

The UK in Cuba: creating alliances in response to COVID-19

Small-scale project interventions with funds from the International Programme (IP) of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) in Cuba, will contribute to increase the country's sanitary resilience, support research into vaccines and therapeutics, and mitigate the domestic economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

British Ambassador to Cuba, Dr Antony Stokes LVO said:

Cooperation between countries is essential in responding to the challenges posed by COVID-19. In addition to putting the world's health systems under pressure, the pandemic has impacted our economies. The projects drive bilateral collaboration in these two key areas.

The Embassy is assisting the Cuban Centre for Neurosciences (CNEURO) in its effort to optimize the diagnosis and treatment approaches that minimize brain damage in patients. The institution also works on improving the treatment of COVID-19-related respiratory deficits and will implement a protocol for the assimilation and use of non-invasive Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) devices, based on a design by University College London.

Dr Mitchel Valdés-Sosa, Director of CNEURO said:

Non-invasive ventilation implies a significant improvement in the recovery of patients. Both projects are innovative within the portfolio of projects aimed at combating COVID-19 in Cuba, and an important resource to improve the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of current and future diseases.

The British Embassy is also collaborating with the Cuban Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CIGB) in several areas of research, related to: the clinical trial of an immune enhancer, the development of diagnostic tests for serological antigen detection and the effect of an existing antiviral in COVID-19 positive patients.

Dr Eulogio Pimentel, Director of CIGB, said:

In facing the pandemic in Cuba, the possibility of developing specific and effective drugs against this disease has been essential. In this sense, we appreciate the contribution of the United Kingdom, to be able to acquire multiple reagents and materials necessary to ensure the progress of the three mentioned

actions.

On mitigating the economic impact of COVID-19 in Cuba, the Embassy is supporting research that will bring about concrete proposals to transform the fresh food commerce in Cuba. Equally, it will support the Cuban private sector in its discussions on how to strengthen the sector despite the devastating consequences that the outbreak has had for them.

Since 2016, the FCDO's International Programme has provided financial support for events, research, workshops, visits and other interventions that support development projects and exchange between the UK and Cuba.

The Embassy works with the Cuban government, academia, international organisations and civil society to support the country's development in areas such as: economic reform, global health threats, biotech and life sciences, public governance, financial and professional services, higher education and English Language teaching, renewable energy, creative industries, and the media, among others.

Examples of this past work are:

- Training workshop on accessing climate finance for mitigation in energy and transport.
- Workshops on potential value and impact of a stronger Creative Industries sector in the Cuban economy.
- Training to the Cuban banking sector by several institutions from the City of London on issues such as: digital banking and Fintech, strengthening governance and strategic leadership in banks, building a future-proof financial technology programme, retail banking & SME lending, among others.
- Assisting Cuba in the development of a National Public Procurement Strategy
- Assessing the role and value of energy storage in Cuba.
- Technical assistance by Public Health England (PHE) for training and implementation of immunological assays for improving vaccine evaluation at the Cuban Finlay Vaccine Institute.
- Supporting the reshaping of the policy for English Language teaching at Cuban universities.
- Workshops and visits on entrepreneurship and its role within the Cuban economy.

For the Financial Year 2020-21, the British Embassy in Havana has been forced to suspend the call for projects bids to be supported by the International Programme. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 the British government is focused on its response to the global pandemic.