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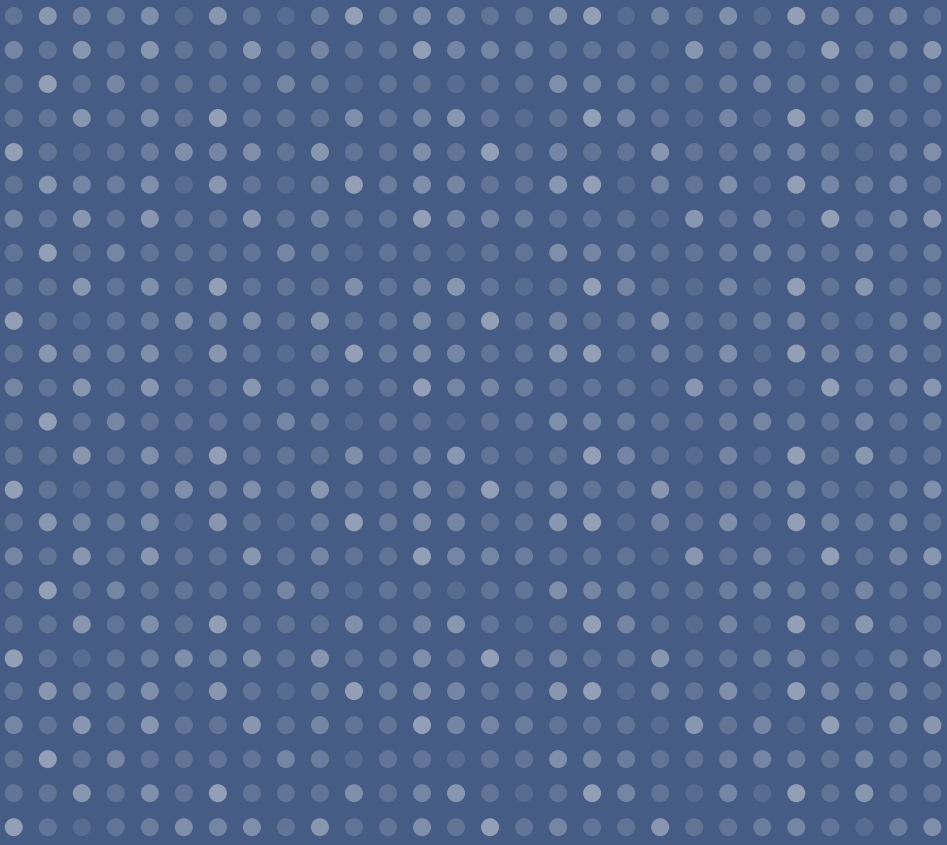
Expertise to Influence: UK's Soft Power in Global Health



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Foreword

In November 2021, I announced to Parliament that a concerning new variant of Covid-19 had been detected overseas. The sequence B.1.1.529, better known now as Omicron, was probably already on our shores and would very likely go on to infect millions of people.

It was clear we faced a race between the vaccine and the virus. Within weeks, the total number of boosters delivered reached 35 million. On a single day in December, over 1 million Covid-19 jabs were administered. Our pharmaceutical defences held firm – a credit to our strong position as a centre of scientific excellence.

British scientific breakthroughs like the vaccine are no accident. They are the result of our exceptional academic institutions, powerful industries, and government agencies. The Government was right to set this out as a key feature of the Integrated Review.

The UK remains at the forefront of some of the most important advances being made in modern science. This position is crucial to our strength both domestically and overseas today, and with the world we face tomorrow, it will become even more important.

Increased risk of pandemics, the emergence of new technology and changing climate could all be potentially catastrophic. Now more than ever, UK leadership on science and technology is needed.

There is no shortage of resolve in meeting this objective, but often a lack of clarity on the strategy to achieve it. This paper engages in an important discussion about our current success, as well as securing a more resilient future.

As I recognised during my time as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the government has a critical role in building and projecting soft power in science and technology sectors. We have world-leading scientific institutions at home, and strong diplomatic networks abroad to draw upon.

We should be proud of the role we have carried out to date, but there is so much more to be done. The UK can and must play a central role in shaping the future of global health policy.

In such a consequential policy area, nothing less will suffice.

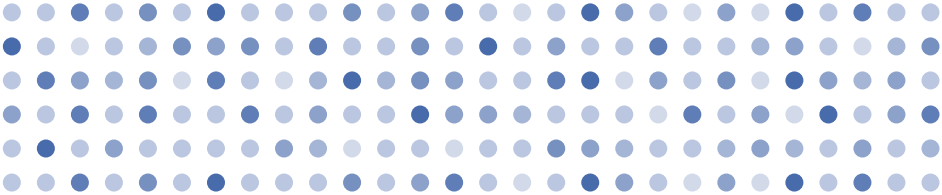
Rt Hon Sir Sajid Javid MP

Chapter One
Expertise to Influence: UK's Soft Power in Global Health

The UK has long been a dynamic force shaping the future of healthcare worldwide. From pioneering the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine to spearheading initiatives through organisations like Gavi and the Global Fund, the UK's impact on global health is profound and far-reaching.

The UK Government stands at the centre of a dynamic, world-class life sciences sector in the UK and strong multilateral organisations, leading international peers to deliver rapid and large-scale improvements to global health. With access to high quality scientific and health expertise, the UK is helping to tackle some of the greatest global health threats of our time.

The UK's leadership in global health has important implications for foreign policy. In particular, the strategic use of the UK's distinctive institutional strengths can serve as a cornerstone of its soft power. Soft power – the ability to sway others through attraction rather than coercion – is increasingly vital in an interconnected world where alliances shift and global challenges loom large.



The Integrated Review rightly highlights an increasingly competitive global landscape. If the UK is to exert its power in an increasingly competitive global landscape and have a platform on which it can voice its concerns and objectives, soft power is a crucial asset.
As geopolitical tides turn, this report argues that the UK's unique institutional landscape positions it as a key player in global health diplomacy, enabling it to leverage key strengths in the life sciences sector and its strong diplomatic ties.

In this report, we delve into how the UK leverages its national assets to project power globally. By prioritising science and technology, nurturing international relationships, and harnessing the expertise of its renowned institutions, the UK's influence in global health is amplified. This report explores the intersection of health, diplomacy, and soft power in the UK's quest to tackle the world's most pressing health challenges.

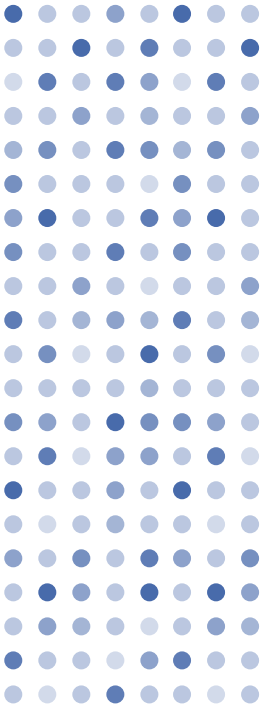
Leveraging UK soft power in global health

There are two main strands of soft power: cultural projection and strategic diplomacy. Cultural institutions like the BBC and the British Council serve as ambassadors of British values and creativity, fostering connections and enhancing the nation's image abroad. Meanwhile, strategic diplomacy uses soft power to build trust and credibility, providing a platform for effective engagement on global issues such as climate change or global health.

While, as soft power theorist Joseph Nye asserts "soft power is not a zero-sum game", the narrative nature inherent to soft power carries with it an element of competition.[1] The perception of the UK as a leading voice in global health is in itself a relative judgement. The Government must therefore make strategic choices over which areas it chooses to establish British expertise.

Soft power, a concept popularised by Joseph Nye, represents a nation's ability to achieve its goals through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or force. It encompasses a diverse array of assets including culture, values, policies, and institutions that shape perceptions and garner goodwill on the international stage.

Amongst the UK's expansive soft power assets, the science and technology sector stands out as a critical strategic resource with significant potential for spearheading global health. The science and technology industry in the UK showcases expertise across a wide- variety of topics from genomic research to vaccine development. Public- private partnerships prevalent in the UK draw together the best scientific research with the capabilities for large- scale manufacturing of new healthcare technologies.



1. Guozuo Zhang, "Interview With Joseph Nye on Soft Power," in Research Series on the Chinese Dream and China's Development Path, 2016, 95–100.

Connected to this dynamic industry are the mechanisms which enable these assets to influence globally:

Top-ranking universities. World class institutions attract global talent, and through international partnerships and knowledge exchange, UK institutions have been able to foster long-term relationships and cutting-edge research.

Standards-setting, regulation and governance. Institutions like the British Standards Institution (BSI) are highly regarded across the world. In some cases, guidance enables the mainstreaming of ethical research practices, or the integration of new technologies into public health systems to make advances available for all.

The English language. Together with the vast array of Britain's other cultural assets such as the BBC World Service, the English language is a global language that is able to reach billions of people around the world.

These institutions promote and demonstrate the importance of open access to reliable information, and echo the values at the heart of British democracy. Taken together, they project Britain as a trustworthy and influential global actor with the ability to shape narrative and foster connections. The advances the UK makes in science and technology have far-reaching impacts.

How the UK saves lives[2]

6.3 million lives were saved across 183 countries by the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine in the first year.

80 million vaccines were donated through COVAX.

Est. **13 million** lives saved through development of over 30 malaria products including vaccines, drugs and diagnostics, since 2017.

2. Oxford University, "Oxford Vaccine Saved Most Lives in Its First Year of Rollout", July 15, 2022.
FCDO, "UK Begins Donating Millions of COVID-19 Vaccines Overseas," GOV.UK, July 28, 2021
FCDO, "UK Announces 'Transformational' Support to Boost Global Health at the UK General Assembly," GOV.UK, September 21, 2023.

Why is soft power important today?

In an increasingly competitive global landscape, soft power is more relevant than ever for nations seeking to assert their influence.

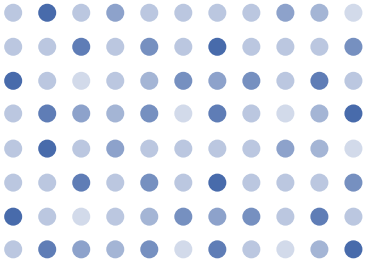
China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative exemplifies the strategic use of soft power to expand influence and achieve foreign policy objectives, despite a mixed record of 'attractiveness'.[3] Since 2013, China has invested over 1 trillion USD into infrastructure in countries of the Global South.[4] Many countries of the Global South have gone to China for alternative funding for infrastructure and health development, turning their backs on traditional lenders such as the World Bank and the IMF. By facilitating trade and connectivity, China has embedded itself into the global landscape and has gone someway to increase leverage and fulfil its foreign policy aims, including isolating Taiwan.

Yet, China's strategy has led to a significant level of backlash due to concerns over human rights negligence, poor governance and environmental damage. There have also been concerns over 'debt-trapping', as exemplified by China's controversial purchase of a deep water port in Sri Lanka.[5] The lack of returns on China's huge levels of investment demonstrate the indirect link between investment and a positive impact on soft power. The strategic use of effective investment and the broader support the Government can offer to its internationally-facing institutions is often just as important.

Britain's allies are also sharpening their soft power tools. France's dwindling influence in Africa reflects how a "diplomatic battleground" has emerged with Russian and Chinese influence fast expanding.[6]

The French Government is attempting to redefine a rocky relationship with former colonies as President Macron asserts that the era of interference in the continent - "Françafrique" - is over, and a new era founded on mutually beneficial partnerships is beginning.

As both our allies and rivals seek to embed soft power influence within an integrated foreign policy strategy, the UK can offer a competitive edge in the field of global health which not only promotes the common good, but strengthens the UK's global position.



3 Christopher Balding, "Why Democracies Are Turning Against Belt and Road: Corruption, Debt, and Backlash," Foreign Affairs, October 19, 2018.
4 WEF, "China's Belt and Road Initiative Turns 10. Here's What to Know," World Economic Forum, November 20, 2023.
5 Jonathan E. Hillman, "Game of Loans: How China Bought Hambantota," June 28, 2023.
6 Kester Kenn Klomegah, "Macron Outlines France'S New Policy Strategy for Africa," Modern Diplomacy, March 5, 2023.

What next for UK soft power?

Soft power is a vital tool for governments seeking to navigate complex geopolitical dynamics and achieve their objectives in the international arena. By understanding the unique talent and potential of the nation, the UK Government can act as an orchestrator for British institutions and assets in order to wield influence and shape perceptions in an increasingly interconnected world.

The UK is a founding member of a number of global health alliances. Through its membership to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, The Global Fund, CEPI, and the WHO, the UK contributes funding and expertise to ensure rapid rollout of newly available medicines and technologies. The majority of UK aid for global health is distributed through global alliances such as these. International collaboration means funding can go further, reach more lives, and gives the UK a platform for putting its technological capabilities to use.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought home the global nature of health threats; viruses do not respect national borders. If we had forgotten, the experience of the pandemic reminded us that global health truly is a global endeavour, in the same way that the security of the world, is also security for the people of the UK. Investing in the life sciences sector and global health can strengthen our national health and economy, while supporting millions of livelihoods across the world. As a leader in global health, the UK can promote a mutually beneficial arrangement for all, and there are many willing partners that the UK can work with to maximise the impact better health can have on all across the world.

From the development of the malaria and Covid-19 vaccines to groundbreaking discoveries in genomics, the following case studies exemplify the transformative global impact of the UK's domestic investment in science and technology.

Through its membership to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, The Global Fund, CEPI, and the WHO, the UK contribute funding and expertise to ensure rapid rollout of newly available and technologies

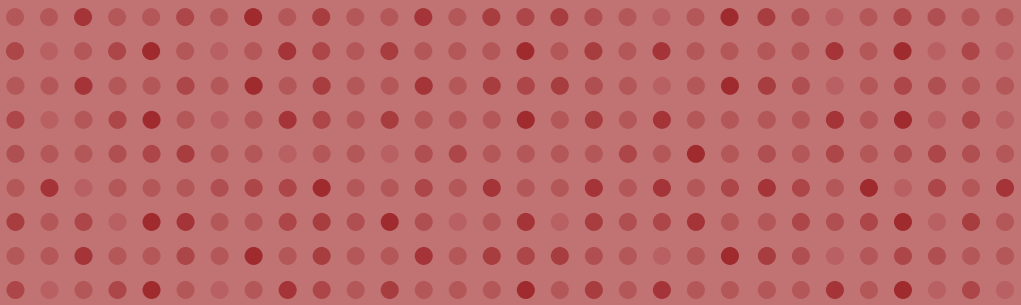
For the United Kingdom, retaining and enhancing soft power requires strategic investment and alignment with national strengths and priorities. Global health presents a compelling opportunity, leveraging the UK's world- class research institutions and innovative industries to address pressing global challenges. By investing in and championing initiatives like climate action, girls' education, and global health resilience, the UK can reinforce its reputation as a responsible global actor and amplify its voice on the world stage. Answering the call of Dr John Bell for the UK to "focus on areas where we already have a strategic advantage", this research piece joins the dots of technology, science and foreign policy ambitions to demonstrate where the UK is strengthening its leadership in global health.[8]

8 Dr John Bell, "Science Superpower: The UK'S Global Science Strategy beyond Horizon Europe." Panel event, Onward, January 12, 2023.

Chapter Two
Case Studies

In the following section, we delve into three compelling case studies that highlight the intersection of UK success in global health and its influence on soft power. These case studies offer an understanding of how the UK leverages its expertise, partnerships, and institutional strengths to address pressing global health challenges while simultaneously enhancing its soft power on the world stage.

Through these examples, we uncover the strategic initiatives and impactful interventions that solidify the UK's position as a global leader in health diplomacy.



Case Study A
Pioneering the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine

As the UK went into its first lockdown in March 2020, work had already begun on creating a solution to one of the biggest global health challenges not seen in decades. By the end of the first year, Covid-19 had infected over 82 million people and caused more than 1.8 million deaths globally.[9]

The UK's domestic response to Covid-19 meant that a year later, almost 9 in 10 individuals aged 12 and over had been vaccinated with at least one dose.[10] Despite several governance challenges over that year, it represents one of the fastest mobilisations ever seen in public health.

It also highlighted some of the institutional strengths within the UK that enabled such a rapid and effective response, as well as contributing significantly to the overall global response. Covid-19 is not a crisis which respects national borders, and at the same time, while all countries were impacted by the Covid-19 virus, not all were impacted in the same way. One crucial pillar to the UK's global health contribution is the development of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine.

Source: Gavi.org - Five key factors that allowed COVAX to deliver two billion COVID-19 vaccines

£548 million contributed to COVAX.

Over 2.5 billion doses of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine were distributed to over 170 countries.

84.4 million doses were delivered.

9 WHO, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Global Health Goals," May 2021.
10 NHS England, "Covid-19 Vaccination Statistics, Week ending Sunday 12th December 2021", Statistics » Vaccinations: COVID-19, December 2021.

The solution: The success of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine

UK Research and Innovation is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.

The vaccine was able to develop rapidly in part due to previous research the Jenner Institute had been conducting on MERS-CoV vaccine, backed by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). For Gilbert this was key: "Long-term funding through UKRI, adding up to more than a decade of investment, has been vital to developing the viral vector vaccine platform and optimising our manufacturing methods. This meant that all the pieces were in place for us to be able to develop a novel coronavirus vaccine at speed".[11]

This points to the uncertainty inherent to long-term planning: while there was no way of knowing that the MERS-CoV vaccine work would enable the vaccine development for Covid-19, it is this investment in long-term scientific progress which laid the foundations.

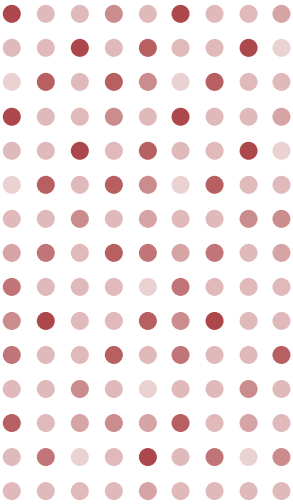
Short-term investment and whole sector mobilisation was also critical.

As noted by Gilbert, the development, manufacturing and distribution of the vaccine at such a rapid pace "isn't something that any one lab, institution or sector can do alone".[12]

In fact, the efforts involved hundreds of researchers, technician clinical and non-clinical staff across many locations, and tens of thousands of volunteers. For the manufacturing of the vaccine, an early partnership between Oxford University and AstraZeneca was a key determinant.[13]

All these factors together meant that the UK had a working vaccine within less than a year.

Government support came not only in funding but also as a coordinator: a fast-track mechanism was made available to national regulators, and the government had oversight across different parts of the vaccine supply chain. For instance, two other vaccine candidates were also manufactured in the UK.[14]



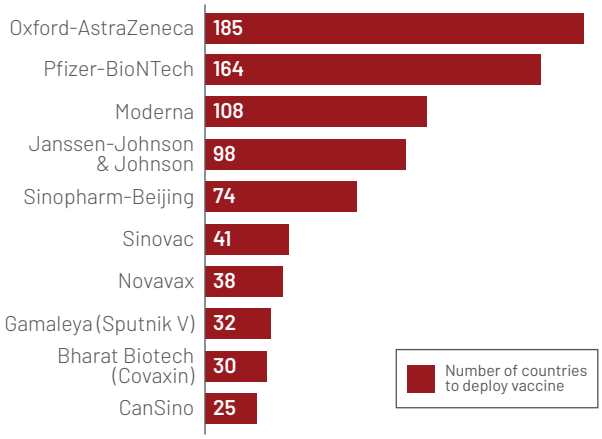
11 Sarah Gilbert, "The Story Behind the Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 Vaccine Success," 21st November, 2021.
12 Ibid.
13 Daniel Boffey and Dan Sabbagh, "'We Had to Go It Alone': How the UK Got Ahead in the Covid Vaccine Race," The Guardian, January 30, 2021.
14 Ibid.

Global Action

AstraZeneca's involvement was crucial for the global distribution of the vaccine. Stored at normal fridge temperatures, the vaccine was more accessible to low- and middle-income countries through COVAX. The company also made an agreement to sell the vaccine at no profit for the duration of the pandemic, with costs of $2-5 per dose globally.

In August of 2020, AstraZeneca stated its intention to deliver 300 million doses to COVAX by the end of 2021. It also announced a commitment to supply to 142 countries and become the biggest initial supplier to COVAX (through the Serum Institute of India).[15]

COVAX was a historic multilateral effort co-led by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, CEPI, WHO and UNICEF, active between 2020-2023.



Source: DHSC, "A review of the Vaccine Taskforce", Gov.uk, August 2023.

It aimed to accelerate development and manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines and to guarantee fair and equitable access for every country in the world.

The UK was its largest single donor, contributing £548 million to ensure vaccines were distributed to countries that lacked the resources.[16] Through match-funding with other donors, the UK has helped raise a total of $1 billion for the COVAX Advance Market Commitment (AMC).

This combined effort will enable the distribution of approximately one billion doses of coronavirus vaccines to 92 developing countries in the current year.[17]

It is difficult to see the efforts of companies like AstraZeneca, institutions like Oxford University and the UK Government separately. The Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine was the most widely used vaccine in the world, in large part due to its early development and easier deployability.

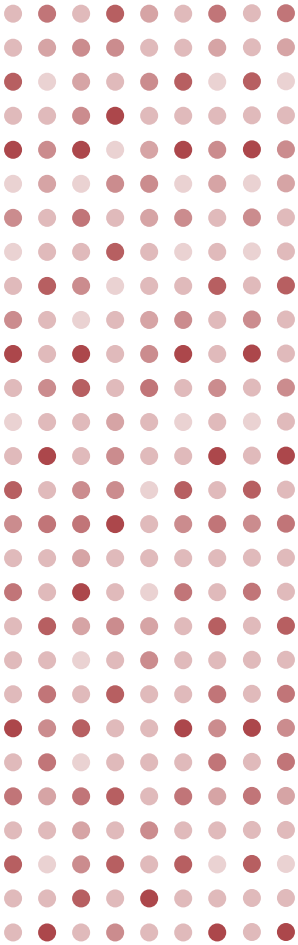
15 Rafael Dal-Ré, "The Winding 12-month Journey of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 Vaccine Since Its First Administration to Humans," Thérapie 78, no. 3 (May 1, 2023): 293–302.
16 DHSC, "A Review of the Vaccine Taskforce," GOV.UK, August 31, 2023.
17 FCDO, "UK Meets £250m Match Aid Target Into COVAX, the Global Vaccines Facility," GOV.UK, January 12, 2021.

Case Study B
Genomics: building a legacy of UK scientific breakthroughs

Genomics – the study of genes and how they interact with each other – can provide genetic information about a person's disposition to certain diseases, and improves detection, diagnosis, and personalised treatment. The UK has been a pioneer in genomics, from the identification of the DNA double helix structure in 1953, to the routine use of whole genome sequencing in the NHS in 2020.

These scientific and technological advancements have an overall huge impact on health outcomes at an individual and societal level, for instance improving efficiencies within the health system and ensuring accuracy. Rapid progress in the last decades has had a huge impact on improving quality of life.

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the UK's genomic capabilities. Lighthouse Labs was set up rapidly and ran round the clock to support the Government's response to the pandemic. Public-private partnerships were at the centre of a mass mobilisation among the scientific community to direct funds and labour to a health issue of enormous scale. For instance, COG UK Consortium delivered large-scale, rapid whole-genome sequencing of SARS-CoV-2 to public health agencies, NHS and the UK Government. As a result the UK became a world leader in detection of new variants including Alpha, Delta and Omicron.



1953
The DNA double helix structure is identified

1961
Genetic code deciphered

1985
First NHS funded DNA diagnostic service is launched

2003
Human Genome Project is completed - first whole genome sequencing

2012
UK government announces 100,000 Genomes Project

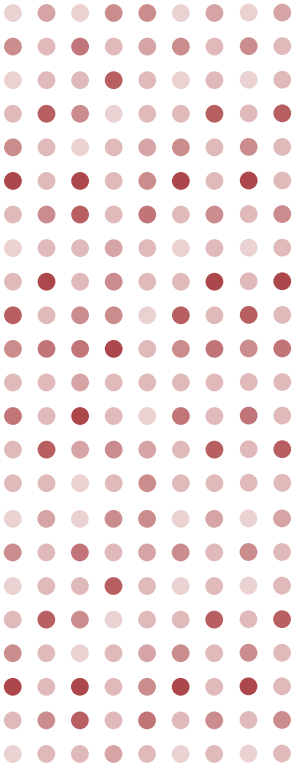
2013
First multi-gene sequencing diagnostic test for tumour profiling in the NHS

2018
100,000 Genomes Project reaches its target of 100,000 whole genomes sequenced

2020
Routine use of whole genome sequencing in the NHS

The ability for the UK to spring into action is the result of decades of cutting-edge research and genomic projects. Building on discoveries such as deciphering the genetic code in 1961, the NHS was the first public health service in the world to introduce DNA diagnostic services in 1985. This paved the way for other projects unlocking whole genome sequencing, such as the 100,000 Genomes Project which uncovered new genetic causes of diseases and improved patient care. The NHS has led globally on the clinical integration of genomics, with many other national health services following suit. This has been possible in part due to the robust ethical and regulatory frameworks that have been put in place to govern genomic research and ensure responsible use of genetic data. When pursuing global health diplomacy and health systems strengthening, this approach is valued and replicated among many countries across the globe.

The interconnectedness of academia, the private sector and the NHS has been key to the success of genomic projects. Analysis conducted by the BioIndustry Association, reported a thriving genomics ecosystem in Britain.



Their report "Genomics Nations", identified 154 genomic companies, 5119 employees based in the UK, with a total market cap of over £5 billion, and over £3.3 billion private investment raised since 2011.[18] The Government's 2021 life sciences vision commits £1 billion in public and private funding to the UK's most promising life sciences companies, with genomics identified as a key priority. The document "commits [to] building the most advanced and integrated genomic ecosystem in the world".[19]

The Genomics Nation report also identified several key components to this success, including world-leading research institutes and academia such as the Wellcome Sanger Institute, unique data resources like UK Biobank and Our Future Health, the NHS, active industrialisation for techniques and technologies, and an ambitious community of entrepreneurs.

18 UK BioIndustry Association, "Genomics nation: A benchmark of the size and strengths of the UK genomics sector", July 2021.
19 Office for Life Sciences, "Life Sciences Vision," GOV.UK, July 6, 2021, p. 21.

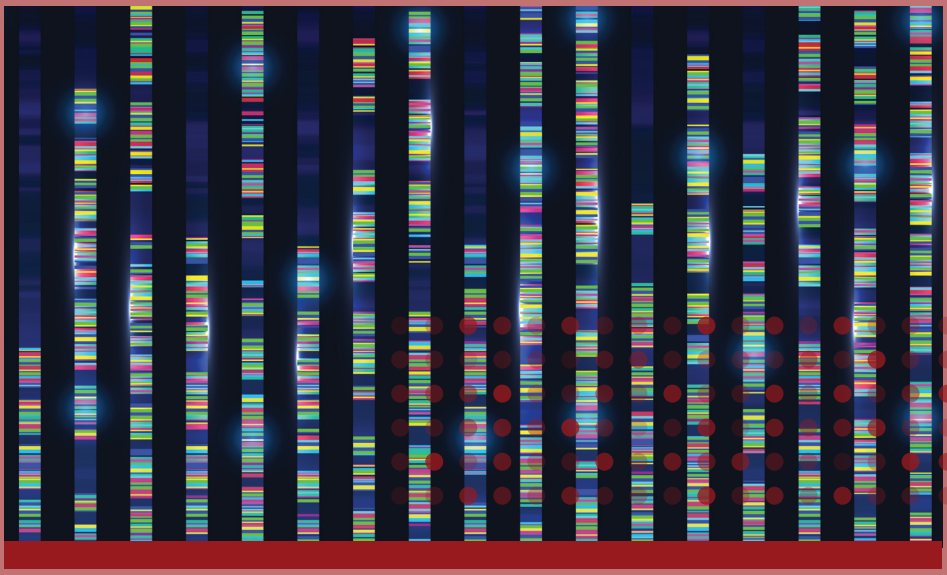
The UK Biobank is an ongoing genomics project which collects genetic, health and lifestyle data from half a million participants. It is one of the largest and most comprehensive population-based biobanks in the world, and for many "is arguably the UK's most significant asset".[20] Over 30,000 researchers across 100 countries are registered to access the database.

It is the most detailed picture of human health the world has.

It has facilitated numerous genomic studies, with companies such as AstraZeneca and Johsnon & Johnson already accessing genomic data via UK Biobank to help create new treatments and technologies.

Government support is crucial to the project. They have committed match funding of up to £25 million, which has already resulted in private investment amounting to over £30 million.[21] In addition, the Government also announced a £38mn capital fund to encourage investment in biomanufacturing to improve its ability to respond to future health emergencies.[22]

20 Ian Sample, "UK Biobank and the masses of medical data that became key to genetic research", The Guardian, 20 November 2023.
21 DSIT, "Philanthropic Partnership Unlocks £32 Million for the Future of Best-in-class UK Biobank," GOV.UK, October 30, 2023.
22 DSIT, "Biomanufacturing Fund (BMF): Phase 2 (Closed to Applications)," GOV.UK, February 26, 2024



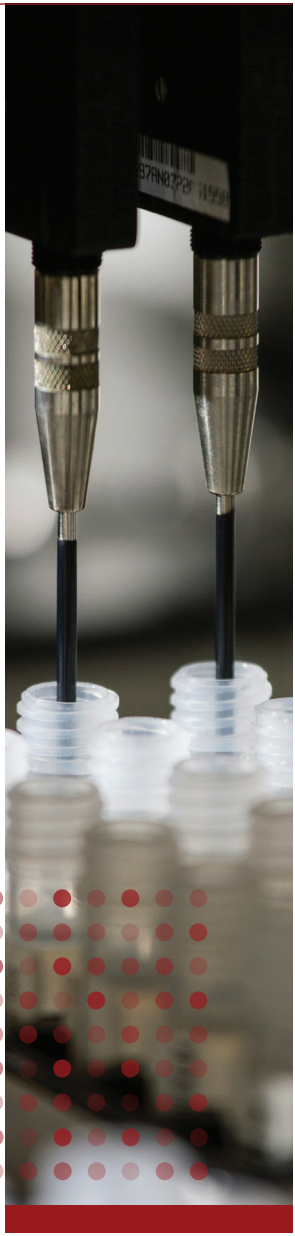
Human genome research: DNA sequencing analysis on a computer screen

What is the Government's role in promoting scientific progress in genomics?

"The genomics sector is a pertinent case study where a 'whole of government' strategy is needed."
Bob Seely MP[23]

More broadly, the UK's strategy on genomics reflects a concerted effort to leverage scientific advancements to improve healthcare in the UK and overseas. By prioritising innovation, collaboration, and patient-centred approaches, the UK aims to maintain its leadership role in the genomics revolution and contribute to global advancements in healthcare.

The success of the genomics industry in the UK is a perfect example of how the Government can support and facilitate groundbreaking research, and scale up solutions for large-scale impact within and beyond the UK. By providing adequate funding, facilitating the clinical application of new technology through guidance and updated regulation, and supporting rollout of new science and technology through multilateral organisations, the Government has enabled the UK to become a world leader in genomics research and application.



23 Bob Seely, "Voices: We need to start taking China's tech threat seriously", The Independent, 11 February 2024.

Case Study C
Innovating towards a malaria-free future with the world's first vaccines

Malaria is a long-standing public health threat to developing countries, especially in Africa. Around 630,000 people died of malaria in 2020, with the majority of deaths occurring in Africa and a disproportionate number in Cameroon, Ghana, Malawi, Kenya, Burkina Faso and Mali.[24]

Malaria is also one of the main causes of death for children under 5 in Africa, who continent-wide account for 80% of all deaths from the disease.[25]

Source: Gavi.org - Gavi Board approves funding to support malaria vaccine roll-out in sub-Saharan Africa

In 2022, **malaria caused 608 000 deaths** in a total of 249 million cases, across 85 countries.

94% of malaria cases and **95%** of all malaria deaths were concentrated in African countries 2022.

Children under 5 accounted for about **80% of all malaria deaths in Africa**.

24 World Health Organization, "Malaria," WHO, December 4, 2023.
25 Ibid.

Vaccines are a landmark development in the fight against malaria

In January 2024, the first ever routine vaccinations for malaria took place in Cameroon using the RTS,S vaccine.

This is a landmark achievement, and the outcome of decades of research and innovation led by British firm GSK, the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, and an NGO, Path, who were assisted by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation. Collaboration and partnership has been key in developing the cutting-edge scientific progress made in malaria immunisation.

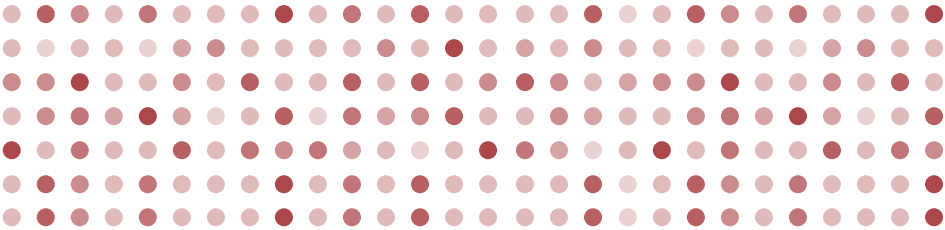
The RTS,S vaccine was prequalified by the WHO in July 2022, but another British vaccine, the R21/ Matrix-M vaccine, soon followed. Developed by the University of Oxford, it has similar levels of efficacy, but with lower associated costs at $2-4 per dose.

After Ghana became the first country to approve the R21 vaccine, the Serum Institute of India announced a technology transfer deal to produce the vaccine in-country. Manufacturing will begin as soon as the manufacturing facility in Accra has been finished.[26]

Together, the RTS,S and the R21 vaccines can fill the supply demand that just one vaccine cannot fill alone, and reach millions of children at risk. Working in collaboration with our partners, we can bring the world one step closer to a future without malaria.

The impact these two vaccines will have on global health is difficult to overstate.

> *"As a malaria researcher, I used to dream of the day when we would have a safe and effective vaccine against malaria. Now we have two."*
>
> WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus[27]

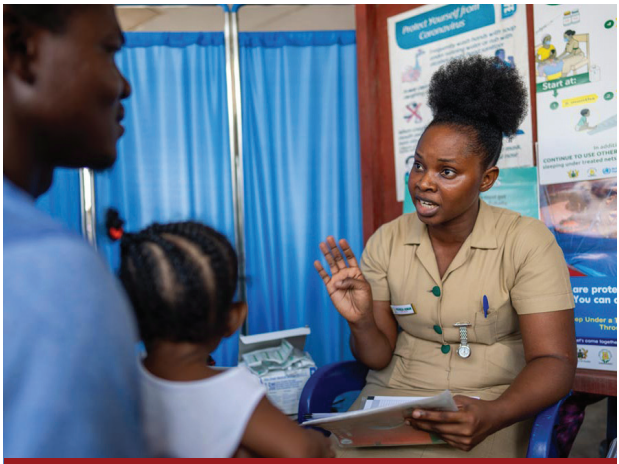


26 Gavi, "Five Things You Need to Know About the New R21 Malaria Vaccine," Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, April 25, 2023.
27 WHO, "WHO Recommends R21/Matrix-M Vaccine for Malaria Prevention in Updated Advice on Immunization," World Health Organization, October 2, 2023.

While progress against malaria has stagnated since 2000, the vaccines offer a new hope on the long road to eradication. The impact will be profound in Cameroon, where rollout has started for the RTS,S vaccine. Since 2017, malaria cases and mortality rates have steadily increased, and lead to almost 30% of hospital consultations.[28] For Gavi spokesperson, Aurelia Ngyuen, the "Vaccination will save lives, and provide major relief to families and the country's health system."[29]

While Cameroon is currently the only place the immunisation scheme has begun, according to Gavi, several countries received shipments of doses earlier this year and are in the final steps for rollout.

As said by Gareth Jenkins of Malaria No More UK, the vaccine is further proof of the "tremendous power of UK-backed research and development. Groundbreaking British-led science has today taken us a step further in the fight against malaria."[30]



Source: Gavi.org - Ghana sees falling malaria burden, targets elimination

28 WHO, "World Malaria Report 2021", 2021.
29 Aurelia Ngyuen in Temitayo Ayetoto-Oladehinde, "Malaria Vaccine Rollout Begins in Cameroon, Nigeria Eyes Next Phase," Businessday NG, January 22, 2024.
30 Gareth Jenkins, cited in Kaya Burgess and Rhys Blakely, "World's First Routine Malaria Vaccinations Start in Cameroon," The Times, January 22, 2024.

The UK has been at the forefront in the global fight against malaria for decades

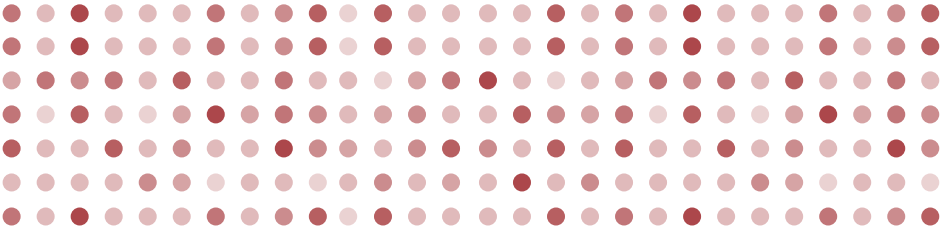
Both new vaccines were powered by British innovation, marking a new milestone for the UK's leadership in global health. It builds on a legacy of innovation in immunisation, including the smallpox vaccine which led to the eradication of the disease. The strength of the science and tech landscape in the UK, and its international links, has enabled these advancements to 'cross fertilise'. Progress made on vaccine development during the COVID-19 pandemic transformed the landscape of immunisation, as it demonstrated a vaccine could be developed in 1-2 years rather than 25 years.[31]

Maintaining a vibrant and dynamic science ecosystem enables progress in multiple areas, often in unexpected ways.

In fighting malaria, Britain has also long been at the frontlines, supporting the implementation of insecticide-treated bednets and development of antimalarial medicines. Deaths caused by malaria fell sharply after 2000 as a result of these efforts.

The UK Government has had a direct impact in increasing the reach of such tools, partly through multilateral organisations. Through funding the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the UK has helped distribute over 219 million mosquito nets in 2022, a vital component in reducing infection rates. The UK Government has pledged £1 billion to the Global Fund to cover the current period 2023-2025.[32]

With the availability of new technologies, the UK Government is once again supporting the far-reaching implementation of malaria vaccines. For instance, UK membership and continued support for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, WHO and UNICEF, will help deliver 18 million doses of the malaria vaccine to 12 African countries over 3 years.[33]



31 Lancet, "2021: The Beginning of a New Era of Immunisations?," The Lancet 397, no.10284, April 1, 2021.
32 The Global Fund, "Global Fund Applauds UK Pledge to Seventh Replenishment," News Releases - the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, November 14, 2022.
33 WHO, "18 Million Doses of First-ever Malaria Vaccine Allocated to 12 African Countries for 2023–2025: Gavi, WHO and UNICEF," World Health Organization, July 5, 2023.

What does it mean for UK soft power?

Overall, the UK's advancements in combating the world's biggest global health threats build upon its legacy as a science and tech superpower. With world-class research institutions such as the University of Oxford and the London School of Tropical Medicine, as well as a dynamic and collaborative private sector, the UK Government has proactively cultivated a space for large-scale health innovation.

This has benefits at home as well as overseas: as a founding partner of international alliances, the Government is also in a unique position to increase the reach and access of these life-changing technologies. The development of groundbreaking technologies, as demonstrated by the malaria vaccine, is further proof that the UK continues to attract investment, talent and ideas that can help the world and amplify our soft power.

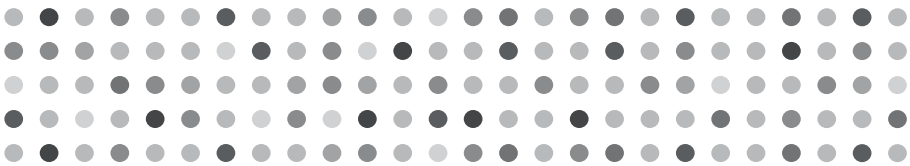
Chapter Three
Government policy and their implications

A new approach fit for a new era in international development

The Covid-19 pandemic marked a significant turning point in the UK Government's approach to global health and development, with UK leadership and cooperation at its centre.

The publication of strategies like the Integrated Review, the white paper on International Development, and the Global Health Framework signals a clear intention to "return to a long-term, predictable focus on policy and funding".[34] For many across the global health landscape this is a welcome decision after almost a decade of appearing to be "offline".[35]

Other signalling, such as the recent rebranding of UK Aid to UK International Development (or UKDev), shows a new focus on long-term mutually beneficial development partnerships. Simultaneously, the UK reaffirmed its leadership in this field by spearheading several global health initiatives and commitments during its presidency of the G7 and COP26 in 2021, amidst the ongoing global repercussions of Covid-19.



34 FCDO, "International Development in a Contested World: Ending Extreme Poverty and Tackling Climate Change, a White Paper on International Development," GOV.UK, January 22, 2024, p. 27.
35 Richard Horton, "Offline: The UK, a Knave Among Nations," The Lancet 399, no. 10344 (June 1, 2022): 2336.

The urgency of the work to promote Britain's global health leadership is highlighted as a security issue in the Integrated Review in 2021, and the Refresh in 2023. Here, the UK Government acknowledges the importance of soft power in an increasingly competitive global landscape. Building on the UK's edge in science and technology, the Prime Minister states that "we will invest in the UK's unique strengths. Britain is a leading economy, but our strength comes not only through size but specialisation. As the 2021 Integrated Review was clear, science and technology is increasingly vital to our future. ... That's why we are committing to spend £20 billion a year by 2024/25 on research and development and why we have reorganised the government to enable greater focus and dynamism in an area that is critical for our future prosperity and security".[36]

Building on the successes of British medical research and the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine, this kind of focused investment means that the Government's goal to become a Science and Tech Superpower by 2030 is within reach.[37]

Linking the UK's strengths in science and technology, the strategy papers also underscore the UK's aspiration to lead in global health initiatives. In the Integrated Review, the UK establishes its commitment to the SDGs, while the Global Health Framework restates the UK's aspirations to "be a world leader in global health".[38] The International Development White Paper, published in 2023, further highlights the importance of a sustained focus on predictable patterns of funding and policies that are aligned with locally-led development efforts. The UK's contributions to global health should therefore be seen within the context of a changing approach to aid and development more broadly.

36 Rishi Sunak, in Cabinet Office, "Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World," GOV.UK, May 16, 2023.
37 Cabinet Office, "The Integrated Review 2021," GOV.UK, March 16, 2021.
38 FCDO, "Global Health Framework: Working Together Towards a Healthier World," GOV.UK, May 22, 2023, p3.

Collaboration and leadership after a global health emergency

The emphasis on pandemic preparedness stands out as a key priority in the context of Covid-19 recovery. The Global Health Framework, introduced in May 2023, outlines objectives aimed at fostering global health security, reforming health systems, and advancing UK leadership in science and technology.

In this context, collaboration and leadership emerge as pillars to a refreshed UK approach to global health. Britain's G7 presidency in 2021 led to several global health initiatives, notably the Carbis Bay Health Declaration and the 100 Day Mission. Reflecting the lessons learned during Covid-19, the Mission outlines a shared goal of developing safe and effective vaccines within 100 days of the identification of an epidemic. The FCDO has since created a new Global Health Directorate (GHD) to action the priorities of the Integrated Review Refresh and the 100 Days Mission.

Bringing together the technical aspects that the UK can deliver on through innovation in the NHS, Government strategy also brings into focus the need for greater scrutiny on governance and financing in global health - two elements which are not fully fleshed out in current Government publications. However, taking on the presidency of groups like the G7 lends a moment of momentum for the UK and brings to the fore the unique technical and diplomatic assets it can use to advance global health goals.

Another initiative brought forward under the UK's G7 presidency has resulted in the creation of the Global Digital Health Partnership. The NHS AI lab led on the creation of shared principles for AI and machine learning-enabled medical devices,facilitating their development and implementation across the globe.

The Government proposes to use this success as a blueprint for collaboration and leadership in areas of British expertise: "we will use initiatives like this as an opportunity to maximise our relationships with our global partners to share and exchange knowledge on medical technologies and solutions".[39] By leveraging its technical expertise through unique assets like the NHS's AI Lab, the UK is able to demonstrate leadership and facilitate collaboration for furthering the aims of global health, and ultimately, harness its soft power.

This recommitment to a multilateral effort to secure global health security has led to a realignment with the SDGs, serving as a guiding framework for UK global health policy. Prioritising goals related to poverty alleviation, ending preventable deaths,and strengthening health systems reflects a commitment to achieving sustainable development and improving global health outcomes.

39 FCDO, "Global Health Framework: Working Together Towards a Healthier World," GOV.UK, May 22, 2023, p.16.

While there has been debate in UK policy circles over the last few years over the efficacy of multilateral versus bilateral funding, both are crucial for high impact work in global health.[40] For instance, the UK is a founding member of a number of organisations including Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, which was crucial in setting up the COVAX and promoting equitable access to the Covid-19 vaccine.

At the moment, Gavi is preparing for its 6th strategy period, 2026-2030, for the Vaccine Alliance. As stakeholders debate "Gavi 6.0", there is a window of opportunity for the UK to voice its opinion and influence how the alliance can make the most impact. The alliance has frequently been recognised as a top performer regarding delivering high impact work by the FCDO and is therefore a key partner for delivering UK aid.[41] It is one of the most effective ways the UK supports global vaccination efforts, and joins the dots between rapid vaccine technology development and UK aid's ability to reach those in need.

By using British expertise, the UK can leverage its soft power to contribute to the alliance's goals for its next phase.

The UK also has strong political currency within the World Health Organization (WHO) and other UN platforms. For instance, at the last UN General Assembly, the UK announced an almost £500 million health package including £295 million of new funding for health research, R&D for new drugs, vaccines and diagnostics.[42]

The UK also set out a new AI vision for development and launched an International Science Partnerships Fund to promote open science for global resilience. Announcing these initiatives in the context of the General Assembly sets out to prove this commitment to international cooperation. More broadly, in taking a more active stance in multilateral organisations and small groups like the G7, the UK is utilising its soft power to shape the international order - and defend liberal values. A key example is in the space of gender equality.

40 Andrew Mitchell, Oral evidence: Future of UK aid, HC 148, In: International Development Committee, 6 December 2022, Q361 & Q366.
41 Gavi, "United Kingdom," Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, 2024.
42 FCDO, "UK Announces 'Transformational' Support to Boost Global Health at the UK General Assembly," GOV.UK, September 21, 2023.

The UK's fight for gender equality and global health

The principle of individual rights and bodily autonomy is at the heart of the UK's work on advancing the rights and health of women and girls. Connecting to other parts of UK foreign policy, advocating for access to basic healthcare services, sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortion, and maternal healthcare is a core pillar of the broader work the UK does on advancing the rights of women and gender equality. As a consequence, policy papers such as 'Ending the Preventable Deaths of Mothers, Babies and Children by 2030', define some of the work UK global health seeks to address, aligned with broader national and international priorities on gender equality.

In parallel to the importance of partnerships and mutual benefits in development, there is strong support for investing in life sciences within the UK. Acknowledged as a crucial driver behind the UK's contributions to global health through scientific advancements, the life sciences sector is often the object of focus among global health and development policy papers, as well as the publication of related domestic policies including the UK Science and Technology Framework, and the Life Sciences Vision.

Source: Gavi.org - How to keep vaccine production going during a pandemic?

Striving for 0.7%, and beyond

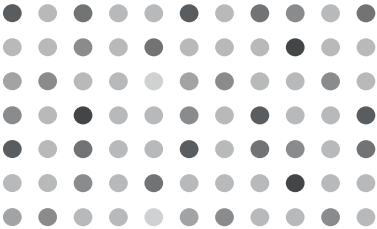
In striving for a return to the 0.7% GNI target for ODA, stakeholders within the global health ecosystem advocate for sustained investment, recognising its benefits for both the UK and the broader international community. Government policy remains committed to reaching a 0.7% GNI target for ODA "once the fiscal situation allows".[43]

To deliver on the UK's aims for global health and poverty alleviation, a dependable sum of aid is necessary.

As the international development committee has noted, the impact of the cuts on the ground have been particularly felt by bilateral programmes and have damaged "our soft power and reputation as a country that does right by the poorest".[44]

However, in reality the UK is unlikely to be able to meet the 0.7% target soon, and as such, we should address what is in our control, and where current aid is spent.

Money should also be unlocked in areas that are too wasteful - such as the increasing ratio of aid going to housing refugees in the UK. In March of last year, the International Development Select Committee found that UK aid spending per refugee has almost tripled, representing almost 10% of ODA budget in 2021.[45] Migrant hotel costs have risen to £8 million according to the Home Office as of September 2023.[46] This also touches upon the issue of departmental remit: the merger of DFID and the FCO should allow for greater centralised control of the aid budget by the FCDO, rather than it being enveloped by the Home Office.



43 FCDO, "International Development in a Contested World: Ending Extreme Poverty and Tackling Climate Change, a White Paper on International Development," GOV.UK, January 22, 2024.
44 Sarah Champion, Oral evidence: Future of UK aid, HC 148, In: International Development Committee, 6 December 2022, Q361 & Q366.
45 International Development Committee, "Aid Spending in the UK: Sixth Report of Session 2022-23", House of Commons, 28 February 2023.
46 Patrick Daly, "Migrant Hotels Bill Climbs to £8m a Day, According to Home Office Accounts," The Independent, September 19, 2023.

Despite fiscal limitations, there is still much room for optimism. The emphasis on the life sciences provides another avenue for efficient investment in boosting global health. For instance, the Chancellor's last Spring Budget in March 2024, set aside £92 million of joint Government and industry investment to expand facilities for medicine and diagnostic products manufacturing.

To support the life sciences research hub in Cambridge an additional £10.2 million is being invested for local infrastructure. This is accompanied by a £650 million investment announced by AstraZeneca in further research in Cambridge and to build a vaccine manufacturing hub in Liverpool.[47]

These investments show how targeted Government spending in areas of growth can have a multiplying effect, harnessing the best of the UK's academic institutions, and encouraging private sector investment. This type of strategic investment is particularly significant under the fiscal constraints of the cut to 0.5% GNI aid spending. Moreover, these investments recognise the global impacts that previous scientific breakthroughs in the UK have had, far beyond its borders, such as the malaria vaccines.

47 Gemma Gardner, "Spring Budget 2024: Jeremy Hunt confirms Cambridge development corporation plan and further AstraZeneca investment in Biomedical Campus", Cambridge Independent, March 2024.

Mutual benefits: moving from aid to trade

The argument for aid to support global health is a moral one. With the malaria vaccine, by supporting scientific advancements and supporting widespread access, the UK helps move the dial to eradicating a life-threatening disease for millions across the globe. Yet, alongside moral arguments, there are compelling mutual benefits to conducting partnerships.

One clear example lies in attracting talent to power the NHS. 1 in 3 UK doctors were born overseas, together with 1 in 4 UK nurses.[48] This has been at the heart of the NHS since it began. In relation to global health there are also certain added strengths: many of the international staff bring their own experience of global health with them, through lived experience and connections with diaspora.[49] We must not neglect this pool of knowledge within our own national health system.

Furthermore, as Andrew Mitchell notes, we must not forget that with every doctor or nurse we "poach" from a developing nation, there is one less trained medical staff they have for their own healthcare system. Through initiatives like the Medical Training Initiatives, NHS staff have trained over 100,000 medical professionals from LMICs in the past 5 years.[50]

Policy to achieve stronger health systems carries stronger incentives for reciprocity and demonstrates added benefits to a partnership-based approach to development. The Better Health Programme, launched in 2019 is a compelling example of this logic. To help middle-income countries move from an "aid to trade" model, the partnership with NHS Consortium for Global Health, DIT and Healthcare facilitated several new commercial deals for UK and non-commercial projects.

As the Health Systems Strengthening paper and Global Health Framework argue, while this type of work "primarily aims to improve global health outcomes, [it also] contributes to the UK's own ability to handle health threats and strengthens our life sciences sector".[51]

More generally, through boosting the life sciences sector, the UK can also promote its aim to strengthen "the UK's position as a leading global hub for trade and investment".[52] The Global Health Framework argues that by reducing trade barriers and facilitating collaboration, the UK could support global health improvement while bringing the benefits for the UK economy. For instance, in 2021, the UK life sciences sector was third in the world for number of inward investment projects, with medicinal and pharmaceutical products in the top three goods exported from the UK.

48 Carl Barker, Research Briefing "NHS staff from overseas: statistics", House of Commons, 23 November 2023.
49 Ben Simms in "Systems not symptoms: Tackling the root causes of the global health crisis", The Foreign Policy Centre, 28 June 2022.
50 Ibid.
51 FCDO, "Global Health Framework: Working Together Towards a Healthier World," GOV.UK, May 22, 2023, p.4.
52 Ibid, p.17.

In the same year, £1.9 billion inward foreign direct investment helped fuel the life sciences sector.[53] As the Global Health APPG previously noted, the UK is a global centre for health and science - it is the go-to place for all aspects of health globally, giving it permission to shape global health directly with other nations and through global institutions such as the G7 and the WHO.

In summary, the UK's evolving global health strategy reflects a renewed commitment to international cooperation, driven by a recognition of the interconnectedness of global health challenges and the imperative for collective action. Through strategic investments and partnerships, the UK seeks to assert its leadership role in advancing global health outcomes while addressing pressing challenges such as pandemic preparedness and equitable access to healthcare.

53 DIT, "Life Sciences - What's Next for This Top UK Sector: A Board of Trade Paper (Web Version)," GOV.UK, November 28, 2022.

Conclusion

A New Era of Global Health Diplomacy: Harnessing Science, Technology, and Global Health for Enhanced Soft Power

The strategies outlined in policy papers like the Integrated Review, the International Development White Paper, and the Global Health Framework reflect a strategic realignment with long-term, predictable engagement in addressing global health challenges. Through these initiatives, the UK aims to assert its leadership in key areas such as pandemic preparedness, scientific innovation, and health system strengthening.

Global health has been brought into focus rapidly over the last few years. The Covid-19 pandemic brought home the real impact that "problems without passports" can have at home, just as much as overseas. As exemplified by Section 2's case studies, protecting our future health and ensuring a better quality of life for all is not only a domestic issue, but clearly an international one as well. While players like China assert their soft power through overbearing and centralised Government control of investment, the UK proudly supports international institutions at the forefront of efforts to affect genuine progress on global health.

Financial investment in the health institutions that drive progress and innovation is one significant pillar, and the UK's role as "global broker" also provides crucial access and support.[54] Without governmental support, the AstraZeneca vaccine would not have been developed as quickly, nor been distributed as effectively to those most in need.

Though fiscal uncertainties are one key challenge to fulfilling these aims, in the context of large budget cuts in 2020, rebuilding trust with international partners may prove just as challenging. Proving that the UK's ambitious goals in advancing global health are not just rhetoric will take time.

However, through strategic investments in research and development, as well as fostering partnerships with international stakeholders, the UK can drive progress towards addressing pressing global health challenges and strengthening health systems worldwide.

As the UK works to achieve Science and Tech Superpower status by 2030, it must recognise the intrinsic link between scientific advancement and global health. By building on successes like the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine, the malaria vaccine, and the cutting-edge genomics industry, the UK can position itself as a pioneer in medical research and innovation.

54 All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Health, "The UK, G7 and Global Health," House of Commons, February 2020.

These efforts to advance science, technology, and global health will not only yield tangible benefits in terms of improved health outcomes but also enhance the UK's soft power on the world stage.

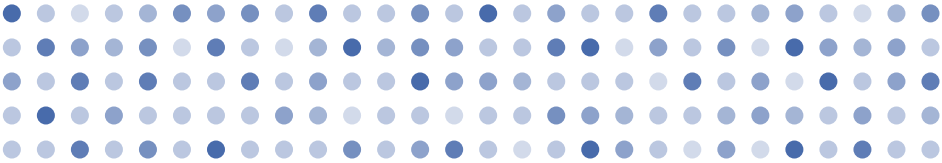
By showcasing its expertise, leadership, and positioning itself as a responsible actor, the UK can foster goodwill, build trust, and strengthen diplomatic relations with partner countries and international organisations.

In summary, by harnessing the power of the UK's unique domestic institutional landscape, collaboration between academia, the private sector and government can make the UK a leading force for good with meaningful contributions to addressing the world's most pressing health challenges. Not only does this provide life-saving health benefits for some of the most vulnerable populations across the world, there are tangible domestic benefits for the UK economy and healthcare system.

Recommendations

1 **Provide longer-term and predictable funding to the life sciences sector.** Increasing settlement plans in the next spending review would demonstrate the UK Government's commitment to achieving Science and Tech superpower status by 2030. This would offer stability and flexibility to the sector enabling long-term investment by academic institutions and private investment, thus multiplying the returns on investment made by the Government, as demonstrated in the case studies of this report. This could involve setting budgets over five years instead of two or three, as was done in the 2015 spending review, facilitating strategic planning and resource allocation across government departments. This approach has proven effective in previous spending reviews and creates a conducive environment for drawing in investment and long-term planning. Similar commitments to the life sciences sector would enhance confidence for investment in impactful projects, foster resilience, allowing the UK to be adaptable and nimble in the face of future global health challenges. This will enable knock-on impacts, by unlocking further opportunities for UK institutions to have a greater impact in global health.

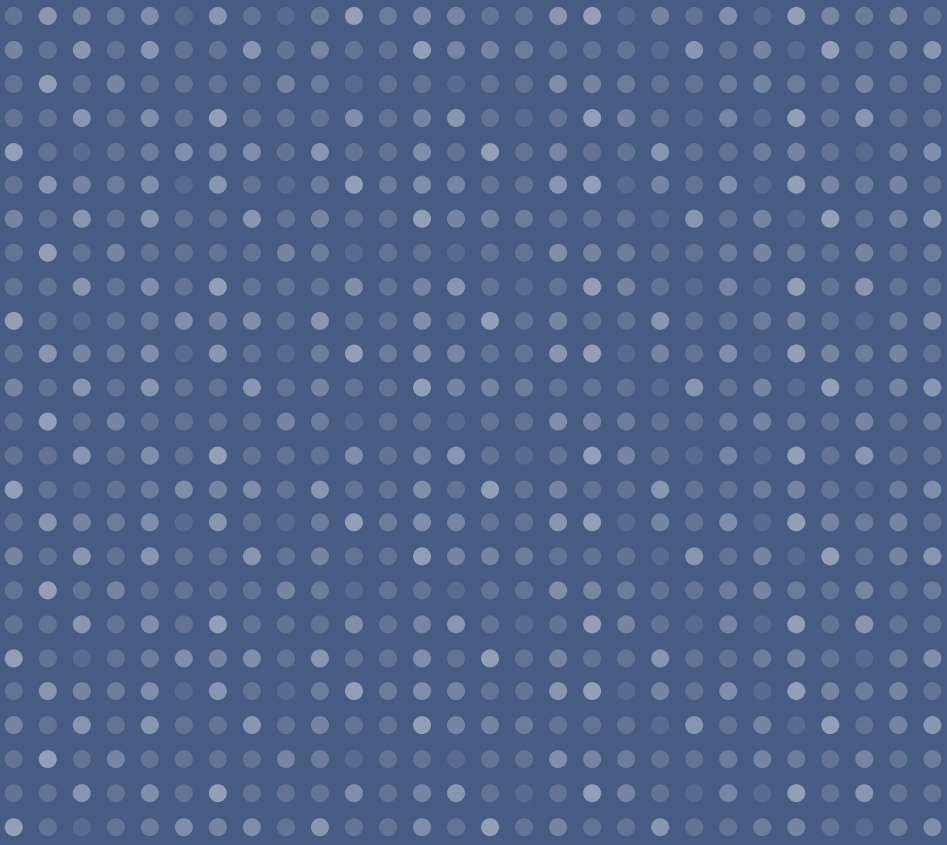
2 **Enhance cross-governmental cohesion on the UK's science and tech ambitions, and how these will help to deliver UK aid.** Delivering on the UK's science superpower ambition will require cross-regularised dialogue between departments including the Cabinet Office, DSIT, DHSC, and the FCDO. Creating a new subgroup within the Council on Science and Technology, which sits within the Cabinet Office, would be a low-cost tool to facilitate conversation and to advise on how science and tech progress should be reflected in the UK's development offer. This could echo the work achieved at the AI Safety Summit hosted at Bletchley Park last year, where discussions offered insight into the implementation of AI to power long-term development work across Africa. This will support a more strategic approach to global health aims by reducing inefficiencies and using UK tech to make the aid budget go further.

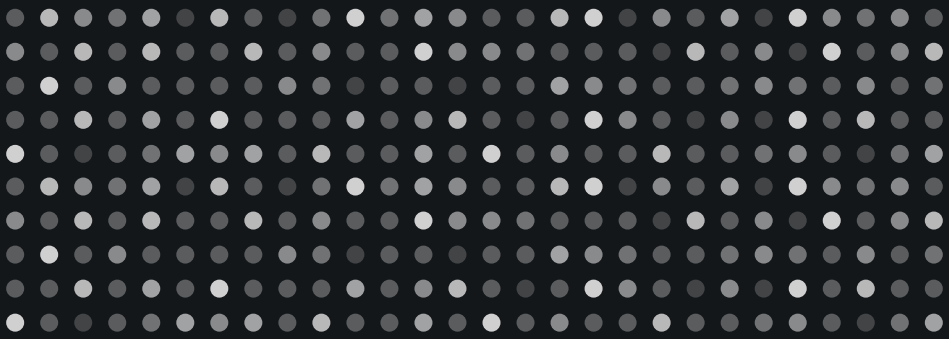


3 **Provide better access to the UK's science, tech and health expertise using the Government's convening power.** The UK's role as a Science and Tech superpower depends on a number of institutions beyond government and their international relationships. The UK Government must act as an effective orchestrator to convene these institutions with developing countries to maximise the scope for those institutions to develop tailored arrangements. To achieve this, the UK should convene a new forum – for instance, the UK Global Health Summit – to increase dialogue between representatives of higher education, the science and tech sector, and public health including the NHS, as well as counterparts and representatives of developing countries.

4 **Honour commitments to the international community.** By fulfilling promises made and communicating global health achievements, the UK can reinforce its position as a dependable leader and effectively wield its soft power in advancing global health agendas. The UK can achieve this by upholding commitments to the international community through consistent engagement and reliable funding allocations. This could build on previous commitments to specific global health challenges. For instance, since endorsing the Kigali Declaration on Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs), the UK has invested over £42 million since 2021 in research and innovation for prevention and treatment. Through action the UK has demonstrated its continual support for the 2030 roadmap on NTDs, contributing to its reputation as a world leader in combating global health challenges.

5 **Strengthen international partnerships by expanding the list of global universities available to the high talent visa track.** The current list of global universities set out by the Government is small and composed mostly of top US universities, with some located in Australia, France and China. This list should be expanded to include greater geographical variety. Part of the rationale for this network is to increase the potential talent pool for the UK, but it should also reflect a longer term strategic interest in cultivating partnerships with academic and research institutions in countries whose power and global influence will grow in the decades to come. A significant part of this work should look to prioritise existing links with the commonwealth nations, and strengthen relationships across a broad geographic spread. One place to start would be building on existing networks like the Association of Commonwealth Universities.





COALITION FOR GLOBAL PROSPERITY

Britain as a force for good