Hopkins – h.hopkins@ucl.ac.uk

BEAMS: Jennifer Hazelton – j.hazelton@ucl.ac.uk

This version 2.0: UCL

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Version 1.1	July 2016		
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