



Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

17 March 2021

Dear Chancellor

We are writing on behalf of Eastern Arc to express our concern about the decision to halve the official development assistance (ODA) budget to the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS).

Eastern Arc is the regional research consortium comprising the universities of East Anglia (UEA), Essex and Kent. As civic universities rooted in our region and working for those within it, we fully understand the difficult choices you have had to make in focussing on the recovery from the pandemic and supporting the UK population.

Indeed, we have been working hard throughout the lockdown to support the national effort: we have turned our labs over to processing Covid tests, put aside part of our ongoing research to work towards developing a vaccine, and repurposed equipment to provide emergency PPE equipment.

However, the pandemic has demonstrated that we as a nation are not alone. We are part of a global community. What happens in other parts of the world affects us. Our futures are inextricably linked and, as such, it is crucial to balance our immediate needs with the long-term needs of those in countries who are least able to address them.

As one of the richest countries in the world we have a certain duty to do so, but it is more than that. By helping those in the global south, by ameliorating their problems and working with them in their development, we are also building the foundations for our own future sustainability and wellbeing.



From migration to climate change and from disease to food security, we are more secure, sustainable, healthy and prosperous as a nation by working with others. It's a belief that has always been central to our work, and is manifest in our world-leading research, such as that being undertaken at the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research at UEA, the Human Rights Centre at Essex, and the Durrell Institute for Conservation and Ecology at Kent.

The government's support in this effort has been invaluable. Since the Global Challenges Research Fund was launched in 2016, over 220 investigators across EARC have been working to address issues of literacy, food systems, pollution, drug-development, health and human rights.

Much of our work would not be possible without this support, and an immediate halving of this will put on-going initiatives at risk, and discourage others from turning their research towards the global good.

In addition, the cut will affect the next generation of researchers in the area. Kent's Global Challenges Doctoral Centre, one of only two in the country, uses ODA funding to support internationally excellent doctoral students conducting challenge-led research that brings direct benefits to DAC-list countries. Cutting this funding will bring to an end this initiative which has proved to be an extremely efficient and effective use of ODA funding.

We understand that there are no easy answers; there are only hard choices. However, we would encourage you to reconsider how best to balance the domestic and international demands on HM Treasury. The £120m cut to the BEIS ODA budget is relatively small, but will make a huge difference to our effort.

We believe that, through discussing options with funders and universities, we can arrive at a solution that will strike a balance between short-term exigency and long-term benefit, whether that be through giving UKRI and others the opportunity to vire between budgets, considering postponing or downsizing other significant investment that have yet to be allocated, or even introducing cuts on a more gradual basis over a five year period to allow universities the opportunity to mitigate the worst effects of the reductions.



Once again, we appreciate the difficult situation you face, but we would encourage you and your department to discuss with UKRI and the UK research community how to meet these funding challenges to limit the potential damage to the UK and its global partners.

Yours faithfully



Phil Ward
Director, Eastern Arc



Professor Fiona Lettice
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation), University of East Anglia



Professor Christine Raines
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), University of Essex



Professor Shane Weller
Deputy Vice-Chancellor - Research and Innovation, University of Kent

cc

Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng MP, Secretary of State at the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs

Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser DBE FRS, Chief Executive Officer, UKRI

Professor Christopher Smith, International Champion, UKRI