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International Development
Committee

UK progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Voluntary National Review

Twelfth Report of Session 2017–19

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to the report*

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The International Development Committee

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Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the International Development Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 1223; the Committee's email address is indcom@parliament.uk

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Contents

Summary	3
Acknowledgements	5
1 The Voluntary National Review Process	6
The Sustainable Development Goals	6
Voluntary National Reviews	8
The UK Voluntary National Review Process	9
Timeline	10
Stakeholder Engagement	12
Cross-Government Coordination	18
2 The Voluntary National Review	24
Geographical scope of the Review	24
Rigorous coverage of goals and targets	25
Leave No One Behind	29
International contribution to the SDGs	31
Interlinkages and policy coherence	32
Next steps	33
Does it fulfil the purposes of a good VNR?	34
The High-Level Political Forum	35
3 What next?	37
Conclusions and recommendations	39
Appendix	43
Formal minutes	46
Witnesses	47
Published written evidence	48
List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament	50

Summary

On 16 July 2019 the UK Government presents its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York. This is the first assessment of the UK's progress towards the SDGs at home and its contribution to their achievement overseas. It is an important moment for the UK and an opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to achieve this transformative global agenda, which covers everything from infrastructure to inequality and poverty to peace, both here in the UK and overseas.

The Secretary of State conceded that the coordination of the UK's first VNR has been an "imperfect process", with a lot of "nervousness" about the Government "marking [its] own homework". The timeline for the Review has been unnecessarily tight, with most of the activity to pull the Review together taking place in the last eight months. The Government should have allowed more time for the VNR process, and in future should produce a detailed, publicly available timeline at least 18 months before presentation of the Review.

Stakeholder engagement throughout the VNR process has been inadequate and disappointing, with undue weight placed on the collection of 'case studies' in the VNR document. Departments' engagement with stakeholders was 'ad hoc' and much of it took place late in the process, with little evidence of coordination from the centre. Consultation events were largely superficial, and it is hard to see how this engagement has influenced the final Review; or could have. We welcome the Government's commitment to develop a formal mechanism for stakeholder engagement on domestic implementation of the SDGs, but require further details on this. We also want to see a commitment to create a similar mechanism for consultation on the UK's global contribution.

The VNR process has doubtless resulted in increased awareness of the SDGs in pockets across the government departments. However, it was clear that initially the bar was very, very low, with some departments having virtually no knowledge of the agenda at all. We welcome the Global Goals being put on the agenda at Cabinet, which ensured some visibility of the SDGs for Cabinet Ministers at least. We hope that the next Prime Minister will follow up on these small steps with some leadership to ensure that the new Cabinet receives the message that the SDG agenda is integral to, and coherent with, the UK Government's agenda. As the Secretary of State told us: "if you had a Prime Minister who made this central to their domestic agenda. That is what would really transform this."

Placing the responsibility for implementation of the SDGs—and by extension the Voluntary National Review—in the Department for International Development is simply wrong. The practicalities are that DFID is an internationally-focused department whose Ministers have recognised that they have "relatively few, if any, domestic levers". The message in this arrangement is that the SDG initiative is one for developing countries (when the whole point of the agenda is the shared and global nature of the goals). It is clear that the VNR—and UK implementation of the SDGs more generally—should be the responsibility of the Cabinet Office. For substantial progress to be made on the

SDGs, across Government, it is essential that an appropriate mechanism is created in the Cabinet Office, at the very heart of government, to lead on communication and implementation of the SDGs, including coordination with the devolved administrations.

Overall, the UK's first VNR was a welcome, but ultimately disappointing, review of the UK's progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We found that despite some strengths, too often the VNR lacked coherence, depth and breadth of analysis, focusing instead on "cherry picked" data and case studies at the expense of facing up to the challenges that remain to be tackled in the UK and around the world. For its next VNR, the Government should be more ambitious and rigorous in its review of the UK's progress. It should include more contextualised data, and analyses, showing trends and comparisons with other countries to illuminate the UK's performance against SDG targets, including the variations across the four UK nations. Where case studies are deployed, there should be one real challenge—and in 2019 the withdrawal from the EU is an obvious choice—for every inspiring vignette or impressive new initiative.

The presentation of the VNR to the UN HLPF this week is an opportunity for the UK to reaffirm its commitment to the SDGs on the international stage and to once again show leadership on this vital agenda. We hope that the UK's presentation will include a wide range of stakeholders involved in implementation of the SDGs across the UK, including young people and civil society representatives. The Government should use this year's HLPF to commit to producing its next VNR in three years' time: in the summer of 2022.

It is also vital that the next Prime Minister attends the SDGs Summit at the United Nations General Assembly in September, to speak to the UK's progress on the SDGs and its first VNR. It is crucial that the UK reinforces its commitment to this transformative global agenda, supports the push—by Project Everyone and others—to deliver the SDGs by 2030, and demonstrates that the country remains a force for good on the international stage.

As part of the legacy of the VNR, the Government should also commit at the HLPF to a process of public review meetings on the Review, to include the devolved administrations; human rights institutions; trades unions; business and industry; NGOs; Parliamentarians and UK academia. Key points and recommendations could be summarised, appended to the VNR and submitted to the UN at next year's HLPF. This process would allow the Government to raise awareness of the Goals by launching a national conversation about the VNR alongside these meetings. It would also ensure an accurate and comprehensive baseline for future reporting. In a spirit of peer learning and global engagement, the Government should assemble a peer review panel to feed into this process and kickstart implementation.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the enormous contributions made to our work by a wide range of people and organisations, including: as ever, those who provided written and/or oral evidence (and who are listed at the end of this Report) and those whose published work we have also used (and referenced by way of the traditional footnote).

Especial thanks to our Specialist Adviser on this line of inquiry, Dr Graham Long, Associate Director of Newcastle University Institute for Sustainability, and two organisations in particular, the UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development (UKSSD) and the Bond SDGs Working Group whose inputs have been invaluable.

Within Parliament, we have benefited from the work of the Environmental Audit Committee (and cooperation between our staff teams) and, equally, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the United Nations Global Goals for Sustainable Development.

We also thank the staff of DFID for their continued cooperation, both formal and informal, with our scrutiny.

1 The Voluntary National Review Process

The Sustainable Development Goals

1. In September 2015, 193 UN Member States—including the UK—adopted a new global development framework: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The seventeen SDGs, or ‘Global Goals’, set out a comprehensive and transformative global agenda on issues such as climate change, gender equality and economic development (see Box 1). The Goals are universal and apply to developed and developing countries alike. As Emily Auckland, co-Chair of UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development (UKSSD) told us:

The Sustainable Development Goals have been called the closest thing the world has to a strategy for the future. Together, they provide us with an ambitious plan for a future that is fairer, safer, healthier and in better balance with nature. They resonate with every aspect of life in the UK. They are relevant to individuals, to households, to communities, to business and to government.¹

2. Our predecessor International Development Committee was at the forefront of parliamentary scrutiny of this agenda in the UK and published a Report on *UK Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals* on 8 June 2016.² The Report expressed significant concern with the Government’s early approach to the implementation of the SDGs in the UK, including:

- Lack of focus on domestic implementation;
- Insufficient communication—and understanding—of the Goals across all Government departments;
- The absence of a formal mechanism for Ministers from across Government to meet regularly to discuss implementation of the Goals;
- The need to strengthen reporting on policy coherence.

The Report also asked the Government to develop a national implementation plan, and to commit to monitor, and report on, its contribution to the Goals at home and overseas on an annual basis.

3. Although some progress has been made since 2016, the majority of our predecessor’s concerns on implementation still stand. For example, although some effort has been made to map the SDGs on to the Government’s single departmental plans (which detail each department’s objectives and how they will achieve them), this does not equate to a comprehensive implementation plan or full integration of the Goals across the Government’s programme. Crucially, there remains an absence of leadership at the top

1 [Q1](#)

2 International Development Committee, First Report of Session 2016–17, [UK implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals](#), HC103

of Government on the SDGs and a lack of political will, and administrative means, to put them firmly at the heart of government policy. As Rt Hon Rory Stewart OBE MP, the current Secretary of State for International Development, told us during this inquiry:

[...] if you had a Prime Minister who made this central to their domestic agenda. That is what would really transform this. If they did make it central to their domestic agenda, they could do it in a whole series of ways. They could make it absolutely central to the Cabinet Office.³

In the coming months there will be an opportunity for a new Prime Minister to use the UK's first Voluntary National Review (VNR) as a launchpad for greater action on the SDGs, and to use them as a blueprint for domestic and international policy to 2030.

Box 1: The Sustainable Development Goals

- Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
- Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
- Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
- Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
- Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
- Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Source: UN, *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (September 2015)

Voluntary National Reviews

4. In order to review progress towards the SDGs, the UN encourages member states to “conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven”.⁴ The 2030 Agenda clearly states that these reviews should:

4 UN, [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, para 79

draw on contributions from indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, in line with national circumstances, policies and priorities. National parliaments as well as other institutions can also support these processes.⁵

These Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) form the basis for the annual reviews of progress on the SDGs conducted by the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), held at the UN Headquarters in New York each July. To date, 111 countries have presented their VNRs to the HLPF. In 2019, an additional 47 countries will report; seven of those for the second time since the Goals were adopted in 2015. The UK is amongst those reporting for the first time and will present its Voluntary National Review to the HLPF on 16 July 2019, almost four years after the Goals were adopted. The Voluntary National Review is the focus of this *first* report by the Committee into UK Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, with a further Report on implementation of the Goals to be published later in the year.

The UK Voluntary National Review Process

5. The presentation of the UK's first Voluntary National Review (VNR) this year is significant. It is a moment for the UK to: reaffirm its commitment to the SDGs (role-modelling its approach to reporting), assess its contribution to their achievement at home and overseas, identify gaps in implementation, and make changes to enable greater progress on the 2030 Agenda. It is an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of people around the UK striving to achieve the Goals, to assess honestly the UK Government's successes and shortcomings in relation to the SDGs, and to raise awareness of the Goals amongst the general public.

6. It is worth stating at the outset that we are aware this is the first time the UK has prepared a VNR on the SDGs and, as such, it is a learning experience for everyone involved. However, there are many areas where we feel the Government could have done better. In delaying the creation of its first VNR beyond many other OECD nations, who have reported at least once over the last four years, there were also many lessons that could have been learned from others. The purpose of this Report is to scrutinise this first VNR process and to lay out recommendations for future such reviews. As the Secretary of State said himself just a few weeks ago:

It has definitely been an imperfect process. It is a process. This is our first VNR. We are learning from it. I think it will grow and strengthen.⁶

5 UN, [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, para 79

6 [Q212](#)

Timeline

7. Despite being one of the countries at the forefront of the 2030 Agenda during the negotiation and agreement of the SDGs,⁷ the UK has lagged behind many OECD nations in committing to producing its first Voluntary National Review. France and Germany published their first VNRs in 2016, Sweden and Denmark in 2017 and Ireland in 2018. Some countries, such as Switzerland, have already published two VNRs since 2015. In evidence, Secretary of State Rory Stewart told the Committee that there was “a lot of nervousness” around the Government “marking our own homework domestically”:

People thought this was completely crazy and totally inappropriate, and all we were doing was providing for more Opposition and Backbench Business Committee debates on our head.⁸

8. The Government did eventually commit, in November 2017, to presenting the UK’s first VNR in 2019.⁹ This gave the Government 19 months to complete and submit the final VNR to the UN and 20 months to prepare for its presentation. As Emily Auckland of UKSSD told us, “there was absolutely plenty of time”.¹⁰ Despite early interventions from civil society,¹¹ DFID’s initial consultations on the VNR did not start until August 2018, and substantive work to push the VNR forward did not begin until October 2018 (see Box 2: Government Timeframe for the VNR). Departmental ‘Champions’—described by DFID as “responsible for supporting production of the review”—were not appointed until late October 2018 and were then given very short time-frames within which to produce contributions to an ‘Emerging Findings and Future Engagement’ document, which was used at subsequent stakeholder engagement events.¹² As one of the ‘Champions’, Sam Lister, Director General at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) told us:

The original deadline for it was 16 November and, clearly, we were appointed on 22 October, so the timeframe was fairly narrow. That deadline then stretched, so it allowed for a couple more weeks of being able to input into it.¹³

7 The then UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, was a member of the [UN Secretary General’s High-Level Panel of eminent persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#), which helped develop the SDGs

8 [Q217](#)

9 [Letter](#) from Lord Bates to Maria Miller MP, Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, 15 November 2017

10 [Q8](#)

11 Bond and UKSSD, [Recommendations for developing the UK VNR 2019](#), March 2018

12 DFID written evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee inquiry, ‘Sustainable Development Goals in the UK Follow Up’ ([SDF0029](#)); [Q53](#)

13 [Q53](#)

Box 2: Government Timeframe for the VNR

Key activities and deadlines for the UK's Voluntary National Review:

- Ongoing engagement to inform initial drafting between October and December [2018]
- Case studies of how people and organisations are contributing to delivering the Sustainable Development Goals through the Voluntary National Review website
- Engagement events with different groups of stakeholders on emerging messages and key findings in the new year [2019]
- Submission of a main messages document to the UN by 17 May 2019
- Submission of the full report to the UN by 14 June 2019
- Presentation of the Voluntary National Review at the ministerial meeting of the UN High Level Political Forum from 16–18 July 2019
- The first Head of Government-level review of the Sustainable Development Goals at the UN General Assembly in September 2019

Source: ['About the Voluntary National Review'](#), Gov.uk

9. The IDC Chair, Stephen Twigg MP, wrote on behalf of the Committee to the then Secretary of State for International Development, Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP, in April 2019, to outline our concerns with the constricted timeline for completing the VNR:

The Government has known about the VNR process since its inception in 2015. It will have had a period of over eighteen months since committing to its first VNR by the deadline for presentation at the UN in July 2019. It is clear that this time could have been used much more effectively, and that the vast majority of purposeful activity has been squeezed into the final eight months before submission.¹⁴

This compressed timeline has been clearly evidenced by the almost two-week delay in delivering the UK's final Review to the UN. The final VNR was due to be submitted on 14 June, but instead was delivered and published on Wednesday 26 June. Although delays are not uncommon in the VNR process, a large number of countries—including many DFID partners, such as Ghana, Tanzania and Sierra Leone—managed to deliver their Reviews on time. The Secretary of State told us the delay was because the devolved administrations—who had "... a lot of justified pride in what they have done in relation to the SDGs and the SDGs frameworks"—did not quite manage to deliver their submissions to "... our desk in the time that we required in order to submit". We assume that the discussions—described by Rory Stewart as "not easy"—over the presentation of a "UK story", versus tales from England, Scotland Wales and Northern Ireland, also contributed to the delay.¹⁵

14 [Letter](#) from the Chair of the International Development Committee to the Secretary of State for International Development, 2 April 2019

15 [Q199 and Q209](#)

10. When the Government adopted the SDGs in September 2015, they were aware that they would be required to report on progress. The Office of National Statistics has been working hard since then to build up the data to report against the Goals.¹⁶ What seems to be missing is a mechanism within Government to use this data and contributions from all government departments and the devolved administrations to systematically track and report SDG implementation and progress. There was an opportunity to put such mechanisms in place as soon as the Goals were adopted, and to avoid this rather rushed and panicked process, which has resulted in a delay to the UK's final VNR submission. There appears to be a compelling case for the Government to put in place a formal mechanism to align measurement, reporting and action towards the SDGs (making future VNRs far easier to produce). A further Committee Report on future implementation of the SDGs, to be published later this year, will cover this in more depth.

11. The Government should have given more time to the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process. A plan to take the process forward should have been agreed soon after the commitment to produce the VNR was made, in November 2017, and shared with all relevant stakeholders. This would have allowed more time and space for DFID officials to engage other government departments in the process, and to coordinate with the devolved administrations, clarifying the details on timelines and presentation of the final Review.

12. Allowing more time for the VNR process may have enabled the UK to keep to the timescale set by the UN, as so many other countries did. This Review was an enormous undertaking that included every government department. We appreciate that this is the first time the UK has conducted a VNR process, but these are lessons that must be learned before the UK embarks on its next VNR.

13. When embarking on future VNRs, the Government should produce a detailed, publicly available timeline at least 18 months before presentation of the Review, including the main deliverables and deadlines. This would help to focus minds across Government and the devolved administrations and enable stakeholders to engage more effectively with the process. This timeline should be realistic and allow adequate time for contributions to be prepared and consolidated, and for meaningful stakeholder engagement to take place. It should also provide time for meaningful and collaborative discussions between all the UK's administrations about taking account of different approaches and priorities.

Stakeholder Engagement

14. Stakeholder engagement is a central part of voluntary national reporting on the SDGs. The UN Secretary General's reporting guidelines for VNRs emphasise that reviews should be "open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people and will support reporting by all relevant stakeholders."¹⁷ The Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) states that countries should consider developing a stakeholder engagement plan. This would:

16 The ONS has sourced data to report against 74% of the SDG indicators in the UK. These can be found at its [SDGs reporting platform](#).

17 UN DESA, [Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews: The 2019 Edition](#), p. 56

Identify key stakeholders, methods of engagement and consider online and other means through which stakeholder contributions could be gathered. All sectors and levels of government, civil society, private sector, trade unions, members of parliament and national human rights institutions, should be considered. The identification of a focal point to liaise with stakeholders can facilitate communication and follow up.¹⁸

15. During our inquiry, it has become clear that stakeholders feel let down by the UK's VNR process and disappointed that they were not able to contribute in a meaningful way. Although the Government has engaged stakeholders during the process, it failed to draw up a substantive stakeholder engagement plan in advance or to coordinate appropriately the activities of different government departments. In a recent submission to the Environmental Audit Committee (EAC), UKSSD highlighted that, "Efforts have been taken by DFID and other departments to engage stakeholders in the production of the VNR, but this has been limited and selective."¹⁹ Similar criticism of DFID's approach to stakeholder engagement was received from, amongst others, WWF UK, Commonwealth Medical Trust, Restless Development, and NASUWT—the Teachers Union.²⁰

16. The former Secretary of State, Penny Mordaunt, was keen to cite examples of engagement events held across Government when she appeared before us in March.²¹ Whilst we are pleased these events took place, they have been criticised for being "last minute", "ad hoc" with "as little as three days" notice. As a result, "stakeholder attendance has been limited".²² UKSSD included further details of the events held by different government departments, including methods of engagement, in an appendix to their recent evidence to the EAC on the VNR.²³ It is included here as an Appendix to this Report. It demonstrates clearly the difference in approach between government departments and the failure to coordinate these efforts centrally. Lord Bates insisted to us that this was a conscious decision:

we said that it is down to that Government Department to consult with its stakeholders on the goals for which it is responsible. That is clearly going to be a longer process, it is going to require more energy and drive and it will be less universally consistent as to who performs in which way.²⁴

We are not, however, convinced this was the right decision or a method that should be replicated with future VNRs. Many of these events were also not publicly advertised, meaning that those who were not party to the information (those outside the usual suspects) were "not seeing that and being given an opportunity" to engage.²⁵

18 UN DESA, [Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews: The 2019 Edition](#), p. 14

19 Written evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee's inquiry into 'Voluntary National Review of UK progress against the Sustainable Development Goals' ([VNR0010](#))

20 WWF UK ([SDG0037](#)); Commonwealth Medical Trust ([SDG0031](#)); Restless Development ([SDG0026](#)); NASUWT - The Teachers' Union ([SDG0032](#))

21 [Q70](#)

22 Written evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee's inquiry into 'Voluntary National Review of UK progress against the Sustainable Development Goals' ([VNR0010](#))

23 [Ibid](#)

24 [Q86](#)

25 [Q8](#)

17. A large number of engagement events—including those coordinated by DFID—also took place towards the end of the VNR process, in mid-March 2019, just three months before the final Review was due to be submitted to the UN. Despite this, stakeholders were not provided with comprehensive materials, such as a draft VNR, in advance of these events. Their ability to influence the VNR was therefore limited. The depth of expertise on, and commitment to, the SDGs amongst UK stakeholders is shown clearly in the publication of the two ‘shadow’ reports on the UK’s progress on the SDGs in the past two years: UKSSD’s 2018 report on domestic performance and Bond’s 2019 report on its international contribution.²⁶ This expertise has not been fully taken advantage of by the Government during this process.

18. One of the main methods of engagement used by the Government during the VNR process was the collection of case studies via an online portal. This enabled the Government to collect 270 case studies of activity from “a wide range of groups, including organisations that are not within the remit of government”.²⁷ The results of this exercise usefully demonstrate the range of activities that are going on across the UK to promote and contribute to the achievement of the Goals. However, as UKSSD expressed in evidence to us, the collection of case studies is “not... a sufficiently meaningful approach to yield a rigorous VNR”.²⁸ The portal only served to capture snapshots of activity, rather than using the expertise and perspectives of those delivering the Goals around the UK to meaningfully track progress and gaps in implementation. The online portal was a good initiative, but needed to be complemented by more substantive stakeholder engagement with the Review.

Parliamentary Engagement

19. As parliamentarians, we have been similarly disappointed at the Government’s failure to engage us fully in the Review process. When we launched this inquiry in December 2018, a commitment had been made to involve parliamentarians in the VNR process,²⁹ but we had no idea what this engagement would look like. As a result, our Chair wrote to Lord Bates on 12 December 2018 to emphasise that stakeholder consultation on the VNR should “be substantive and meaningful”. It also laid out a series of criteria for parliamentary consultation, including sufficient notice and “an advance copy of the draft VNR/main messages for Members to look at and seek advice about”.³⁰ We were pleased that DFID adhered to the vast majority of our requests on parliamentary consultation. However, the document circulated for comment before the initial parliamentary engagement event in March 2019 was not a draft VNR, nor the main messages. Instead, it was an *Emerging Findings and Further Engagement (EFFE)* document, which provided a mere snapshot of activities and data relevant to each Goal.³¹ UKSSD described the document as giving “a very limited indication of what the final VNR will contain and therefore how the Government assesses the UK’s progress on the SDGs.”³² We agree with this statement.

26 UKSSD, [Measuring up: How the UK is performing on the UN Sustainable Development Goals](#), July 2018; Bond, [The UK’s global contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals](#), 17 June 2019

27 HM Government, [Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#), p. 8

28 UKSSD ([SDG0029](#))

29 [Q93 & 99](#)

30 [Letter](#) from the Chair to Lord Bates regarding the Voluntary National Review, 12 December 2018

31 DFID, [UK’s Voluntary National Review on the Global Goals: Emerging Findings and Further Engagement](#), 4 March 2019

32 Written evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee’s inquiry into ‘Voluntary National Review of UK progress against the Sustainable Development Goals’ ([VNR0010](#))

20. During the meeting (held under Chatham House rules), parliamentarians expressed concern at the cherry-picking of information presented in this document and the lack of any systematic analysis of progress against the SDG targets and indicators. When asked by the Committee about the content of the EFFE document in evidence the following day, the then Secretary of State said:

The purpose of this initial document—which is not a draft; it is just a method of engaging people—is to scoop in others who are currently not living, breathing and getting out of bed in the morning for the global goals and particular aspects of them.³³

The fact that parliamentarians were only provided with a document intended to be “a method of engaging people”, when they are clearly an engaged constituency with much to say on this agenda, meant that the meeting had little value in terms of substantively engaging with the VNR. The event did provide an opportunity for parliamentarians to lay out their expectations for the final Review, and to make it clear that, unlike the EFFE document, they expected it to include a comprehensive assessment of the UK’s performance against each individual Goal, target and indicator. However, the Government could have gained much more substantive and constructive feedback from parliamentarians if they had provided them with a draft VNR document, or something that was at least representative of the content of the final Review.

21. Likewise, the parliamentary debate on the SDGs—scheduled in Government time at the request of the Chairs of the International Development and Environmental Audit Committees—could have been much more useful if MPs had received a draft VNR in advance. The debate was scheduled for 11 June 2019, just days before the final Review was due to be submitted to the UN, and so there should have been some substantive material for interested parliamentarians to see at that point in time. The debate provided a useful opportunity for MPs to, once again, highlight what they would like to see in the final report, but it was not a method for constructive feedback on the final document.³⁴

22. When asked how Members’ contributions from this debate fed into the final Review, the current Secretary of State for International Development, Rory Stewart, told us:

The lesson I am taking forward, both in what I will present to New York and in what we have done, is that... people are looking for much more reassurance on stakeholder engagement, consultation and the formal structures... through which that happens.³⁵

He also highlighted that he had expected the VNR to “become a stick to attack us on domestic policy issues” in the debate, but that this was not actually the case.³⁶ However, given MPs were not able to see the VNR in advance of the debate, it is not surprising that they were unable to comment on the Government’s performance against the Goals.

33 [Q74](#)

34 HC Deb, 11 June 2019, [col 592–624](#) [Commons Chamber]

35 [Q197](#)

36 [Q197](#)

23. Throughout the VNR process, Members of Parliament have had to push to be included. If it were not for the persistence of interested MPs and Peers, including members of the International Development, and Environmental Audit, committees and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the SDGs, we are not confident that even this level of parliamentary consultation would have taken place. Here, the UK experience compares unfavourably with countries like Poland, where we were told, the VNR was “published in draft form and taken through Parliament”.³⁷

Leaving no one behind

24. Despite the SDGs’ focus on “leaving no one behind”, there is little evidence that the Government engaged marginalised groups in the VNR process. Emily Auckland of UKSSD told us:

“this process could have provided an opportunity... to reach out to those that represent marginalised communities or disadvantaged groups, as well as those that are on the ground delivering some of the activities that are necessary for the SDGs, who maybe are not engaged in the goals as a framework themselves. That opportunity has not been taken advantage of.”³⁸

There was some acknowledgment of this from the former Secretary of State, Penny Mordaunt, who told us she wants more people “on the street” to know what the Global Goals are.³⁹ She emphasised:

Unless that happens, we are not going to have entrepreneurs engaged; we are not going to have business engaged; we are not going to have the innovators, people putting their savings into global goal ISAs, et cetera. [...] Stakeholders close to these issues are already engaged. We need to open this out much more to get to people who could be contributing by what they are doing but do not know about the goals yet. That is what we need to be doing.⁴⁰

25. We welcome the attempts made by DFID to engage with stakeholders outside of London by hosting some regional events, and to reach out to a wider audience through social media campaigning with the #myglobalgoal campaign. However, these attempts were, at best insufficient and, at worst, tokenistic. The SDG Network Scotland told us:

SDG Network Scotland and other organisations in Scotland were only made aware of DFID-led VNR stakeholder meetings in London through word of mouth, and there has been no clear, visible communications and engagement plan from the UK Government to mobilise civil society and other major stakeholders across England or the devolved nations.⁴¹

37 [Q11](#)

38 [Q8](#)

39 [Q106](#)

40 [Ibid](#)

41 [SDG Network Scotland \(SDG0020\)](#)

26. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that people who were not previously engaged in the SDGs have become so as a result of the VNR process, and that is a real opportunity missed for the Government. Given sufficient time and resources, government officials could have done far more to reach out to marginalised groups during this process. The Government needs to be doing far more to ensure that more people are engaged in the SDGs agenda, reaching beyond traditional stakeholders to hard-to-reach communities and regions across the UK.

Looking ahead

27. In the VNR, the Government commits to developing “an effective mechanism... to enhance stakeholder engagement and cooperation with government in the domestic sphere”.⁴² We welcome the acknowledgement by Government that a specific mechanism for stakeholder engagement on domestic implementation, and the commitment to create it, is required. However, we would have liked to see the Government commit to a similar mechanism for engagement on the UK’s contribution to the SDGs overseas.

28. Stakeholder engagement throughout the VNR process has been inadequate and disappointing. Leaving each government department to carry out its own engagement with stakeholders has led to ‘ad hoc’ arrangements which differed wildly across Government and a lack of coordination, making it difficult for interested parties to participate meaningfully in the process. Where engagement events were organised, they took place late in the process, were largely superficial and, aside from a two-page document attached to the VNR, it is hard to see how this engagement has influenced the final Review.

29. *In its response, the Government should provide further details on its plans to develop a formal mechanism for stakeholder engagement on domestic implementation of the SDGs, including:*

- a) *when it will be established;*
- b) *who will be involved (and how marginalised and hard-to-reach communities will be engaged);*
- c) *which government department will coordinate it;*
- d) *what its terms of reference will be; and*
- e) *proposed methods of engagement.*

Parliamentarians must be included as key stakeholders in this process going forward.

30. *Whilst we welcome the commitment to create a mechanism for stakeholder engagement on domestic implementation of the SDGs, we recommend that the Government commits to establishing a similar mechanism focused on the UK’s global contribution to the SDGs and would welcome its commitment to do so in the response to this Report.*

Cross-Government Coordination

DFID Leadership

31. As the department leading on the implementation of the SDGs, DFID was responsible for coordinating the VNR process across Government.⁴³ Andrew Griffiths, Co-Chair of the Bond SDGs Group, told us that this is not a typical approach:

In most countries, you would say that it is a planning Ministry that takes the role in terms of developing the voluntary national review and there is either Prime Ministerial or Presidential leadership; they take the responsibility for it. The UK is probably quite an outlier when it comes to giving the responsibility to an internationally-focused arm.⁴⁴

Mr Griffiths also shared his concerns about DFID being the lead on both international and domestic implementation of the Goals, telling us: “the risk is that DFID is not able and does not have the resources to do both.”⁴⁵

32. Our predecessor Committee stated clearly in 2016:

We remain to be convinced that responsibility for domestic implementation should lie with the Secretary of State for International Development, who already faces a substantial challenge in working to support international implementation of the Goals.⁴⁶

Similar concerns were expressed by the Environmental Audit, and Women and Equalities, committees in subsequent reports.⁴⁷ The view that DFID should not be the lead department on the SDGs prevails across the evidence to this inquiry.⁴⁸ Instead, given the Cabinet Office’s responsibility for “supporting collective government, helping to ensure the effective development, coordination and implementation of policy”, it seems right that they should take the lead on this cross-government agenda, including the coordination of future VNRs.⁴⁹ This applies to the process of gathering information to present a progress report; but it applies *doubly* to the process of improving awareness, alignment and coordination that could be achieved by the effective embedding of the SDGs within key government processes such as the single departmental plans, comprehensive spending reviews and budget and estimates documentation.

33. The VNR process has necessitated a greater understanding of the SDGs across Government and this is a positive development. However, we have started from a very low bar, with departments having little to no knowledge of the agenda at all. We welcome the Prime Minister putting the Global Goals on the agenda for Cabinet,⁵⁰ which ensured that all Cabinet Ministers had a basic understanding of the agenda

43 Department for International Development ([SDG0017](#))

44 [Q11](#)

45 [Q10](#)

46 International Development Committee, First Report of Session 2016–17, [UK implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals](#), HC103, Para 74

47 Environmental Audit Committee, Ninth Report of Session 2016–17, [Sustainable Development Goals in the UK](#), HC596; Women and Equalities Committee, [Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5 in the UK](#), HC885

48 See Bond ([SDG0018](#)) para 5, Overseas Development Institute ([SDG0027](#)) para 1 & 2, UKSSD ([SDG0029](#)) para 9, WWF UK ([SDG0037](#)) para 3, SDG Network Scotland ([SDG0020](#)) para 6 & 7

49 Gov.uk, [Cabinet Office: About Us](#) (accessed 3 July 2019)

50 [Q101](#)

and the Voluntary National Review process. We hope that the next Prime Minister will follow up on this progress by ensuring that the new Cabinet understands the importance of the SDGs agenda when it is formed.

34. *Placing the responsibility for implementation of the SDGs—and by extension the Voluntary National Review—in an internationally-focused department where Ministers have previously said they have “relatively few, if any, domestic levers” is not the right decision.*⁵¹ *The view prevails, on this Committee, as in the evidence received to this inquiry, that the VNR—and UK implementation of the SDGs more generally—should be the responsibility of the Cabinet Office.*⁵² *Unfortunately the Cabinet Office’s Minister for Implementation, Oliver Dowden MP, declined our invitation to give oral evidence to this inquiry so we were unable to put this matter to him.*

Engaging other Government Departments

35. Given its limited influence across Government, engaging other departments in the SDGs has been a challenge for DFID officials, particularly when many of these departments had little to no awareness of the agenda before the Review process began. When asked whether other departments had come late to the table on this agenda, Donna Ward, Director of Children, Families and Disadvantage at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) told us:

Yes, I think so. [...] I was chief analyst in DfE [Department for Education] before this. It might be my failing, but I knew a lot about poverty and I knew a lot about the Child Poverty Act and the whole history of that. I did not know about these goals until the process of the review.⁵³

It is concerning that over three years after the SDGs were first adopted, many departments were learning about the agenda for the first time as they began to prepare the VNR. This has undoubtedly made DFID’s job coordinating the Review even harder, as have the numerous changes in Secretaries of State at DFID (three since the SDGs were adopted in 2015) and Ministers (most recently, portfolio responsibility for the agenda was shifted from Lord Bates to Baroness Sugg after the former Minister’s resignation).

36. A number of mechanisms were put in place to engage other departments, outside of DFID, with this agenda and to bring together the final Review:

- i) Government departments were given **specific responsibility for coordinating one or more Goals/chapters in the VNR**. (see table 1);
- ii) Each department had one or more nominated **SDG Champions** “whose responsibility is to promote the SDGs and the Voluntary National Review in their department”;⁵⁴

51 Evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee inquiry into Sustainable Development Goals in the UK, [Q146](#) [James Wharton]

52 See UKSSD ([SDG0029](#)) para 9, Overseas Development Institute ([SDG0027](#)) para 2, WWF UK ([SDG0037](#)) para 3, Aviva ([SDG0044](#)), SDG Network Scotland ([SDG0020](#)) para 6 & 7

53 [Q26](#)

54 Department for International Development ([SDG0017](#))

- iii) **Senior Responsible Officers** (SROs) also appear to have been appointed for specific Goals/chapters in some departments, e.g. Donna Ward from DWP was the SRO for Goal 1;
- iv) The pre-existing **cross-Whitehall Group on the SDGs**, co-chaired by DFID and the Cabinet Office, which “governed” the process.⁵⁵

Whilst we welcome these efforts to engage other departments, there are some key limitations to these mechanisms, which we will explore below.

Lead Departments

37. The distribution of Goals/VNR chapters amongst the different government departments was very uneven. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) was responsible for five Goals, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) for three Goals, and the Government Equalities Office (GEO) for two Goals. DFID, Home Office, HM Treasury and the Departments for Work and Pensions (DWP), Health and Social Care, Education, and Housing, Communities and Local Government (HCLG), were each responsible for one Goal. This meant that DEFRA, BEIS and GEO had a very large VNR-related workload, whilst a number of departments did not have any primary responsibility (although they may have contributed to relevant chapters). The allocation of departments was, of course, done according to where the work on each particular Goal is focused: it makes sense that chapters on water and sanitation, life on land, and under water were led by DEFRA. However, it does lead us to question whether those departments which were not directly responsible for a chapter/Goal (e.g. the Ministry of Justice and the Department for International Trade) really engaged with the SDGs during this process and therefore whether there is really awareness of the Goals in *every* government department.

38. UKSSD also expressed concern, in evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee, that “The assignment of the Goals to individual departments has resulted in an inconsistent approach to stakeholder engagement and risks missing the interlinkages between the Goals and between policy areas”.⁵⁶ Donna Ward from DWP certainly confirmed that the chapters, at least initially, were being drafted in isolation: “When we drafted the first chapter, it was in a vacuum, not knowing how other people were drafting theirs”.⁵⁷ With different departments leading on different Goals, it is unclear how much space there was for cross-fertilisation of ideas, making links between the Goals and assessing policy coherence. Certainly, the latter seems largely absent from the final Review. (see chapter 2)

55 Department for International Development ([SDG0017](#))

56 UKSSD, Evidence to Environmental Audit Committee inquiry into the Voluntary National Review ([VNR0010](#))

57 [Q30](#)

Table 1: Lead Government Departments for the purposes of the Voluntary National Review

Sustainable Development Goal	Lead Government Department
Goal 1: No Poverty	Department for Work and Pensions
Goal 2: Zero Hunger	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being	Department of Health and Social Care
Goal 4: Quality Education	Department for Education
Goal 5: Gender Equality	Government Equalities Office
Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth	HM Treasury
Goal 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities	Government Equalities Office
Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Goal 13: Climate Action	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Goal 14: Life Below Water	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Goal 15: Life on Land	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	Home Office
Goal 17: Partnership for the Goals	Department for International Development

Source: DFID, [UK's Voluntary National Review on the Global Goals: Emerging Findings and Further Engagement](#), 4 March 2019

SDG Champions, Senior Responsible Officers and Cross-Whitehall Leads

39. We have already noted how late SDG ‘Champions’ were put in place, only receiving notification of their position in the latter half of October 2018, for a VNR that was due to be submitted in June 2019. There also seems to be disparity between departments on what it meant to be a ‘Champion’. In DWP, Donna Ward was appointed Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for Goal 1 on poverty—the first chapter of the VNR—whilst the ‘Champion’ role sat elsewhere, in their central strategy team. In BEIS, there were three Senior Responsible Officers (one for each Goal/chapter they were responsible for within the VNR) who also considered themselves “policy champions”. However, Sam Lister from BEIS also referred to a “process champion” sitting in their central team.⁵⁸ The ‘Champion’ role, although a positive innovation to encourage engagement from senior officials in other government departments, appears to have been poorly defined. There were also no additional resources allocated to ‘Champions’ to enable them to carry out this function, in addition to their

already busy workloads. Donna Ward told us: “I have no additional resources for this particular exercise... For the champion role inside strategy, that has been absorbed as part of their business as usual”.⁵⁹

40. DFID stated that the VNR process was governed by a “pre-existing official-level cross-Whitehall Group on the SDGs... co-chaired by DFID and Cabinet Office.”⁶⁰ However, the role of these officials, their connection to Champions, SROs and the VNR team in DFID, and the percentage of their time, day-to-day, allocated to the implementation of the SDGs, remains unclear. The only evidence we saw of the cross-Whitehall Group during this inquiry was their attendance at the parliamentary stakeholder event on the VNR in early March. *In its response to this inquiry, we would be grateful if the Government could provide some further detail on this Group including its membership, terms of reference and outputs since 2015.*

41. *We urge the Government to retain the Director-level SDG Champion roles in all government departments, to continue to communicate, and encourage progress towards, the Goals beyond the VNR. However, the roles should be better defined. In its response to this Report, we would like to see the Government commit to retaining ‘Champions’ in all government departments and set out a clear job description for the role. Champions should be provided with appropriate resources, in terms of staff and budget, to enable them to continue to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda in their departments beyond the 2019 HLPF.*

Resources allocated to the VNR

42. Emily Auckland of UKSSD told us, “The issue about departmental engagement has very much been the lack of resource... We know that they have had issues engaging with this process, because of other demands and priorities”.⁶¹ In terms of government resources allocated to the VNR, Lord Bates told us:

Within DFID, there are about nine people working specifically on the global goals and the voluntary national review. There are three or four who are working very effectively across Whitehall with some of the key lead Departments that have a lot of the key goals, such as Defra and BEIS, which we need to work with. There are about 12 people there. They were set up and, if I was pinning a date—at this point I was hoping there might be some inspiration shouted from behind me, as they are here—our Agenda 2030 was published at the end of March 2017. That was when we put it forward as to how we were going to implement this plan and then gradually the resources have built. The resources have grown as we have been delivering the voluntary national review. The voluntary national review has been going on for about six months, this process of consultation.⁶²

The vast majority of staff with a dedicated focus on the SDGs sit within DFID, rather than in the Cabinet Office or in other government departments. Whilst we welcome the number of staff working that were assigned to the VNR and the SDGs within DFID, to ensure buy-in from other government departments, similar resources should have been allocated across Whitehall to support the creation of the VNR.

59 [Q29](#)

60 Department for International Development ([SDG0017](#))

61 [Q8](#)

62 [Q79](#)

43. It is important to note that DFID officials have been complimented in evidence for doing the best job they can with limited resources and leadership. Sam Lister from BEIS praised DFID for providing “support [they] really needed” on stakeholder engagement.⁶³

Coordination with the devolved administrations

44. The Secretary of State told us that the reason for the delay in submitting the final VNR to the UN was the late submission of contributions from the devolved administrations.⁶⁴ However, in its evidence to the Committee, submitted in February, Scotland’s International Development Alliance questioned the UK Government’s methods for exchanging information with the devolved governments:

The UK Government should develop a more systematic information exchange mechanism that improves both vertical and horizontal coordination across and within different levels of government, including the countries with devolved government. By doing so, it would be easier to communicate and coordinate a transparent road-map for VNR development.⁶⁵

45. *For future VNRs, it is essential that an appropriate mechanism is created—at the heart of Government, in the Cabinet Office—to lead on communication and implementation of the SDGs. If such a mechanism had been in place, bringing together the VNR would have been much more straightforward. Instead, the process was incredibly fragmented, with chapters of the VNR drafted, at least initially, in isolation, by different departments. The process to bring all of the sections of the report together was then very complex, and was made more difficult by the coordinating department, DFID, having limited influence across government departments and the devolved administrations.*

46. *Coordination with Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, for the purposes of the VNR, could also be improved. We recommend early communication between the UK Government and the devolved administrations, and agreement of a common style, structure and reporting framework, well in advance of the next VNR.*

63 [Q30](#)

64 [Qq198–199](#)

65 [Scotland’s International Development Alliance \(SDG0042\)](#)

2 The Voluntary National Review

47. Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are a core part of global review and follow up for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), intended to “promote accountability to... citizens”, “foster exchanges of best practices and mutual learning” and “mobilize support”.⁶⁶ A VNR should, according to UN guidance, respect the universal scope of the SDGs and their interlinked and interdependent nature, focus on those left behind, and be rigorous in its coverage of goals and targets, reporting not just on successes, but also challenges and lessons learned. It should highlight and commit to next steps for that national context. This section of the Report assesses the content of the UK VNR in terms of these criteria and purposes. Overall, it finds inconsistent adherence to these standards—strong in some respects, and weak in others.

48. The VNR reviews the UK-level picture and UK-level overseas action, but also the specific situations in England and the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This raises the possibility of comparison and learning not just between the UK and other developed countries, but also between Whitehall, Westminster and the devolved administrations.

49. The opening chapters of the VNR, as per UN guidance, do review some of the “building blocks” of SDG progress: governance at a UK level and in the devolved administrations; and a discussion of the fundamental ‘leave no one behind’ paradigm. In addition, a description of the stakeholder outreach undertaken is included (discussed in chapter one above).

50. In the context of concerns about the degree of meaningful stakeholder involvement in national reviews, it is striking that the comprehensive stakeholder review of UK domestic implementation—UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development (UKSSD)’s 2018 “Measuring Up” report⁶⁷—is not cited, linked to, or discussed at any point in the VNR, though the presence of UKSSD, and the role of civil society in monitoring implementation, are briefly mentioned.

51. Another significant omission from the opening sections of the VNR concerns government awareness-raising activity. UN guidance recommends that VNRs report on the current status of government awareness-raising activities around the SDGs.⁶⁸ However, there is no coverage of that in the UK VNR, though the role of stakeholders in awareness-raising is highlighted.

Geographical scope of the Review

52. The Review covers UK-level domestic activity, with separate headings for the devolved administrations. It also covers UK action on the Goals abroad. Each chapter is balanced between these elements. Taken together, the emphasis is, as the UN recommends, on domestic progress on the SDGs in the UK, though there are contrasts in the volume, length and character of coverage between sections on England and the devolved administrations.

66 UN, [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, para 73

67 UKSSD (2018), [Measuring Up](#): How the UK is performing on the UN Sustainable Development Goals

68 UN DESA, [Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews: The 2019 Edition](#), e.g. p60

53. The Review’s coverage of the UK’s Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies is limited. These territories are mentioned in the opening summary of the UK system of governance,⁶⁹ and under goal 14⁷⁰—and one case under goal 15⁷¹—where positive progress is highlighted. However, the Overseas Territories are not addressed in the report in respect of corruption, inequalities, environmental protection or illicit financial flows, or in respect of other environmental protection issues. In all these areas, there are important issues for the Overseas Territories (not least surrounding data availability) that the VNR might have addressed in substance, made reference to, or—at least—acknowledged.

54. Overall, the UK VNR is much longer than that of most countries, containing many more examples and charts, and covering a wider range of areas. This is something that is to be applauded. However, this extra length does not necessarily indicate more government activity on the SDGs. For example, Iceland reports on a process to map national progress against all SDG targets, from which a cross-government task force has chosen to prioritise 65 targets especially relevant to Iceland’s context. Iceland has begun to link the SDGs to the government’s fiscal strategy. Iceland reports launching multiple government-led public awareness initiatives from March 2018 and has commissioned opinion-polling on public SDG awareness.⁷² New Zealand’s VNR is, again, much shorter. But New Zealand has adopted a new “Living Standards Framework” and supporting statistical indicators that have been aligned to the SDGs and is able to report on a government-led awareness raising campaign “Narrative imperative”, and annual SDG summit with stakeholders.⁷³ Size isn’t everything.

Rigorous coverage of goals and targets

55. The universal nature of the SDGs is reflected in the UK VNR. Almost all applicable targets are addressed (although not in equal breadth, depth or detail). The coverage is most thorough in terms of the pattern of activities relevant to particular target areas and the data relevant to that target, supported by a comprehensive annex of the UK’s performance against the global indicators.

56. UK performance and progress on the SDGs is not addressed as systematically. The tone and quantity of the coverage of particular targets varies significantly between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The lack of detailed assessment of UK performance against the SDG targets, overall, reflects the Secretary of State’s oral evidence that “We have resisted a little the idea that this is somehow a universal scorecard”.⁷⁴ Treatment of the SDG targets is selective in the UK VNR. The ambition of the relevant SDG target is only included, in the English domestic context, where that target is met: examples of such targets are

- 10.1 (By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average);

69 HM Government, [Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#), p. 10

70 Ibid, p. 171

71 Ibid, p. 182

72 Government of Iceland, Prime Minister’s Office, [Iceland’s implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Voluntary National Review](#), June 2019

73 New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, [Towards a better future, together - New Zealand’s progress towards the SDGs-2019](#), July 2019

74 [Q200](#)

- 12.3 (By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses); and
- 14.2 (By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans).⁷⁵

In other cases where there is a clear SDG target on which data for England is available, it is not invoked.

57. One notable case where the SDG target is not met is domestic poverty, where there is a clear and nationally-differentiated SDG ambition: “1.2 By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions”. However, the report makes no mention of whether this is an appropriate target for the UK, or how the UK performs against it, or indeed any other specific ambition on UK poverty reduction. The chapter states twice, though, that “the UK is committed to tackling all forms of poverty, including childhood disadvantage and in-work poverty”.⁷⁶ We also found it striking in this section how often data—such as, absolute and relative child poverty rates—were described as “stable”⁷⁷ which sounds like a good thing at first glance, but actually indicates static and intractable situations

58. The VNR also fails to include trends within the data, to show whether progress towards the targets is being made over time. In addition, the data annex, though listing data points for all global indicators on which the UK has data, does not include the targets to which indicators “belong”. Including both trends and relevant targets would make it far easier to assess UK progress. The selective referencing of SDG targets is one form of “cherry picking” in the VNR. Another is the selection of data beyond the global indicators for inclusion in the report, and the selection of some activities and framings over others.

59. The chapter on Goal 1 (No Poverty) presents the impact of public spending and welfare reform as positive. However, the Equality and Human Rights Commission is more critical, noting that

Changes in public spending (and tax and welfare reforms), between 2010 and 2018 have produced differential impacts. Black and ‘Other’ ethnicity households have been more negatively affected than White households, and lone parent (predominantly female) households more negatively affected than any other demographic in terms of final income.⁷⁸

75 [UN SDGs Knowledge Platform](#) (accessed 5 July 2019)

76 HM Government, [Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#), p. 29, 39

77 Also: working age relative poverty, absolute poverty before housing costs, absolute and relative child poverty rates, disability poverty and relative unemployment, pensioner poverty and working age adults in working families in poverty.

78 Equality and Human Rights Commission, [Briefing on the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (June 2019) p. 7

60. Under Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), food insecurity is highlighted as an area where the UK is “increasing monitoring”.⁷⁹ The challenges of food security in England are presented as data-led. Whilst Scotland and Wales both include data on the prevalence of food insecurity in their sections, this data is not presented for England until the final page of the chapter, under a concluding challenge on “measuring and addressing household food insecurity”⁸⁰ which focuses on the problems of obtaining commensurable UK data. The only mention of food banks in England is an effort “to make it as easy as possible for food banks to identify and refer back to the local job centre”⁸¹ anyone who is not receiving support they are entitled to. No systematic exploration of why food insecurity might exist in England, who is most affected, or how it might be remedied, is undertaken.

61. Under Goal 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), alcohol and drug abuse and issues of addiction (target 3.5) are not discussed in the UK-wide or English context, though they are addressed in all the devolved administrations.

62. Under Goal 4 (Quality Education) the “action” section on primary and secondary education reports positive data on Ofsted inspections, international rankings, and Phonics decoding for 5–6-year-olds, all of which present substantial improvement.⁸² But it chooses not to present the SDG target 4.1 on quality education for all or UK progress on the key global indicator on pupils attaining minimum expected levels of reading and maths. Data on reading and maths is available in the annex showing how many pupils currently do not meet these expected minimums.

63. Under Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), there is no mention of target 8.8 covering precarious employment, health and safety at work, and compliance with ILO regulations, nor of zero-hours contracts under target 8.3, even though this data is available and included in the data annex.

64. Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) notes, in brief and precise language, that “the UK does not have any fossil fuel subsidies, according to the definition it shares with European G20 partners”.⁸³ A European Commission Report from January 2019 examines energy subsidies across Europe, finding that the UK has the highest level of financial support for fossil fuels in Europe, at over 12bn euros.⁸⁴ We continue to be struck by the evidence, unearthed in our report on DFID’s work on climate change, that the £4.8 billion worth of UK Export Finance support for fossil fuel projects from 2010–16 was almost equal to the UK’s total spend on its International Climate Fund for a similar period, 2011–17.⁸⁵

65. Goal 15 (Life on Land) on environmental protection is presented carefully in a way that foregrounds UK progress. Mention is made of the 2019 update on progress towards the Aichi biodiversity targets,⁸⁶ showing “progressing but not at a sufficient rate” for 14 out of 20 targets. However, this omits timescale: 2020 is the end-date by which these targets should be achieved. Acknowledgement of the relative lack of progress on the most

79 HM Government, [Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#), p. 39

80 Ibid p. 47

81 Ibid p. 40

82 Ibid p. 63

83 HM Government, [Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#), p. 149

84 European Commission, [Commission Report on Energy Prices and costs in Europe](#), COM(2019)

85 [UK aid for combating climate change, Eleventh Report, 2017–19 Report from the Committee, HC 1432](#), (published 8 May 2019), paragraph 131

86 HM Government, [Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#), p. 181

important of these targets, and discussion of key indicators, including species decline and biodiversity, is very brief,⁸⁷ and these areas are not revisited as “challenges” in the final subsection.

66. Goal 5 (Gender Equality) is unambiguous that a “global rollback” on women’s rights is an important challenge.⁸⁸ However, women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and specifically abortion rights, in Northern Ireland—as covered in targets 3.7 and 5.6—are left unaddressed in the report, apart from a brief acknowledgement that “abortion is available in more limited circumstances in Northern Ireland”.⁸⁹

67. The assessment of Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) is also relatively positive in the VNR, noting progress on access to justice, levels of crime overall, and levels of hate crime. The Equality and Human Rights Commission’s assessment is more critical:

Our analysis shows regression in relation to a number of the requirements of Goal 16, including the targets to significantly reduce all forms of violence, to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and violence against children, to ensure equal access to justice, and to promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws. We have observed a deterioration in access to justice, including reductions in legal aid, deterioration in conditions of detention, a substantial rise in the use of restraint in the youth custodial estate in England and Wales, and the continued use of painful restraint on children in youth justice settings.⁹⁰

68. In a particular example of selective data use, the section on Goal 16 cites decreased levels of hate crime experienced by victims as evidence that recent government policy is working.⁹¹ The data cited is correct, though the source of this citation notes that hate crime recorded by the police has doubled, with particular spikes around the EU referendum and 2017 terrorist attacks,⁹² and also that the VNR-cited measure of hate crime experienced by victims ignores public order offences which account for “over half of police recorded hate crime”.⁹³ The headline of a “40% reduction”, given in the opening summary for that chapter, does not attempt to capture this context.⁹⁴

69. It should be noted that the Secretary of State acknowledged and defended this emphasis on positive activity in his oral evidence, in the context of the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies:

[I]t takes effort for a Government to point out what is not going well... We are learning through this that, when Governments publicly make statements about their own development progress, they understandably emphasise the positive and downplay the negative... We have tended to emphasise the positive and not the challenges, but you are right; we should do more on that.⁹⁵

87 HM Government, [Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#), p. 181

88 Ibid p.85

89 Ibid p.79

90 Equality and Human Rights Commission, [Briefing on the Sustainable Development Goals](#), June 2019, p. 7

91 HM Government, [Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#), p. 195

92 Home Office, [Hate Crime, England and Wales 2017/18, Statistical Bulletin 20/18](#), 16 October 2018, p7

93 Ibid p9

94 HM Government, [Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#), p. 192

95 [Q206](#)

It should also be noted that this characterisation of the VNR as a conscious effort to “emphasise the positive”, conflicts with the stated approach to the VNR in the testimony of Nick Dyer of DFID, that “the way we have chosen to present this report is as a stocktake of where we are in 2019, and this then becomes a baseline for future reports.”⁹⁶ Clearly, if the baseline presents a picture designed to downplay challenges, this has the potential to skew future reporting.

70. We were surprised that the UK’s withdrawal from the EU did not merit discussion under Goal 17 on strengthening the means of implementation and revitalising the global partnership for sustainable development.

Leave No One Behind

71. A key principle of all SDG reviews, including VNRs, is that reviews should focus on the poorest, most marginalised and vulnerable, reflecting the pledge of the SDGs to “leave no one behind”. This focus is present in the UK’s report in certain respects, and with respect to particular prominent groups—notably women and girls, LGBTQ+, minority ethnic groups, and people with disabilities. This focus is partly a matter of data disaggregation, and for these groups, the VNR is relatively comprehensive. It highlights, for example, the poverty facing single parent families and those with disabilities.⁹⁷

72. Overall, though, coverage of those left behind is uneven. The VNR authors clearly had a difficult decision to make about how much of this disaggregated data to include in areas such as undernutrition amongst older persons, or those most at risk of food insecurity. In this respect, it should be noted that the data annex includes no disaggregated data, even where that is specified in the description of the UN global indicator. For example, indicator 8.5.1 asks for “Average hourly earnings of female and male employees” but the data annex gives only one figure: “£16.20 per hour 2017, UK”.⁹⁸

73. Other dimensions of vulnerability and marginalisation are addressed to a much lesser extent. Homelessness in England is addressed as a Goal 11-specific challenge,⁹⁹ but homeless people are not identified as a “left behind” group, even though they are excluded from many household statistics cited in the VNR.

74. Migrants are another group not examined across the goals, even though they are identified as a “left behind” group in the SDGs, and even though a specific target directly addresses the working situation of migrants. Instead, they are briefly addressed under the need for “effective integration”¹⁰⁰ into “inclusive communities”.¹⁰¹ The Equality and Human Rights Commission’s briefing, further, highlights the barriers facing Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children and these are absent in the VNR¹⁰²—Gypsy travellers are mentioned in the Welsh and Scottish context, but not England.

96 [Q202](#)

97 HM Government, [Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#), p. 30

98 HM Government, [Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Annex III Data Annex](#), p. 34

99 HM Government, [Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#), p. 146

100 *Ibid* p. 134

101 *Ibid* p. 147

102 Equality and Human Rights Commission, [Briefing on the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (June 2019) p. 7

75. Geography is identified in the SDGs as another dimension in which people can be left behind. However, apart from a map of smoking prevalence, discussion of 4G coverage, and efforts to tackle “the unfair spread of the UK’s prosperity” of regional disparities—whether in terms of poverty, quality of health services, youth employment, or other areas—are not addressed.¹⁰³

76. The commitment to leaving no one behind is closely tied to human rights. The treatment of human rights in the VNR is limited. Socio-economic rights in contexts of food, poverty, and work are not addressed in the English sections of the VNR, even though human-rights based approaches are prominent in the sections by Scotland on these issues.¹⁰⁴ UN guidance recommends that VNRs engage with recent human rights reporting,¹⁰⁵ but the UK does not do this in the VNR, for example omitting discussion of the Special Rapporteur’s recent report on extreme poverty in the UK¹⁰⁶ or the UK’s reporting under the UN’s Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The latter focused on abortion law in Northern Ireland as an area of grave concern.¹⁰⁷ Human rights are considered only in the context of anti-discrimination and civil liberties (in Goals 10 and 16, for example), in marked contrast to Scotland’s more holistic rights-based approach. This concern is reflected in the briefing of the Equality and Human Rights Commission. They state that

there is little evidence that the UK Government is currently linking the SDGs to its human rights reporting and monitoring and taking a coordinated, cross-government approach to both sets of obligations. general concerns on linking frameworks and domestic implementation.¹⁰⁸

Evidence to the inquiry from Amnesty International and Professor Rhona Smith highlighted that ninety-two percent of SDG targets are linked to existing provisions of international human rights and labour law standards,¹⁰⁹ supporting the need for the UK to address existing human rights reporting in reviewing progress on the SDGs.¹¹⁰

77. “Leave no one behind” is a cross-cutting commitment in the SDGs, informing all review and the assessment, potentially, of every goal and target. In this context, focusing only on the most prominent marginalised groups, or those where there is the most positive story to be told, is especially problematic. The Secretary of State identified, in response to a question from the Committee, those he considered furthest behind: “the sort of people I was dealing with in prison, illegal migrants, some of the most extreme examples of the poor elderly, people with addiction, mental health issues, homelessness”, highlighting these as the “bottom 10%”.¹¹¹ This VNR does not systematically focus on such groups,

103 HM Government, [Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#), p. 118, 125

104 E.g. Ibid p. 43, 142

105 The VNR should address “reports submitted to international bodies, including those under international human rights treaties” (UN DESA, [Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews: The 2019 Edition](#), 11).

106 UN Human Rights Council, [Visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Add.1, 24 June-12 July 2019, Agenda item 3](#)

107 OCHR, [Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#), 72nd session (18 February-8 March 2019)

108 Equality and Human Rights Commission, [Briefing on the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (June 2019) p. 3

109 Danish Institute of Human Rights, [The Human Rights Guide to the SDGs](#), accessed 4 July 2019

110 Amnesty International ([SDG0052](#)); Dr Rhona Smith ([SDG0051](#))

111 [Q205](#)

though the Secretary of State noted that this would be “looking at something that is very important” and the absence of such a focus in political conversation was “a bigger political problem”.¹¹²

International contribution to the SDGs

78. With regard to international action on the SDGs, the VNR showcases a range of important headline commitments on Official Development Assistance (ODA), climate change, modern slavery, and gender equality, and a range of relevant activity and good practice across different SDG areas e.g. on LGBT+ and disability inclusion, water and sanitation, and statistical capacity building. The UK’s activity on global tax regimes is highlighted. Throughout, claims are made about UK engagement and leadership. The UK is “deepening relationships and collaborating with partners”; “promoting” and “supporting” a myriad of actions; “leading the way” on corruption, bribery and illicit flows and “scaling up engagement”.

79. However, little detail or supporting evidence is provided for many of these claims. Nor is there any systematic analysis of whether the UK is doing enough, or whether more could or should be done. This is not necessarily to call those claims into doubt, but to indicate that the summary in the VNR is no substitute for detailed SDG-aligned reporting and analysis by DFID.

80. “Harnessing the power of trade” and “catalysing investment” is portrayed in the VNR as the best route to poverty alleviation in developing countries. However, Bond’s report warns

Emphasis on trade openness and creating an investment climate that is friendlier towards large multinational businesses can be counterproductive for small scale farmers, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, fledgling domestic sectors and industries that are also part of the private sector.¹¹³

The VNR might have approached this in a more nuanced and self-critical way.

81. One key area highlighted in the SDGs¹¹⁴ is the need for development assistance to respect and support national plans and strategies in recipient countries. This concern is repeated in the Bond report and also evidenced in the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation’s 2016 report.¹¹⁵ The VNR does not address this aspect of the SDGs or assess the extent of alignment between UK activity and the priorities of recipient countries.

82. Bond’s report raises the question of whether DFID supports and fosters partnerships with civil society to the required extent, especially in the context of restricted and contracting space for civil society globally. The commitment in the VNR to co-host the Goal 16 segment of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) is welcome, but civil society

112 Ibid.

113 Bond, [The UK’s global contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals: Progress, gaps and recommendations](#), June 2019, p. 46

114 UN, [Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), September 2015, para 29, 44, 63 (as well as target 17.15)

115 OECD, [Making development co-operation more effective, 2016 Progress Report](#), Annex B - Monitoring data: Development partners, Table B.1a., p154

is not otherwise addressed under Goal 16. Under Goal 17, examples of multi-stakeholder partnerships are provided, but otherwise there is only one sentence that recognises the importance of “an open and vibrant civil society”.

83. The VNR highlights DFID’s promise to leave no one behind and reach the furthest behind first. It is not clear how effectively this has been mainstreamed throughout DFID’s activity. There are several examples of good practice, but thoroughgoing implementation of this principle into objectives, structures, staffing, and funding is less obvious. Bond’s report calls for clarity and leadership on “leave no one behind” but it is not clear how far DFID activity has answered this call; Bond’s first reaction to the VNR has described coverage of “leave no one behind” as a “token gesture”.¹¹⁶

84. A broader question about structural alignment can be posed for DFID. Though there are several examples of DFID activity that can be mapped against particular SDGs, it is less clear how central the SDGs are to DFID’s understanding of its mission. When the committee put this to the Secretary of state, he responded, “There is still a lot of work to be done in DFID. We should not be complacent about what has happened in DFID. There is a tension here.”¹¹⁷ Nick Dyer also reflected on whether DFID could do more in respect of its funding schemes: “Where we are running perhaps a competitive fund, like the school grants scheme, the civil society schemes we have, or research, perhaps we should be asking ourselves more explicitly about the SDGs.”¹¹⁸

85. Policy coherence across government activity in support of DFID’s development objectives is not discussed in the VNR. Discussing two apparent examples of incoherence undermining UK policy objectives—funding for fossil fuel-based projects and UK arms sales—the Secretary of State acknowledged but defended the apparent incoherence:

We have an economy in this country that is very heavily dependent, in certain parts of the country, on fossil fuels, in other parts of the country on the export of defence equipment. That poses real foreign policy and development challenges, because it means that we are having to weigh up the interests of, quite literally, hundreds of thousands of jobs in this country against our stated environmental policy challenges.¹¹⁹

Reconciling these “difficult issues”, the Secretary of State noted, was “a much, much bigger strategic policy decision, which would have to be made at a No. 10 level”.¹²⁰

Interlinkages and policy coherence

86. Interlinkages between Goals are identified at various points, but interlinkages between targets are not, nor is the systematically interlinked nature of the agenda—the interlinked economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development—identified or its policy implications examined.

116 Bond, ‘[Has the UK missed an opportunity for global leadership?](#)’, 28 June 2019

117 [Q220](#)

118 [Q221](#)

119 [Q225](#)

120 *Ibid*

87. Coherence between policy areas is not addressed in the summary of UK governance for the goals, nor under target 17.14.¹²¹ No detailed examples of policy coherence, or incoherence, are given there. A “cross government group which meets regularly” is identified as “a platform to coordinate goal implementation”,¹²² and an account of institutional approaches to policy coherence is not otherwise offered. By contrast, both Scotland and Wales say more about cross-cutting measures and frameworks designed to ensure policy coherence.¹²³ Though local delivery of the goals is addressed briefly in the section on Shared Endeavour,¹²⁴ “vertical coherence” between the UK government and the devolved administrations, and local government, goes unexamined in the VNR. Written evidence from the Sussex Sustainability Research Programme reinforces the potential benefits of addressing policy coherence in UK governance, in particular of “assessing the level of cooperation already taking place across government departments and proposing joint actions and accountability arrangements to boost this cooperation”.¹²⁵

Next steps

88. The commitment to generate a stakeholder engagement mechanism is welcome, but the details of this are unclear.¹²⁶ When asked by the Committee, the Secretary of State and DFID could not provide any further information at the evidence session, and await a written response from the Secretary of State.

89. The conclusions and next steps also indicate that a process will be undertaken to increase policy coordination across the UK government.¹²⁷ Again, this is welcome—though the precise constitution of this mechanism, again, is unclear.

90. In four respects, what the VNR does not commit the UK to is just as important. First, there is no commitment to any national plan or strategy to address the SDGs. In other countries, such as France, Canada and Ireland, the VNR has represented an important window to establish or commit to such a plan. Second, there is no indication of any plan to establish a long-term ongoing process of national review, let alone one that—as the UN indicates—is multi-stakeholder in nature, involving civil society organisations, business, and parliament. Third, there is no indication for new or additional budget to support SDG coordination or implementation in the UK. Fourth, though UN guidance recommends a national dialogue around the VNR after its presentation in New York, no such VNR-focused dialogue is indicated in the report.

121 HM Government, [Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#), p. 208–209

122 *Ibid.* p. 11

123 *Ibid.* p. 11, 210–211

124 *Ibid.* p. 16–17

125 Sussex Sustainability Research Programme based at the University of Sussex ([SDG0009](#))

126 HM Government, [Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#), p. 213

127 *Ibid.* p. 213

Does it fulfil the purposes of a good VNR?

91. This initial survey of the VNR allows for an assessment of how far the UK’s VNR fulfils the stated ambitions for the UN’s VNR process. In terms of peer learning and practice sharing, the UK VNR is clearly rich and detailed in outlining relevant UK activity and some of these initiatives could inform the practice of other countries. The sheer volume of initiatives and activities featured, and the correspondingly light level of detail on both the “how” and “why” of these practices, might serve to frustrate lesson-learning.

92. Importantly, for such a substantial document, there is not a clear line of coherence between the executive summary of the report and the summaries of each chapter, nor between the chapter summaries and the challenges and successes identified in each. For example, the recent rise in homicides and certain types of violent crime, highlighted as a challenge in Goal 16, is not mentioned in the Goal 16 summary or the executive summary. “Supporting a growing and ageing population” is stated as a challenge in the executive summary, but not mentioned in any of the chapter summaries or foregrounded in the “challenges” section of any chapter. States and stakeholders might thus find it difficult to engage with the report’s central insights.

93. There is clearly rich potential for peer learning within the UK, in particular the way that the UK could learn from the approaches in Scotland and Wales—both to the VNR and to SDG implementation. As the Secretary of State indicated: “In the normal way, we would have to learn from Scotland’s approach and make sure, in the next iteration, if there are things they are doing better than we are, we learn from that.”¹²⁸

94. The potential for accountability is limited. Successes are highlighted, whilst problems and challenges are inconsistently identified and not investigated in detail. Few standards, specific targets or concrete commitments against which to assess current and future performance are detailed. The SDG targets, which can constitute a provisional benchmark for UK performance, are largely absent from the VNR; trends in the data are not comprehensively addressed in the text or in the data annex.

95. The capacity of this report to mobilise implementation and support is clearly a matter of concern, given limited action by the UK government so far. Some positive steps are noted—the VNR launch and accompanying film, the stakeholder engagement mechanism and discussions on deepening government engagement. Evidence from Nick Dyer of DFID highlights that the VNR may have served as a chance to further discussion of coherence across government:

There are a number of attempts to create this cross-Government coherence. There are increasingly conversations across Government about how you can replicate this kind of approach in the national security space, broadly, in the domestic space.¹²⁹

128 [Q208](#)

129 [Q227](#)

96. However, the VNR itself contains little by way of an “ambitious national response”¹³⁰ that governments pledged themselves to in the SDG outcome document, and the process of preparation of the VNR has not, itself, given rise to new SDG-oriented policies, governance structures, or finance. This situation, it should be noted, is different in the Scottish and Welsh devolved administrations, where there is evidence that the VNR has prompted further review and action.

97. The UK’s first Voluntary National Review (VNR) was a welcome but ultimately disappointing review of the UK’s progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We found that despite some strengths, too often the VNR lacked coherence, depth and breadth of analysis. It was also overly focused on “cherry picked” data and case studies at the expense of challenges that remain to be tackled in the UK and around the world.

98. For its next VNR, the Government should be more ambitious and rigorous in its review of the UK’s progress along the trajectories indicated by the Sustainable Development Goals, especially in those areas we highlight above. We hope that the Government will also provide in future VNRs more contextualised data, and analyses, showing trends and comparisons with other countries to illuminate the UK’s performance against SDG targets, including the variations across the four UK nations.

The High-Level Political Forum

99. We welcome the Secretary of State’s commitment to present the UK’s Voluntary National Review to the UN High-Level Political Forum on 16th July, after some concern that he would not fulfil his predecessor’s pledge to attend.¹³¹ In evidence to the Committee in late June, the Secretary of State told us:

I am very pleased to go. There is a small discussion going on, because I have to miss Cabinet and the NSC on that Tuesday, but my intention is to go to New York to lead the delegation.¹³²

The UN Secretary General’s guidelines state that countries should “consider whether national stakeholders will be allocated time to speak as part of the VNR presentation”.¹³³ It is hoped that the UK Government will include stakeholders in its delegation, and also in the final presentation to the HLPF. As Bond told us:

The UK government should include other stakeholders, including civil society, in their delegation to the HLPF to present the VNR. This would align with good practice and peer countries such as France and Sweden, as the review process is intended to be a reflection of national progress, not simply a government statement.¹³⁴

130 Para 78

131 In the [debate on the Sustainable Development Goals \(HC Deb, Col. 592–624, Vol. 661\)](#) on 11 June 2019, Minister of State, Harriet Baldwin, stated that Baroness Sugg (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, DFID) would lead the delegation to the HLPF.

132 [Q192](#)

133 UN DESA, [Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews: The 2019 Edition](#), p. 51

134 Bond ([SDG0018](#))

Unfortunately, there has been widespread confusion amongst UK stakeholders about who will be represented in the Government's final presentation. It is a concern, at the time of writing this report, that the Committee understands that at least one stakeholder representative has yet to be identified, six days before the beginning of the HLPF. We are not fully confident of the Secretary of State's assertions that stakeholders will be chosen in "the fairest and most transparent way we possibly can."¹³⁵ Once again, it seems that arrangements are being brought together at a very late stage.

100. The 2019 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) presents an opportunity for the UK to reaffirm its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on the international stage and to once again show leadership on this vital agenda. We hope that the UK's presentation will include a wide range of stakeholders involved in implementation of the SDGs across the UK, including young people and civil society representatives.

101. The Government should use this year's HLPF to commit to producing its next Voluntary National Review (VNR) in three years' time: in the summer of 2022.

102. It is also vital that the next Prime Minister attends the SDGs Summit at the United Nations General Assembly in September, to speak to the UK's progress on the SDGs and its first VNR. It is crucial that the UK reinforces its commitment to this transformative global agenda, supports the push—by Project Everyone and others—to deliver the SDGs by 2030, and demonstrates that the country remains a force for good on the international stage.

3 What next?

103. The publication and presentation of the UK's first Voluntary National Review (VNR) is an important moment for the Government to show its continued, and shared, commitment to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. However, as a Committee that has been at the forefront of scrutiny of this agenda since 2015, we acknowledge that what is important is what comes next in terms of the UK's implementation of the SDGs. The UN Secretary General's Handbook on VNRs presents a number of options for follow-up, which require further consideration. (see Box 3) We also offer here our own recommendations for the Government.

Box 3: UN Handbook for the preparation of VNRs: After the presentation

In order to get full benefit from the resources invested in the VNR, countries could consider concrete follow-up steps. Points to consider are the following:

- Ensure wide dissemination of the VNRs. For example, countries could convene a press conference to present outcomes of the VNR presentation at the HLPF.
- Debrief the VNR project team on the outcomes of the presentation at the HLPF. This could include a summary of lessons learned and good practices from other countries which presented during that session.
- Promote concrete action on priorities contained in the VNR. For example, convene a cabinet meeting or other appropriate decision-making body to consider VNR follow-up.
- Develop an action plan/road map covering who, what, where and when for priority follow-up.
- Consider meeting, where applicable, with the UNCT and bilateral donors on follow-up and support for priorities identified in the VNR.
- Take initiatives to simplify the review for wider public consumption.
- Consider presenting an annual report to Parliament on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- Consider sharing the VNR and lessons learned at the regional level.
- Institutionalise the collection of the material for the VNRs.
- Use lessons from the VNR process to refine and enhance institutional arrangements.
- Consider initiating a decision on preparation and presentation of a follow-up VNR

Source: UN DESA, [Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews: The 2019 Edition](#), p. 52

104. *To make up for the limited and hasty consultation during preparation of the Voluntary National Review (VNR), and to allow for detailed scrutiny of the Review (so that a more neutral baseline for future assessments can emerge), the Government should commit at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) to a process of public review meetings on the VNR with UK stakeholders. The meetings should include, amongst others devolved administrations; human rights institutions; trades unions; NGOs; Parliamentarians, and UK academia and should take place during the autumn. This review should aim at learning lessons from the VNR and supplementing the limited review of progress and performance contained within it. It should address both domestic and overseas implementation, and have a component addressing the UK's Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories. Key points and recommendations could be summarised, appended to the VNR and submitted to the UN at next year's HLPF.*

105. *This process would allow the Government to raise awareness of the Goals by launching a national conversation about the VNR alongside these meetings. It would also ensure an accurate and comprehensive baseline for future reporting.*

106. *In a spirit of peer learning and global engagement, the Government should assemble a peer review panel comprised of experts from global partner countries, both developed and developing, to provide input to this domestic review process. This process would be two-way, also allowing for key learning from the detail of the UK's VNR to be drawn out and applied elsewhere. In the absence of leadership by Government, this process could be taken forward by Parliament*

107. *This national review process would kickstart implementation, but also aim to establish an ongoing process of inclusive national review of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals with parliament at its core, as outlined in the 2030 Agenda.¹³⁶ This mechanism would be a powerful legacy of the VNR.*

108. We were keen to publish our initial assessment of the VNR process and the final Review in time to coincide with the UK's presentation at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). However, we are aware that there is more to be said on future implementation of the SDGs and how the VNR can be followed up by substantive Government action and parliamentary scrutiny. We will therefore publish a further short report on 'UK Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: Implementation of the 2030 Agenda' later this year, once a new Prime Minister and a new Government are in place to take forward these crucial Global Goals.

136 UN, [Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), September 2015, para 79 states: "regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels which are country-led and country-driven. Such reviews should draw on contributions from indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, in line with national circumstances, policies and priorities. National parliaments as well as other institutions can also support these processes."

Conclusions and recommendations

The Voluntary National Review Process

1. The Government should have given more time to the VNR process. A plan to take the process forward should have been agreed soon after the commitment to produce the VNR was made, in November 2017, and shared with all relevant stakeholders. This would have allowed more time and space for DFID officials to engage other government departments in the process, and to coordinate with the devolved administrations, clarifying the details on timelines and presentation of the final Review. (Paragraph 11)
2. Allowing more time for the VNR process may have enabled the UK to keep to the timescale set by the UN, as so many other countries did. This Review was an enormous undertaking that included every government department. We appreciate that this is the first time the UK has conducted a VNR process, but these are lessons that must be learned before the UK embarks on its next VNR. (Paragraph 12)
3. *When embarking on future VNRs, the Government should produce a detailed, publicly available timeline at least 18 months before presentation of the Review, including the main deliverables and deadlines. This would help to focus minds across Government and the devolved administrations and enable stakeholders to engage more effectively with the process. This timeline should be realistic and allow adequate time for contributions to be prepared and consolidated, and for meaningful stakeholder engagement to take place. It should also provide time for meaningful and collaborative discussions between all the UK's administrations about taking account of different approaches and priorities.* (Paragraph 13)
4. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that people who were not previously engaged in the SDGs have become so as a result of the VNR process, and that is a real opportunity missed for the Government. Given sufficient time and resources, government officials could have done far more to reach out to marginalised groups during this process. The Government needs to be doing far more to ensure that more people are engaged in the SDGs agenda, reaching beyond traditional stakeholders to hard-to-reach communities and regions across the nation. (Paragraph 26)
5. Stakeholder engagement throughout the VNR process has been inadequate and disappointing. Leaving each government department to carry out its own engagement with stakeholders has led to 'ad hoc' arrangements which differed wildly across Government and a lack of coordination, making it difficult for interested parties to participate meaningfully in the process. Where engagement events were organised, they took place late in the process, were largely superficial and, aside from a two-page document attached to the VNR, it is hard to see how this engagement has influenced the final Review. (Paragraph 28)
6. *In its response, the Government should provide further details on its plans to develop a formal mechanism for stakeholder engagement on domestic implementation of the SDGs, including:*
 - a) *when it will be established;*

- b) *who will be involved (and how marginalised and hard-to-reach communities will be engaged);*
- c) *which government department will coordinate it;*
- d) *what its terms of reference will be, and*
- e) *proposed methods of engagement.*

Parliamentarians must be included as key stakeholders in this process going forward. (Paragraph 29)

7. *Whilst we welcome the commitment to create a mechanism for stakeholder engagement on domestic implementation of the SDGs, we recommend that the Government commits to establishing a similar mechanism focused on the UK's global contribution to the SDGs and would welcome its commitment to do so in the response to this Report. (Paragraph 30)*
8. The VNR process has necessitated a greater understanding of the SDGs across Government and this is a positive development. However, we have started from a very low bar, with departments having little to no knowledge of the agenda at all. We welcome the Prime Minister putting the Global Goals on the agenda for Cabinet, which ensured that all Cabinet Ministers had a basic understanding of the agenda and the Voluntary National Review process. We hope that the next Prime Minister will follow up on this progress by ensuring that the new Cabinet understands the importance of the SDGs agenda when it is formed. (Paragraph 33)
9. *Placing the responsibility for implementation of the SDGs—and by extension the Voluntary National Review—in an internationally-focused department where Ministers have previously said they have “relatively few, if any, domestic levers” is not the right decision. The view prevails, on this Committee, as in the evidence received to this inquiry, that the VNR—and UK implementation of the SDGs more generally—should be the responsibility of the Cabinet Office. Unfortunately the Cabinet Office's Minister for Implementation, Oliver Dowden MP, declined our invitation to give oral evidence to this inquiry so we were unable to put this matter to him. (Paragraph 34)*
10. DFID stated that the VNR process was governed by a “pre-existing official-level cross-Whitehall Group on the SDGs... co-chaired by DFID and Cabinet Office.” However, the role of these officials, their connection to Champions, SROs and the VNR team in DFID, and the percentage of their time, day-to-day, allocated to the implementation of the SDGs, remains unclear. The only evidence we saw of the cross-Whitehall Group during this inquiry was their attendance at the parliamentary stakeholder event on the VNR in early March. *In its response to this inquiry, we would be grateful if the Government could provide some further detail on this Group including its membership, terms of reference and outputs since 2015. (Paragraph 40)*
11. *We urge the Government to retain the Director-level SDG Champion roles in all government departments, to continue to communicate, and encourage progress towards, the Goals beyond the VNR. However, the roles should be better defined. In its response to this Report, we would like to see the Government commit to retaining ‘Champions’ in all government departments and set out a clear job description for*

the role. Champions should be provided with appropriate resources, in terms of staff and budget, to enable them to continue to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda in their departments beyond the 2019 HLPF. (Paragraph 41)

12. *For future VNRs, it is essential that an appropriate mechanism is created—at the heart of Government, in the Cabinet Office—to lead on communication and implementation of the SDGs. If such a mechanism had been in place, bringing together the VNR would have been much more straightforward. Instead, the process was incredibly fragmented, with chapters of the VNR drafted, at least initially, in isolation, by different departments. The process to bring all of the sections of the report together was then very complex, and was made more difficult by the coordinating department, DFID, having limited influence across government departments and the devolved administrations. (Paragraph 45)*
13. *Coordination with Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, for the purposes of the VNR, could also be improved. We recommend early communication between the UK Government and the devolved administrations, and agreement of a common style, structure and reporting framework, well in advance of the next VNR. (Paragraph 46)*

The Voluntary National Review

14. This section of the Report assesses the content of the UK VNR in terms of these criteria and purposes. Overall, it finds inconsistent adherence to these standards—strong in some respects, and weak in others. (Paragraph 47)
15. The UK’s first Voluntary National Review (VNR) was a welcome but ultimately disappointing review of the UK’s progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We found that despite some strengths, too often the VNR lacked coherence, depth and breadth of analysis. It was also overly focused on “cherry picked” data and case studies at the expense of challenges that remain to be tackled in the UK and around the world. (Paragraph 97)
16. *For its next VNR, the Government should be more ambitious and rigorous in its review of the UK’s progress along the trajectories indicated by the Sustainable Development Goals, especially in those areas we highlight above. We hope that the Government will also provide in future VNRs more contextualised data, and analyses, showing trends and comparisons with other countries to illuminate the UK’s performance against SDG targets, including the variations across the four UK nations. (Paragraph 98)*
17. The 2019 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) presents an opportunity for the UK to reaffirm its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on the international stage and to once again show leadership on this vital agenda. We hope that the UK’s presentation will include a wide range of stakeholders involved in implementation of the SDGs across the UK, including young people and civil society representatives. (Paragraph 100)

18. *The Government should use this year's HLPF to commit to producing its next Voluntary National Review (VNR) in three years' time: in the summer of 2022. (Paragraph 101)*
19. *It is also vital that the next Prime Minister attends the SDGs Summit at the United Nations General Assembly in September, to speak to the UK's progress on the SDGs and its first VNR. It is crucial that the UK reinforces its commitment to this transformative global agenda, supports the push - by Project Everyone and others - to deliver the SDGs by 2030, and demonstrates that the country remains a force for good on the international stage. (Paragraph 102)*

What next?

20. *To make up for the limited and hasty consultation during preparation of the Voluntary National Review (VNR), and to allow for detailed scrutiny of the Review (so that a more neutral baseline for future assessments can emerge), the Government should commit at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) to a process of public review meetings on the VNR with UK stakeholders. The meetings should include: devolved administrations; human rights institutions; trades unions; NGOs; Parliamentarians, and UK academia and should take place during the autumn. This review should aim at learning lessons from the VNR and supplementing the limited review of progress and performance contained within it. It should address both domestic and overseas implementation, and have a component addressing the UK's Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories. Key points and recommendations could be summarised, appended to the VNR and submitted to the UN at next year's HLPF. (Paragraph 104)*
21. *This process would allow the Government to raise awareness of the Goals by launching a national conversation about the VNR alongside these meetings. It would also ensure an accurate and comprehensive baseline for future reporting. (Paragraph 105)*
22. *In a spirit of peer learning and global engagement, the Government should assemble a peer review panel comprised of experts from global partner countries, both developed and developing, to provide input to this domestic review process. This process would be two-way, also allowing for key learning from the detail of the UK's VNR to be drawn out and applied elsewhere. In the absence of leadership by Government, this process could be taken forward by Parliament (Paragraph 106)*
23. *This national review process would kickstart implementation, but also aim to establish an ongoing process of inclusive national review of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals with parliament at its core, as outlined in the 2030 Agenda. This mechanism would be a powerful legacy of the VNR. (Paragraph 107)*

Appendix

Extract from the written evidence submitted by UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development (UKSSD) to the Environmental Audit Committee's inquiry into the Voluntary National Review of UK progress against the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2019.¹

This table presents a record of [UKSSD's] ... engagement with departments on individual Goal chapters of the review

Goal	Lead Department	Status of engagement
Goal 1: No Poverty	Department for Work and Pensions	No contact. Heard from DFID on 24/02/19 that they were hosting roundtable on 4/03/19. No communication with UKSSD/Bond.
Goal 2: Zero Hunger	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	DFID helped engagement event on Goals 2, 6,12,14 and 15 on 22 March. UKSSD notified on 13 March and asked to promote to stakeholders.
Goal 3: Good Health	Department for Health and Social Care	Sent email on 30 Jan— response on 13 Feb confirming no specific engagement plans but intention to do so. Email from lead on 22 Jan asking for discussion with UKSSD chair about specific targets. Suggested expert stakeholders better. Call on 26 Feb where clear that domestic engagement would not include a roundtable but may include some expert interviews. Suggested introductions to Measuring Up stakeholders particularly lead author. Have since heard they had plans to run roundtable with international health NGOs but no domestic equivalent. No further communication.

1 See [here](#).

Goal	Lead Department	Status of engagement
Goal 4: Quality Education	Department for Education	No contact. Have heard that they ran some events with schools - no engagement of education professionals or experts. Some DFID intention to do outreach with Connecting Classrooms programme.
Goal 5: Gender Equality	Government Equalities Office	Organised Goal 5 consultation on back of CSW event with gender stakeholders on 14 Jan—we didn't know until week before. Conversation with lead indicated that they are intending to get more inputs on draft chapter. GEO has alerted other departments that their stakeholders are interested in participating in other events.
Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	DFID helped engagement event on Goals 2, 6,12,14 and 15 on 22 March. UKSSD notified on 13 March and asked to promote to stakeholders.
Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy	UKSSD received email on 2/04/19 of event planned on 5/04/19.
Goal 8: Decent work and Economic Growth	HM Treasury	11 Feb roundtable held—limited numbers but focused agenda on specific targets. UKSSD notified of intentions to run event in December 18 and able to feed in to agenda.
Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy	UKSSD received email on 2/04/19 of event planned on 5/04/19
Goal 10: Reduced inequalities	Government Equalities Office	28/02/19 roundtable held—limited numbers but focused agenda on specific targets. UKSSD informed on 4/02/19 and able to feed in to agenda.
Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government	UKSSD received email on 3/4/19 of event on 8/4/19

Goal	Lead Department	Status of engagement
Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	DFID helped engagement event on Goals 2, 6,12,14 and 15 on 22 March. UKSSD notified on 13 March and asked to promote to stakeholders.
Goal 13: Climate Action	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy	UKSSD received email on 2/04/19 of event planned on 5/04/19
Goal 14: Life Below Water	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	DFID helped engagement event on Goals 2, 6,12,14 and 15 on 22 March. UKSSD notified on 13 March and asked to promote to stakeholders.
Goal 15: Life on Land	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	DFID helped engagement event on Goals 2, 6,12,14 and 15 on 22 March. UKSSD notified on 13 March and asked to promote to stakeholders.
Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Security	Home Office	Roundtable with approx 30 orgs (mix of LNOB, international and domestic, and sectors) on 16/11/18. UKSSD contacted by Home Office lead on 9/10./18 and contributed to agenda and invited stakeholders.
Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals	Department for International Development	DFID leading—events booked but delayed because of delays in promoting and finalising plans. No intention to run events on partnership or policy coherence. No engagement with domestic stakeholders although we were aware of the plans.

Formal minutes

Tuesday 9 July 2019

Members present:

Stephen Twigg, in the Chair

Mr Nigel Evans

Chris Law

Mr Ivan Lewis

Paul Scully

Mr Virendra Sharma

Henry Smith

Draft Report (*UK progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Voluntary National Review*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 108 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

A paper (UKSSD etc.) was appended to the Report.

Resolved, That the Report be the Twelfth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

[Adjourned till Wednesday 10 July at 3.30 p.m.]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 12 March 2019

Emily Auckland, Co-Chair, UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development, **Andrew Griffiths**, Co-Chair, Bond SDGs Working Group, **Donna Ward**, Policy Director for Children, Families and Disadvantage and SDG Champion, DWP, **Sam Lister**, Director for Industrial Strategy and SDG Champion, BEIS [Q1–63](#)

Tuesday 19 March 2019

Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP, Secretary of State for International Development, **Rt Hon Lord Bates**, Minister of State for International Development [Q64–108](#)

Tuesday 14 May 2019

Claire Godfrey, Head of Policy and Campaigns, Bond, **Danny Sriskandarajah**, Chief Executive Officer, Oxfam GB, and **Ivan Campbell**, Head of Research and Learning, Saferworld; **Steve Waygood**, Chief Responsible Investment Officer, Aviva, **Helen Dennis**, Policy and Advocacy Manager, Fairtrade Foundation, and **Duncan Hames**, Director of Policy, Transparency International UK [Q109–162](#)

Tuesday 11 June 2019

Richard Curtis CBE, UN SDG Advocate, and **Kate Garvey**, Co-Founder, Project Everyone [Q163–191](#)

Wednesday 26 June 2019

Rt Hon Rory Stewart OBE MP, Secretary of State for International Development, **Nick Dyer**, Director General, Economic Development and International, Department for International Development [Q192–229](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

SDG numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Age International ([SDG0019](#))
- 2 Amnesty International ([SDG0052](#))
- 3 Aviva ([SDG0044](#))
- 4 Beswick, Dr Danielle ([SDG0030](#))
- 5 Bond ([SDG0018](#))
- 6 British Council ([SDG0045](#))
- 7 British Red Cross ([SDG0035](#))
- 8 Business in the Community ([SDG0025](#))
- 9 Centre for a Spacefaring Civilization ([SDG0012](#))
- 10 Commonwealth Medical Trust ([SDG0031](#))
- 11 Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) ([SDG0021](#))
- 12 DECSY (Development Education Centre, South Yorkshire) ([SDG0007](#))
- 13 Department for International Development ([SDG0017](#))
- 14 Department for International Development Annex A ([SDG0058](#))
- 15 Development Initiatives ([SDG0036](#))
- 16 Dr Graham Long, Politics Department, Newcastle University ([SDG0054](#))
- 17 Dr Jie Sheng Li ([SDG0004](#))
- 18 Drummond, Brian ([SDG0011](#))
- 19 EAUC ([SDG0006](#))
- 20 Fairtrade Foundation ([SDG0055](#))
- 21 Feminine Vitae ([SDG0046](#))
- 22 FIA Foundation ([SDG0038](#))
- 23 The Gender and Development Network: Women's Economic Justice Working Group ([SDG0050](#))
- 24 Global Witness ([SDG0057](#))
- 25 Health Poverty Action ([SDG0033](#))
- 26 International Alert ([SDG0001](#))
- 27 INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC) ([SDG0003](#))
- 28 International Rescue Committee ([SDG0053](#))
- 29 Professor Stephen Martin ([SDG0002](#))
- 30 Professor Stephen Martin ([SDG0010](#))
- 31 Minority Rights Group, Health Poverty Action, Translators without Borders, Christian Aid, Human Rights Consortium ([SDG0024](#))
- 32 Dr Sean Molloy ([SDG0013](#))

- 33 NASUWT - The Teachers' Union ([SDG0032](#))
- 34 Office for National Statistics ([SDG0016](#))
- 35 ONE Campaign ([SDG0039](#))
- 36 Overseas Development Institute ([SDG0027](#))
- 37 OxfamGB ([SDG0049](#))
- 38 Palladium ([SDG0047](#))
- 39 Plan International UK ([SDG0041](#))
- 40 Reall ([SDG0040](#))
- 41 Restless Development ([SDG0026](#))
- 42 Results UK ([SDG0034](#))
- 43 Saferworld ([SDG0023](#))
- 44 Scotland's International Development Alliance ([SDG0042](#))
- 45 SDG Network Scotland ([SDG0020](#))
- 46 Send My Friend to School ([SDG0015](#))
- 47 Sightsavers ([SDG0005](#))
- 48 Dr Rhona Smith ([SDG0051](#))
- 49 STOPAIDS ([SDG0048](#))
- 50 Sussex Sustainability Research Programme based at the University of Sussex ([SDG0009](#))
- 51 Trade Justice Movement ([SDG0028](#))
- 52 UK SRHR Network ([SDG0043](#))
- 53 UKSSD ([SDG0029](#))
- 54 WaterAid ([SDG0008](#))
- 55 Westminster Foundation for Democracy ([SDG0014](#))
- 56 Women for Women International ([SDG0056](#))
- 57 World Vision ([SDG0022](#))
- 58 WWF UK ([SDG0037](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website. The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

First Report	DFID's work on education: Leaving no one behind?	HC 367 (HC 914)
Second Report	Bangladesh and Burma: the Rohingya crisis	HC 504 (HC 919)
Third Report	Bangladesh and Burma: the Rohingya crisis - monsoon preparedness in Cox's Bazar	HC 904 (HC 1055)
Fourth Report	Bangladesh, Burma and the Rohingya crisis	HC 1054 (HC 1467)
Fifth Report	Definition and administration of ODA	HC 547 (HC 1556)
Sixth Report	DFID's Economic Development Strategy	HC 941 (HC 1599)
Seventh Report	UK's arms exports during 2016	HC 666 (HC 1789)
Eighth Report	Sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector	HC 840 (HC 1764)
Ninth Report	Appointment of the Chief Commissioner of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact	HC 1493
Tenth Report	Forced Displacement in Africa: "Anchors not walls"	HC 1433 (HC 2357)
Eleventh Report	UK aid for combating climate change	HC 1432
First Special Report	DFID's use of private sector contractors: Government Response	HC 322
Second Special Report	UK aid: allocation of resources: Government Response	HC 323
Third Special Report	DFID's work on education: Leaving no one behind?: Government response	HC 914
Fourth Special Report	Bangladesh and Burma: the Rohingya crisis: Government response	HC 919
Fifth Special Report	Bangladesh and Burma: the Rohingya crisis - monsoon preparedness in Cox's Bazar: Government response	HC 1055
Sixth Special Report	Bangladesh, Burma and the Rohingya Crisis: Government response	HC 1467
Seventh Special Report	Definition and administration of ODA: Government response	HC 1556

Eighth Special Report	DFID's Economic Development Strategy: Government response to the Committee's Sixth Report	HC 1599
Ninth Special Report	UK arms exports during 2016: Government Response to the Committees' First Joint Report	HC 1789
Tenth Special Report	Sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector: Government response to the Committee's Eighth Report	HC 1764
Eleventh Special Report	Forced displacement in Africa: 'Anchors not Walls': Government response to the Committee's Tenth Report	HC 2357