



Foreign, Commonwealth  
& Development Office

## **CALL FOR PROPOSALS**

### **FROM NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS TO ESTABLISH A COMMISSIONING CENTRE FOR FCDO FUNDED RESEARCH**

#### **FCDO Statement of Need**

**September 2022**

#### **1. Programme Summary**

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) will invest up to £25 million over five years to improve operational delivery and value for money of FCDO Research & Development (R&D) investments, in line with the Independent Review of Research Bureaucracy recommendations, published in July 2022<sup>1</sup>, and the ambition set out in the International Development Strategy, published in May 2022. This will be delivered by establishing a Commissioning Centre (CC) for FCDO research and developing a streamlined process for delivery of FCDO research. Therefore, the Commissioning Centre lead will be expected to have the infrastructure and capacity to manage research calls in any thematic area in development and diplomacy research, with a particular focus on FCDO's current key priority areas. A specialist function within the Commissioning Centre will support with designing research and uptake strategies; and will establish a centralised platform for FCDO research results collation and communication. The delivery mechanism for the programme will be an accountable grant following open and transparent call for proposals. The improved delivery model will reduce administrative burden and bureaucracy, improve access to academic expertise and align FCDO closely with the sector to deliver more rapid evidence and solutions that will benefit people in the UK and around the world. The longer-term ambition is that this Centre will cover FCDO's directly procured research, and lessons from the programme will inform existing and future thematic research platforms.

#### **2. Rationale for an accountable grant competition**

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<sup>1</sup> The report concludes a review of bureaucracy in research commissioned by the Prime Minister in March 2021. The final report is available at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1094648/independent-review-research-bureaucracy-final-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1094648/independent-review-research-bureaucracy-final-report.pdf)

In 2020 we held an open Early Market Engagement event with over a hundred research and research-related organisations to inform the programme design. The event provided important feedback on the existing approach to commissioning research by FCDO and proposed improvements. Now we are seeking innovative proposals from suitable research organisations or a consortia to respond to our business need ideally for a long-term strategic partnership with an academic or research commissioning organisation, to work with FCDO on improving the existing delivery model for research commissioning; co-designing and managing research calls; and collating and communicating results and impacts. These core activities will require technical research expertise beyond an administrative fund manager function to meet high research commissioning and granting standards. Ideally, we would like to drive value for money on this investment by building on the existing technical capacity within the research sector and research commissioning infrastructure, to deliver high quality, flexible, responsive and on-time research.

**3. Key objectives**

FCDO is looking for an academic or research organisation with the capacity and expertise to:

- Establish a commissioning centre for managing FCDO research calls and projects to deliver the initial pipeline of multi-thematic calls and beyond (see Annex A);
- Develop a streamlined and flexible process for managing research competitions and projects that can deliver high quality FCDO research in line with mandatory FCDO and research standards;
- Provide FCDO with access to wide-ranging academic research expertise to work with FCDO on co-designing research;
- Support FCDO and downstream partners with strategic approach to uptake and lessons learning;
- Set up an Impact Fund and mechanism to support southern-based researchers with Open Access costs; and
- Develop a new centralised digital platform for communicating and collating results across the FCDO R&D portfolio.

**4. Budget**

**Over a five-year period**, FCDO will allocate **up to £4.8m** for (i) costs related to co-designing of calls, quality assurance, running competitions, grants disbursement, and research project management); (ii) any applicable tax; (iii) provision of academic advice and expertise to guide specific calls and policy engagement; (iv) support to FCDO and downstream partners with strategic approaches to uptake and lessons learnt and best practice sharing; and (v) systems development to enable commissioning, results collation and implementation of an approved FCDO communication strategy

Within the same timeframe, up to £17.5m be directly allocated and disbursed by the commissioning centre for the initial pipeline of pre-approved research projects (ODA and non-ODA, see Annex A), including funds ringfenced up to £2m for the Impact Fund and eligible costs related to Open Access and up to £1.5 for emerging priorities. Additional research investments over and above the proposals set out in Annex A will be let through the commissioning centre as soon as the commissioning model proves viable, effective and sustainable. Any additional investments let through the commissioning centre will be subject to satisfactory completion of the proof of concept phase. This additional funding will be channelled from separately approved programmes

**The long-term aim** is that the CC mechanism will provide the research commissioning for FCDO's *direct* research procurement which currently accounts for between 20 - 30% of the annual research budget (currently £50 - £70m per year). Other RED research funding will continue to be funded through global and UK strategic partnerships and thematic platforms under the existing arrangements.

**At all time**, the continuation of funding will depend on the satisfactory performance of the commissioning centre and its research portfolio; ongoing FCDO business need; and central budget allocation by the HMG Treasury. Therefore, the Commissioning Centre and its portfolio will need to be designed to be able to rapidly scale up, down or close to adapt to changing FCDO and/or HMG economic and/or political priorities.

#### 4. Timescale

The table below sets out the key stages and indicative milestones in the initial phase of the Commissioning Centre.

Expected timeline	Key milestones
<b>Inception phase 1 – 4 months</b>	
Within first 1 month	1. <i>Detailed mobilisation plan workplans, budgets, milestones</i> for the inception and schedule for monitoring and reporting performance during the inception phase finalised 2. <i>Risk Register</i> as per FCDO template
Within first 2 months	3. <i>Detailed workplans and budgets</i> 4. <i>Reporting templates and formats</i> agreed 5. <i>Workshop</i> with the FCDO programme team held, to inform the initial approach and operational framework
Within first 3 months	6. <i>Application process, templates (including agreements) and guidelines</i> proposed 7. <i>Costed options and scope development of the digital platform</i> submitted

	8. <i>Programme theory of change, logframe, value for money (VFM) and initial KPIs indicators proposed</i>
Within first 4 months	9. <i>Full operational framework</i> in line with FCDO ProF <sup>2</sup> standards (including monitoring and reporting against both the CC and individual projects performance) finalised and approved by FCDO 10. <i>Detailed ToRs for first 3 calls in Annex A</i> finalised by the CC technical experts and approved by FCDO Technical Leads, with plan for rapid sequencing further calls 11. <i>Systems for receiving applications</i> developed 12. <i>Communication plans</i> develop and approved by FCDO, to outline how research opportunities commissioned by the CC will be promoted 13. <i>Engagement strategy</i> setting out how the CC will co-ordinate with partners across the sector to ensure consistent practice and research standards; and support implementation of the recommendations from the Bureaucracy Review
Within first 5 months	14. First round of FCDO research calls launched
<b>Proof of Concept phase 6 months – 24 months</b>	
Within 6 months	15. <i>Updated workplans and milestones schedule</i> submitted to include commissioning activities
Within 10 months	16. <i>First annual report</i> aligned with FCDO requirements submitted
Within 12 months	17. <i>Digital platform</i> with core functionality piloted and launched 18. Develop costing model and sustainability options
Within 24 months	19. <i>A short report with lessons learned and recommendations before moving to Scale and Sustain phase</i> submitted 20. <i>NEW FCDO research calls</i> beyond the initial pipeline commissioned through the commissioning centre
<b>Transition to Scale and Sustain phase beyond 24 months</b>	
Within 34 months	21. <i>Mid-term review</i> commissioned and completed
	22. <i>Service Level Standards KPIs and costing model</i> finalised and agreed with FCDO

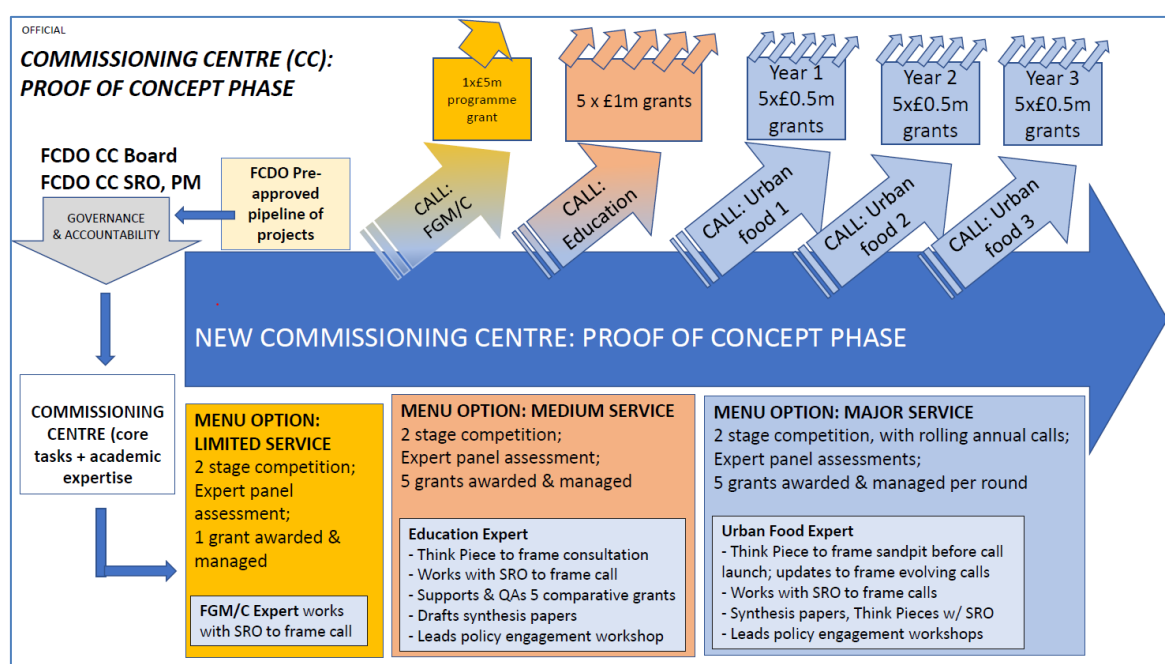
The milestone schedule will be updated and agreed with FCDO to reflect the final proposal and workplans.

5. An overview of the concept for research commissioning

All research let through the Commissioning Centre will be aligned with FCDO priorities and needs. FCDO will retain a full control over the scope and approach to research calls, which will be co-designed with experts from the Commissioning

<sup>2</sup> FCDO Programme Operating Framework at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fcdo-programme-operating-framework>

Centre. The Commissioning Centre will be responsible for letting research calls and managing research projects in line with FCDO requirements and research standards. The initial pipeline of research calls (Annex A) will be used to test and develop the approach. Subsequently, and subject to HMT and FCDO business planning allocations, FCDO will develop a steady pipeline of projects and the Commissioning Centre will move to a scale and sustain phase funded via a standard menu of charges applied to FCDO research requests (see a concept diagram below). The scope of research could include any ODA or non-ODA requests, including multi- and inter-disciplinary research calls.



\*Note: The research themes in the diagram are illustrative examples only and don't reflect calls in Annex A

## 6. Scope of responsibilities

CC's Responsibilities	FCDO's Responsibilities
Organises bespoke consultations and interactive workshops to support RED with development of research scope; and drafts Terms of Reference (ToR) based on research questions from FCDO.	Works across RED and FCDO to identify research gaps and influence needs in line with FS' mission, vision and priorities; commissions rapid reviews to identify gaps; defines research questions to address gaps; and recommends approaches to address research questions.
Maintains peer review and seeks technical assurance of research ToR.	Sets and approves core parameters for the research call and quality assures research ToR.

Manages commissioning process: call for proposals; answering questions; peer review technical and commercial review panels to assess applications; and providing feedback to applicants;	Reviews the shortlisted proposals and approves the final selection for funding.
Conducts due diligence reviews of selected organisations in line with FCDO standards and proactively manages risks across the CC portfolio in line with programme risk appetite.	Sets risk appetite and quality assures and approves due diligence reviews.
Issues downstream agreements and develops monitoring framework to ensure delivery against agreed timelines, budgets and VFM indicators; whilst fulfilling FCDO corporate (e.g. FCDO Annual Reviews; monthly forecasts) and individual project assurance requirements.	Sets result targets and quality assure regular progress reports; leads and approves FCDO Annual Review.
Manages independent technical review of research outputs and quality assure the deliverables throughout the entire process.	Manages internal technical quality assures process of research outputs.
Incentivises and drives strategic uptake. This involves co-ordinating across the CC grantees and over time to the wider FCDO portfolio and research community; supporting research organisations to communicate their research and produce high quality synthesis and other tailored products that situate the research findings within the wider available evidence.	Engages across FCDO to drive lessons, best practice and findings from research into policy and programming; commissions bespoke evidence products
Tracks impact and identifies and communicates research impact stories.	
Identifies and disseminates relevant lessons learned at both individual research and portfolio level, across FCDO and externally.	

7. Key requirements for the Commissioning Centre

A. Managing Conflicts

A significant factor that will influence selection of an appropriate partner or a consortium will be their ability to demonstrate effective approach to Conflict of Interest (Col). FCDO will be open to different proposals for effective management of Col whilst not precluding any organisations bidding for the commissioning centre role from competing for future research projects. This should particularly apply to the academic advisors on the bid assessment panels.

B. Transparency

The CC will agree with FCDO a cap on the proportion or volume of the CC funding that the lead organisation, or other organisations directly involved in the CC, are allowed to win through competitive processes each year.

### **C. Commissioning and Management**

#### ***Research scope***

The CC could include research in any thematic area for FCDO research, both ODA and non-ODA<sup>3</sup>:

- FCDO's existing research teams cover Politics, Conflict, and Humanitarian; Health; Agriculture; Economic Growth; Education; Gender and Inclusion; Climate, Energy and Water; and Technology and Innovation.
- This could expand further, and we foresee multi- and inter-disciplinary research calls (e.g., as seen recently in the FCDO *African Cities* programme).

#### ***Capability***

The CC partner or a consortium will need to demonstrate proven expertise to:

- Let and manage research competitions – and have the potential to grow to scale
- Undertaking due diligence process
- Manage downstream partners/suppliers and related risks
- Drive research uptake and impact
- Manage/build the consortia

#### ***Capacity***

A CC lead or a consortium will need to demonstrate that they can develop and implement multiple research commissions across a broad thematic spectrum, in line with the FCDO standards set out in the PrOF and HMG standards for managing public money, whilst delivering VfM and mitigating key risks. Other core capacities will include:

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<sup>3</sup> ODA spend must be compliant with the [OECD definition of aid](#) and meet domestic legislation such as the [International Development Act](#) 2002 (IDA).

The OECD Statistical Reporting Directives (Chapter II) Rules on eligibility, Section 7: Research defines ODA compliant research activities as follows:

“Research includes financing by the official sector, whether in the donor country or elsewhere, of research into the problems of developing countries. This may be either: (i) undertaken by an agency or institution whose main purpose is to promote the economic growth or welfare of developing countries, or (ii) commissioned or approved, and financed or part-financed, by an official body from a general purpose institution with the specific aim of promoting the economic growth or welfare of [the OECD ODA eligible countries](#) shows all countries.

FCDO non-ODA programme spend is typically either for activity to deliver FCDO objectives in non-ODA countries or for activities in ODA countries which falls outside the OECD definition and domestic legislation on ODA. Some research may combine ODA and non-ODA spend



- Ability to adapt to new priorities/areas, including scale down or up depending on demand and availability of the budget
- Ability to meet ODA requirements, UK requirements on research integrity and standards, including Trusted Research guidance and advice<sup>4</sup>
- Ability to maintain or access technical expertise and other resources in a wider range of specialist areas, to respond to additional funding and priorities
  - Ability to design and manage research competitions
  - Ability to effectively manage grants – e.g., due diligence, negotiating grant agreements, financial management, progress monitoring, etc. VfM
  - Ability to a) maintain a core technical team to deliver the core objectives and collaborate with FCDO technical leads and SROs; b) respond on demand to FCDO’s different sectoral areas and changing priorities; and c) provide specialist functions: for strategic uptake and lessons sharing; and to support FCDO with building a coherent identity and best practice across its research portfolio.

**Research calls**

The CC will manage all stages of research call design (in response to the FCDO scope specification), implementation and quality assurance of research outputs. All research calls will be designed so that key stakeholders can and will access the research products, understand the findings, and be able to apply them to policy and/or practice.

The CC will be responsible for developing and signing agreements, aligned with FCDO PrOF and other mandatory assurance requirements, directly with tier one partners. These requirements will need to be cascaded throughout the delivery chain. Signing of an agreement will follow a robust due diligence process carried out by the CC or/and its partners.

The CC will co-ordinate with other FCDO transparency and FCDO research on delivery of evidence products such as syntheses e.g synthesis paper to bring together multiple research projects at end of a research call cycle.

The research calls will need to be designed at ‘right size’ to ensure the best outcome. Where appropriate, a number of smaller sub-thematic calls will be considered in place of a large contract e.g.:

- a. 1 x £5m programme research call
- b. 5 x £1m research call
- c. sequence of evolving annual calls

<sup>4</sup> Trusted Research outlines the potential risks, provides advice to help make informed decisions, and explains measures that can be taken to secure the integrity of research. Available at: <https://www.cpni.gov.uk/trusted-research>



The FCDO technical lead allocated for each thematic research investment will be responsible for setting the scope for the call whilst ensuring the technical quality of the commissioning process. They will work with recognised academic experts on the roster of the CC partner or other experts brought in for thematic commissions. FCDO would confirm the suitability of experts used.

### ***Commissioning and management process***

A commissioning centre model is expected to deliver more streamlined and flexible research calls, which will be benchmarked against FCDO requirements and standards and best practice within the sector. The performance of the CC will also be measured to ensure:

- Agile commissioning process with timely access to technical expertise across a broad spectrum of thematic areas, whilst meeting different levels of demand.
- Efficient management, including establishing standardised processes for lower administrative effort for both FCDO teams and researchers, whilst meeting mandatory FCDO requirements and ensuring best practice quality standards across all CC activities and research projects (FCDO ProF<sup>5</sup>, the wider HMG<sup>6</sup> and sector standards<sup>7</sup>).
- Flexible sourcing process enabling:
  - a. **Open, fair and transparent competitions** to drive innovation and reduce costs. We are open to different approaches to ensure streamlined competitions that aim to take no longer than 6 months (from identification of research to signing an agreement) and includes peer review or expert panel assessment with academic peers, as well as policy and impact experts. This will need to be rigorous and transparent, but also reflect FCDO's 'mission driven' approach and ambition to reduce administrative burden.
  - b. **Direct and rapid sourcing** of niche expertise to meet FCDO's strategic needs and urgent priorities. This may require us to draw on the CC and FCDO's existing networks and partnerships.
- Quality assurance processes will need to reflect a balanced approach to operational excellence and delivery focused on high quality expertise and

<sup>5</sup> FCDO Programme Operating Framework at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fcdo-programme-operating-framework>

<sup>6</sup> HM Treasury: Managing Public Money at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-public-money>; Cabinet Office: Government Functional Standard GovS 015: Grants at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/grants-standards> (to promotes efficiency and effectiveness in grant making across all government departments and arm's length bodies)

<sup>7</sup> For example, used and produced by UKRI and NIHR

research outputs to drive the highest impact in line with the FCDO mission and priorities.

**D. Strategic uptake and lesson-sharing function**

The CC will be expected to offer tools and expertise to support FCDO and researchers implementing projects with:

- Collating and presenting research outputs in appropriate ways
- Tracking and communicating research impact stories
- Developing pathways to impact which also draw on FCDO’s levers for international influence
- Driving uptake and evidence into practice
- Promoting best practice and disseminating lessons learned across the CC and wider FCDO R&D portfolio.

**E. Platform for research results and impacts collation and communication**

During the discovery phase, the CC lead or its partner will map out FCDO’s needs and appraise different options, constraints and opportunities, before developing the full approach to developing a platform for research results and impacts. This will require exploring the most cost-effective solutions and, where possible, reusing existing technology, software, databases and tools. Examples of such platforms range from establishing the system relying on reporting and inputting the correct metadata by researchers e.g. ResearchFish to more automated solutions such as: 1Science, Wizdom.ai and Dimensions.ai<sup>8</sup>. It will be important that the platform draws from databases which already hold UK and global information about publications and related grants, funders, impact, including citations publicly available.

FCDO expects that the digital platform will be implemented through a phased approach, which will begin with setting out options and then testing and introducing core functionality within a year from signing an agreement and over time expanding by more advanced interactive options to meet the demands of a growing brand, and enhance user experience

Detailed options for developing the platform will be submitted to FCDO by the CC lead and the agreed approach finalised during the inception phase. This will be discussed with the FCDO Digital Team and the final proposal approved by the FCDO Digital Spend Panel, to ensure the design follows the FCDO endorsed Principles for Digital Development and represents VfM<sup>9</sup>. The CC lead will also follow the FCDO ‘Guidance on digital spend and controls for partners and

<sup>8</sup> Dimensions.ai explained on the Digital Market.gov.uk at <https://www.digitalmarketplace.service.gov.uk/g-cloud/services/802447411879085>

<sup>9</sup> FCDO ProF Rule 13 at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/997874/Programme-Operating-Framework-June21.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/997874/Programme-Operating-Framework-June21.pdf)

suppliers'<sup>10</sup> when developing the proposal. A strong approach to sustainability will be important to ensure the platform is maintained and used effectively to disseminate research outputs and promote the new brand beyond the initial CC phase.

## **F. Branding and Communication**

The CC will work closely with FCDO to develop a coherent identity to link FCDO R&D investments. Designing this umbrella identity will require FCDO and the CC to manage the process of early consultations with the key stakeholders (including FCDO Ministers, Communications Team and research partners) to ensure the umbrella identity enhances the visibility of FCDO R&D investments. At the same time, FCDO will work with its key partners to develop an appropriate consensus for branding of its strategic public-private partnerships. This will require the CC lead to establish a co-ordinated mechanism to develop a coherent and sustainable approach for communication and branding across the full FCDO R&D portfolio.

## **G. Additional services to be delivered by the CC**

The other added value services that the CC will provide include:

- a) **Technical hub** hosting consultations, interactive workshops, 'sandpits'<sup>11</sup> to support RED with development of research scope
- b) **Impact fund** a discretionary, competitive source of top up funding for research with demonstrable potential for *additional* real-world impact
- c) **Open access** costs as post-grant funding for Open Access publication costs for Southern researchers and other under-represented groups

### ***Impact Fund***

The CC will also design and pilot an Impact Fund to enhance return on FCDO investments in R&D. The fund will have a modest budget up to £2m included in the £17.5m pot of funding and be open to applications from all FCDO research programmes (recent, past and present). Mandatory requirements for the Impact Fund award will include additionality (that is, existing programme funding could not reasonably be expected to cover the proposed work) and adequately high likelihood of impact (recognising it is rare to have surety of impact from any research uptake work). Applications will be assessed by panels in a similar way to all CC grant awarding, though likely with a streamlined process given that i) timeliness can be critical to grasping impact opportunities and ii) awards are expected to be modest in value. In this way, two core principles – competition for the allocation of research funding and peer review – will be maintained and will drive value for money in this

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-digital-spend-advice-and-controls-for-dfid-partners-and-suppliers>

<sup>11</sup> *Sandpits* are organised interactive workshops aimed at encouraging free thinking and delivering innovative solutions. This type of workshops are organised e.g. by UKRI at <https://beta.ukri.org/councils/epsrc/guidance-for-applicants/types-of-funding-we-offer/transformative-research/sandpits/>

extra investment in impact activities. A small proportion of the Impact Fund may be used to monitor impacts beyond programme closure (e.g. in areas of a strategic importance for FCDO), which is challenging and in general not undertaken sufficiently to capture longer-term benefits. Findings from the pilot phase will help FCDO to determine whether there is a funding gap and need for establishing a permanent funding mechanism.

**H. Sustainability**

During the proof of concept stage FCDO and the consortium lead will agree cost structures for the delivery of regular menu of charges on any research calls beyond the initial pipeline of projects as per Annex A. However, elements such as ‘impact fund’, ‘open access’ and ‘digital platform’ will require ongoing direct funding as they will not necessarily relate to a specific call.

**I. Programme exit/handover**

For the programme exit, the CC lead will produce a comprehensive transition/handover plan at least 12 months before the programme end date to prepare the portfolio of the remaining research projects managed by the CC to transition to a new phase of programming (under the incumbent or a new CC lead) or handover back to FCDO. The plan must cover handover strategies for ensuring no disruption to FCDO or downstream partners. The exit plan will also include key lessons and recommendations from this programme and handover of the website and any digital products or operational guides developed under this programme.

**J. Key Performance Indicators**

Given a new commissioning model will be developed through a very dynamic and iterative process of testing and adapting different approaches, KPIs will be developed and finalised during the transition process to scale and sustain phase. KPIs will measure performance against pre-agreed service level standards. KPIs will be reviewed and reported to FCDO on a 6-monthly basis with 10% of payments related to the commissioning centre technical support expected to be linked to performance.

**K. Reporting**

FCDO will track the CC performance and the progress against the programme logframe indicators through an FCDO mandatory annual review process, that will involve the CC lead to submit an annual report examining Value for Money, Risks, Supply Chains and trajectory towards ultimate impacts.

Other key performance review points anticipated through the year will be:

- Monthly touch-points on finance (including up to date forecasts), risks and other emerging issues.
- Quarterly narrative and financial reports, focusing on operational effectiveness against the workplan, in a standardised and simplified format, including summary of progress against agreed budgets, milestones, up to

date key lessons learned log and improvements for the coming quarter; value for money; up to date risk register and workplan.

- Mid-year reports focusing on progress against logframe targets, strategic challenges and lessons learned, including performance against KPIs.
- At least bi-annual visits to FCDO and partner's HQs for more in-depth strategic discussions and monitoring.

#### **L. Compliance with research standards**

The FCDO expects that the Commissioning Centre, the Commissioning Centre Lead, its consortia partners, and all individuals involved with the provision of research services, including researchers, research support staff, research managers and administrators to observe the highest standards of integrity, honesty and professionalism; and to embed good practice in every aspect of their work. All research will be founded on equitable research partnership principles.

#### **M. Effective collaboration and co-ordination**

Strong collaboration and co-ordination will be required from the CC and its partners to (i) ensure effective data, tools and lessons sharing (with the major research bodies such as UKRI and NIHR and with existing FCDO thematic research platforms); (ii) prevent duplication; (iii) ensure coherent approach to commissioning and managing research in line with best practice standards across the sector; This will also require effective collaboration with FCDO on implementing any relevant recommendations from the Review of Bureaucracy in research and co-ordinating with other FCDO transparency and other FCDO-funded major thematic research platforms for developing coherent identity for FCDO research.

### **8. Disbursement of funds**

Initially, the allocated funding for the management of the commissioning centre will be solely disbursed upon the delivery of pre-agreed milestones, subsequently, moving to payments in arrears, with 10% of payments for technical support linked to KPIs. Before first payment of funds is disbursed to the CC, FCDO will need to undertake a due diligence on the CC lead.

The approach to making payments to organisations implementing research projects will be in arrears although there will be scope to provide some payment in advance to manage CC downstream grant liabilities, if strong justification can be provided. Before first payment of funds is disbursed to downstream partners, the CC will undertake the necessary due diligence checks, with the outcome and any recommendations approved by FCDO.

9. Competition Process and Timeline

We aim to appoint a not-for-profit organisation that can demonstrate the best fit and most optimum approach to meet FCDO requirements through an accountable grant competition. We will carry this process in a fair, open and transparent manner by publishing the Statement of Need and inviting organisations to submit their proposals. Subsequently, FCDO we will evaluate and moderate submitted proposals. Feedback will be provided upon request.

FCDO is not expecting to receive complete solutions but is looking to select a bid that can demonstrate the highest potential for successful partnership that can lead to significant improvements and deliver added value benefits over a period of time.

We expect to receive variety of bids from academic and other not-for profit institutions, who can demonstrate the required expertise and capacity to deliver either as a single entity or most likely in a partnership with other not-for-profit and private organisations.

Bidding organisations will be able to withdraw at any point in the process to join a partnership. Equally, competition will not exclude unsuccessful bidders from joining winning bidder later in the process. Subsequently, we will work with the selected bidder to develop the proposed approach into a compelling proposal to form basis of an accountable grant agreement – ODA and non-ODA.

Indicative competition timeline

	Stages	Target Date
1.	Call for Proposals launched	w/c 19 September
2.	Information Session	At 10:00 on 13 October
3.	Proposal submission deadline	By 10:00 on 11 November
4.	Proposals moderation	w/c 21 November
5.	Meeting/s to discuss the proposals, if required	End November/early December
6.	Outcome decided	By December

Who are we looking for?

Organisations registered as a not-for-profit with proven experience of commissioning and managing research calls and conducting assurance and managing peer review process.

Before FCDO disburses first payment, the successful organisation must pass a due diligence<sup>12</sup> in the areas including, but not restricted to: governance, finance, safeguarding<sup>13</sup>, capacity to manage the proposed project and supply chain and safeguarding assessment.

<sup>12</sup> [Due-Diligence-Guide-External-partners3.odt \(live.com\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> [FCDO Due Diligence: Safeguarding for external partners - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

## To apply for this opportunity

Please submit a proposal which outlines your organisation's suitability and approach to delivery of the key requirements as set out in the Statement of Need above, not exceeding 21 pages + relevant Annexes. The successful proposal will be refined further with FCDO to form a final project document.

Whilst we welcome innovative proposals, we are also looking for the proposals to include the details as set out in the table below:

<b>I. Technical expertise and CC composition</b>	<p><b><i>A range of technical expertise within the proposed CC team and management structure to effectively:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support FCDO with research design</li> <li>- Commission and assessing research proposals across technical areas in the Annex A</li> <li>- Undertake necessary assurance and maintain high rigour in project management, research standards and quality results/outputs across the CC portfolio</li> <li>- Support CC's downstream partners with implementing high quality uptake strategies</li> <li>- Develop and maintain a new digital platform for collating and communicating FCDO R&amp;D results</li> </ul> <p><i>Please include Key Personnel CVs + Organogram + CC structure</i></p>
<b>II. Approach to commissioning, management and strategic engagement</b>	<p><b><i>Proposed approach to managing the commissioning centre and the portfolio to deliver timely and high-quality research, supported by relevant experience examples (where possible), including:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Building and managing multi-disciplinary research consortia or teams</li> <li>- Collaborative approach to designing research</li> <li>- Managing peer review process</li> <li>- Delivering and tracking results and impact whilst maintaining the required rigour, research and quality standards across the CC portfolio</li> <li>- Maintaining coherence across the consortium and portfolio</li> <li>- Collaborating and co-ordinating with the wider sector</li> <li>- Strategic approach to lessons sharing and uptake</li> </ul> <p><i>Please include proposed roles and responsibilities (activities) of each consortium partner</i></p>



<b>III. Approach to flexible delivery</b>	<p><b><i>Proposed approach to flexible commissioning and management of the CC and research portfolio to be able to scale up or down according to the changing scope of the CC budget or FCDO research needs, whilst continue to maintain:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- High quality standards</li><li>- Robust monitoring and rigour</li><li>- Value for Money</li><li>- Sustainability of the CC</li></ul>
<b>IV. Approach to risk Management</b>	<p><b>Effective approach to managing risks and challenges, including:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Managing the required assurance process on research projects and partners</li><li>- Managing downstream partners and risks, especially in politically sensitive areas</li><li>- Quality assessment of the potential risks and mitigating strategies in establishing and managing the commissioning centre</li><li>- Proposed model for managing conflict of interest</li></ul> <p><i>Please include Risk Matrix</i></p>
<b>V. Delivery of Value for Money</b>	<p>Proposed delivery of value for money which reflects balance between costs and quality, whilst utilising economies of scale where possible. In addition, this should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) <b>Detailed cost break-down in (£)</b> related to managing the Commissioning Centre and delivering research commissions</li><li>b) <b>Indicative workplan and milestones</b> for the inception phase to commissioning first research calls.</li><li>c) <b>Proposed indicators</b> for tracking and assessing performance and value for money at both operational and research portfolio level</li></ul> <p><i>Please use the template and guidance on the <a href="#">Accountable Grant Arrangement: budget template and guidance website</a> at gov.uk.</i></p>

**Deadline**

Completed proposals should be submitted to:  
[ResearchCommissioningCentre@fcdo.gov.uk](mailto:ResearchCommissioningCentre@fcdo.gov.uk) by 10:00 on 11 November 2022

**Information Session**

FCDO will hold a virtual information session via Teams for anyone who has questions in relation to the requirement or the process on **13 October at 10:00**. Please register your interest here <https://bit.ly/3ow1Fil>, if you would like to join the session.

## **Contact**

This project is managed by the Research and Technology Development Department in FCDO. If you have any questions related to this opportunity, please submit these to the [ResearchCommissioningCentre@fcdo.gov.uk](mailto:ResearchCommissioningCentre@fcdo.gov.uk) mailbox. In the interest of fairness and transparency, all questions, and answers, including submitted or asked during the information session, will be published on the FCDO Research Commissioning Centre page at <https://www.gov.uk/international-development-funding> alongside other information on how to apply.

## **Annex A Selected proposed research calls to deliver by the Commissioning Centre**

### **International conflict research**

An immediate funding window under the Commissioning Centre will be a portfolio of research to cover R&D on issues to support UK's response to international conflict and crisis, such as the Russia-Ukraine crisis. The themes for this call will be set out following detailed consultation with FCDO.

### **Researchers at Risk (tbc)**

It will focus on developing a longer-term model to respond to crises through research funding to support researchers and academics at risk. R&D calls will be targeted to support this population on thematic areas which respond to the crisis. Research will provide an opportunity for collaboration with their host institutions, including where researchers are displaced, and respond flexibly to their circumstances.

### **Political Economy Research**

A rolling pipeline of applied politically informed research on key development and diplomacy priorities (possible priorities could be, for example, the politics of infrastructure megaprojects, politics of girls' education and the politics of climate and nature-based solutions). The Political Economy Research window will be able to respond to emerging themes, and include non-ODA funding and settings.

### **Technology Governance Evidence Platform**

Technology helps us work more efficiently but also helps governments and companies to surveil people and populations, allowing for rapid spread of disinformation, facilitating online abuse and inciting ethnic and political violence. The UK's International Development Strategy explains how world-class expertise, data, research and technology will be at the heart of our partnerships. It is vital that such technology investments are politically informed and gender, conflict and crime sensitive. This research will generate evidence on 'what works' for building technology governance across a range of priority areas and geographies. The research will deliver: 1) research that applies political economy analysis approaches to a range of contexts (for example, potential high growth contexts where investment is hampered by concerns about poor governance, authoritarian contexts, and/or L/MICs where technical assistance may improve tech governance models that improve the conditions for developmental outcomes); 2) rigorous evidence synthesis of the political economy of anticipatory or emerging tech and governance that looks across a range of geographies and at key priority areas (for example, the potential abuse of tech by anti-democratic regimes, elite capture of both the market and the tech, causes of the lack of regulatory frameworks and capacity for tech governance, and positive cases of the use of tech to support civic engagement); and 3) a partnership-approach to technical assistance and evidence generation for strengthening tech governance in key geographies and sectors.

**Tackling high-prevalence inter-personal violence**

In 4-5 countries with very high levels of inter-personal violence, research will identify ways to reduce harm when multiple forms of violence (gender-based, against children, inter-communal) share common roots and are mutually reinforcing. Testing what works in specific programmes, and the politics of building local or national coalitions to implement these approaches with success, will allow governments, the UK and others to support effective violence prevention policies.

**Ensuring safety and justice for women and men in crises and conflict**

In humanitarian crises and conflict- and post-conflict settings, citizens rarely have access to fair and effective security and justice services, with many competing actors (e.g. police, military, national security, private security, militias) offering and / or abusing justice. Women and girls are subject to particular risks from crime and exploitation. Armed violence combined with ineffective and corrupt security services and courts represent widespread violations of rights and freedoms; they also deter investment and economic development, and contribute to social discontent, political instability and a return to conflict as non-state actors provide alternative sources of protection and dispute resolution. The research will test what works in aid-supported reforms to make safety and justice services more accountable and effective; and highlight approaches to avoid because they risk exacerbating conflict risk. Findings will inform FCDO and other donors' policy and programming, supporting better human rights, conflict prevention, and humanitarian protection.

**OneHealth Evidence and Knowledge Platform**

To support effective action to control emerging zoonoses. This research will be part of a wider portfolio of work, bringing together FCDO's work on animal health, zoonoses and livestock systems to develop and deliver new animal products, evidence and knowledge for FCDO, HMG, multilaterals and developing country governments that

collectively will control the risks of emerging livestock diseases including zoonoses in developing countries.

### **Climate resilient, sustainable agriculture**

READI (Research, Evidence and Advisory for Digital and Innovation in food systems) will generate evidence syntheses and knowledge outputs in response to demand from Post and policy teams; specific R&D commissioning to support the Gilbert Initiative, and tracking of results; provide expertise on agriculture innovation including programme design, evidence and partnership brokering.