Marie Stopes International (MSI) is one of the world’s largest reproductive health organisations. For over 35 years we have been providing services that deliver choice, quality and equity.

We currently work in 37 countries delivering services to poor and underserved women. As a global health provider, a major recipient of UK Aid and a partner to governments, donors and the private sector across the world, MSI welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

1. The role of DFID in facilitating other UK organisations to assist developing countries.

DFID play a critical role in supporting UK-based agencies to deliver development assistance. DFID has developed innovative performance-based funding mechanisms that deliver high-quality results and support communities that would otherwise not be reached. By funding evidence-based, cost effective health interventions, through support to agencies such as MSI, DFID has saved millions of lives and helped build more effective and equitable public and private health systems.

DFID’s emphasis on sustainability means that the support provided by UK-based agencies has a longer-term impact on poverty alleviation. DFID’s focus on value for money obliges partner UK agencies to use tax-payers money efficiently, demonstrating economy of scale, and clear, measurable progress.

2. Whether a stand-alone Department for International Development has a long-term future.

We support the continuation of a stand-alone department for international development (with a dedicated cabinet minister). A dedicated department, staffed with experienced development personnel is vital in effectively delivering aid and ensuring the best investment on return for the UK taxpayer. Many recent achievements, as exemplified below, have been made possible, or been far easier to achieve, with a dedicated and resourced department:

– Progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Several targets have already been met, or will be met, by the end of 2015. The number of people living in extreme poverty has halved and by 2012 all developing regions achieved, or were close to achieving, gender parity in primary education. Globally, health is improving. Since 1990, with a significant contribution from UK’s development programmes, the number of girls and women dying during pregnancy and childbirth has fallen by 45%. A dedicated department has been able to invest resources where they are most needed to deliver impressive progress in poverty reduction both in terms of speed and reach.

– Aid effectiveness. A dedicated department has been able to better ensure the UK’s overseas development aid (ODA) provides value for money, directly contributes to poverty reduction and to meeting the needs of poor people, and is consistent with international human rights standards. In a dedicated department, there are clear lines of responsibility and accountability for ODA and development policies.

A dedicated department has been important in advocating for the UK’s political and financial commitment to international development: arguing successfully that 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) be allocated to ODA. A dedicated department has streamlined the delivery of this commitment, tracking results and reporting on its impact. Investment in international development is a cornerstone of the UK’s foreign policy and financial and technical oversight from a dedicated department has been crucial for effectively managing these funds on behalf of the UK taxpayer.

– Global leadership and soft power. DFID’s leadership and expertise is valued across the world, particularly by partner governments, other donor agencies and non-governmental organisations such as Marie Stopes International. This is an endorsement of the UK’s decision to dedicate specific technical and financial resources to understanding the drivers and solutions to poverty. Within the international community DFID is particularly appreciated for its focus on sustainability and impact, and the UK has played a unique role in strengthening global aid and development architecture. It is unlikely that global attention would have been as focussed on women’s rights, and in particular family planning and FGC, in the way it has been in recent years without a dedicated department. The evidence is clear that with
authority and clear purpose, single entities - such as DFID - are more effective and cohesive in achieving their goals than entities with varied and multiple briefs.¹

This leadership role gives the UK access to diplomatic, trade and business opportunities, and allows the UK to ‘punch above its weight’ in the world. Integrating DFID into another department would inevitably mean the loss of capacity to influence, both in developing countries and with other donor countries, as well as a loss of intellectual leadership.

- **Innovative and flexible approaches.** DFID has been able to experiment with cutting edge approaches to achieve development, for example working across health markets and with the private sector to improve access to reproductive health services, or developing practical tools with proven ability to improve gender equity. These examples call into question the value of integrating DFID with other departments, if there are already ways to identify and invest in non-traditional mechanisms to achieve development goals.

A dedicated department also ensures the capacity and resources to respond to specific global humanitarian emergencies (e.g. the current Ebola crisis) and ensures that the UK has the expertise and ability to operate in, and support short and medium term aid in fragile states.

There are reasons across the political spectrum to better align foreign, development, trade and commercial policies. We believe that greater policy coherence is possible and preferable without the amalgamation of departments. As experiences in Canada, Australia and New Zealand show, amalgamation can lead to a loss of prioritisation, focus and expertise, particularly in relation to aid effectiveness.

DFID personnel have solid technical expertise, policy experience and professional relationships that enable delivery of programmes with proven results. So the evidence shows that retaining experienced, dedicated development staff in London and around the world is needed to safeguard this record of effectiveness. (The Australian experience of integration is important here: since the merger of AusAID and DFAT, significant numbers of locally engaged, highly-qualified AusAID staff have left the department taking with them years of specialist expertise and contacts).²

3. **The coherence of policies which affect development**

DFID’s ability to implement policies and programmes is hampered by often competing and contradictory policy agendas within the UK government. Greater coherence and co-operation is needed across all ministries particularly foreign, trade, defence and finance to ensure agendas are also actively supporting the objectives of development co-operation.

There is great potential for further leveraging of trade and diplomatic opportunities for greater development returns, and strengthening organisational structures and communication arrangements across government to better facilitate the identification and funding of non-traditional aid activities. To lead efforts to address future development challenges, a strong and well-resourced DFID is needed, with a mandate to advise and influence how non-aid policies impact developing countries.

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¹ Carol Lancaster in *Foreign aid: diplomacy, development, domestic politics* and by Erik Lunsgaarde in *The domestic politics of foreign aid*.