

DFID RESEARCH STRATEGY 2008-2013  
Working Paper Series: Education



THIS WORKING PAPER ON EDUCATION IS ONE OF A SERIES OF 10 PAPERS PUBLISHED ALONGSIDE DFID'S RESEARCH STRATEGY 2008-2013. IT PRESENTS THE CASE FOR DFID-FUNDED RESEARCH ON EDUCATION – DRAWING ON THE RESPONSES GIVEN DURING A GLOBAL CONSULTATION THAT DFID CONVENED IN 2007 ABOUT ITS FUTURE RESEARCH.

The purpose of the Working Papers is two fold: to record the key issues raised during the consultation; and to spell out DFID's decisions on new directions, as informed by the consultation. As such, they constitute an important part of the feedback process, and provide an opportunity to clearly articulate DFID's strategic response to the consultations and to other global drivers of research. They also provide guidance to those implementing DFID's research strategy in the future.

Each Working Paper reviews the current state of DFID's research on a given theme, highlights the key questions asked during the consultation process, and documents the main feedback received. The Papers then tease out the implications of the consultation findings on DFID's work, and end by spelling out DFID's future directions on each priority theme. Where possible, each Paper makes clear how DFID has drawn upon the consultation responses to shape its plans.

Other titles in the series are: Economic Growth, including Infrastructure; Sustainable Agriculture; Better Health: Climate Change; Political and Social Science Research; Stimulating Demand for Research; Research Communication; Capacity Building; and Mainstreaming Gender in Research. Note that issues which are not directly addressed under this paper may appear in others (for example the impact of agriculture on climate change is largely addressed in the paper on Agriculture).

More information on DFID funded research can be found on the website [www.Research4Development.info](http://www.Research4Development.info). This also offers the facility to sign up for e-mail alerts covering different sectors.

## WHERE WE ARE NOW

1. A new approach to managing education research was developed in the context of the Research Funding Framework 2005-2007. Large multi-country work programmes were introduced in order to create coherent bodies of knowledge on key themes related to achieving the education-related MDGs but also the relationship between education and the other MDGs.
2. DFID supports three research consortia, comprising northern and southern partners, each of which focuses on one of the priority themes of:
  - access;
  - quality;
  - outcomes.

3. The consortium focusing on improving access to education is exploring how to improve access and inclusion for 5-15 year olds, including the impact of overage entry and school grade repetition, the role of small multi-grade schools and the impact of longer-term education sector planning.
4. The consortium concerned with the quality of education is linking state of the art school effectiveness research with selected national priorities in a range of countries, such as the development of science and technology teaching, more mother tongue instruction and improvements in school leadership and management.
5. The consortium on the outcomes of education is investigating the drivers of education outcomes and how education impacts on, and is related to, poverty.
6. Funding for these consortia comprises up to £2.5 million for each consortium over five years, finishing in 2010.
7. £2.5 million was agreed to fund multilateral research partnerships but this has not been implemented to date.
8. DFID research funding for education has also been used over the last three years to complete the publication of reports from a series of small research projects commissioned by DFID under its previous research strategy for education.

## WHAT THE CONSULTATION ASKED

9. The research consultation focused on DFID's current priority research themes. It also consulted on a range of general research process issues. As research on education is not seen as part of the current priority themes, there were no specific questions on education in the main public e-consultation exercise or in the country consultations.
10. Nevertheless, a number of the questions asked were relevant to education, including questions on DFID's current priority research themes, questions about new issues for research and questions on research processes and organisation, such as ways to improve building research capacity and partnerships, and the dissemination and use of research findings. A number of the e-consultation responses mentioned education and it was also raised in some of the country consultations. In addition, as part of the internal consultation process, specific comments on DFID's research on education were requested, and received, from DFID education advisers.

## WHAT WE HEARD

11. Overall, comments on education in the consultation addressed both sector-centred research on education and research on education's broader role in meeting the MDGs and other development objectives.
12. In relation to DFID's *current research on education*, which is largely sector-centred, comments emphasised the continuing importance of research on access, quality and outcomes but with the proviso that such research should be deepened and extended to incorporate a wider range of countries, particularly those most at risk of not achieving the education-related MDGs. Comments were also made on the importance of extending the research on education outcomes and their links to development goals more generally, since education is critical to delivery of all the MDGs.
13. It was stressed that good research is essential to underpin and extend DFID's global impact on education policy and that investment in education-related research should both be commensurate with DFID's programme spend and also reflect the need for effective impact from the significant proportion of public expenditure spent on education in developing countries. DFID should also work more on policy questions identified by partner governments and with the global research community and a range of other partners to develop and disseminate knowledge.
14. In relation to research on DFID's *current thematic priorities*, education was seen as being particularly relevant to:
  - building human capital;
  - individual and institutional capacity development;
  - the skills needed for economic development and diversification;
  - access to and take up of technology (especially ICTs); and
  - marginalised groups, particularly in conflict affected and fragile states.
15. There were also some specific responses on one of the topics mentioned in the consultation, under the questions on health research, namely children's education and HIV and AIDS. These responses endorsed the importance of this issue but did not make many concrete recommendations.
16. In relation to new issues, youth was mentioned in a number of responses, particularly in relation to fragile and conflict-affected states. A number of responses also highlighted the need for more interdisciplinary research, focusing on education outcomes and their impact on governance, the empowerment of women and better health, and especially how education and skills development link to livelihoods and economic growth. Comments made in the consultation on the need to learn from emerging economies are also relevant to education.

17. In relation to research processes, most of the consultation comments on capacity building, institutions and partnerships, timeframes, dissemination, and stakeholder involvement and use are pertinent to research on education. A number of respondents mentioned the general need to provide more syntheses and summaries of existing and new research, which reflects the concern in many countries and within the international community concerned with education development, to foster greater sharing of knowledge, innovative and effective practice, and lessons learned in relation to education.
18. Some consultation comments also explicitly identified the role of education in developing research capacity and research into use. In relation to research capacity, there were some important comments on the need for more support for higher education (*particularly from UK OGDs and Research Councils*) and a number of comments on the critical need to develop science capacity. In relation to research into use, comments stressed the importance of basic education to ensuring that new ideas and technologies are both understood and taken up. There was also one interesting and important comment on the need to communicate research in ways which take account of levels of education amongst target audiences.

## IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

### IMPLICATIONS OF THE CONSULTATION

19. The consultation, although limited in terms of comments on education, has five clear messages:
- in relation to research centred on the education sector, DFID's current research themes are appropriate and should be built on, though the emphases need to be refined in future. In particular, more attention needs to be given to issues, policies and practice related to achieving the Millennium Development and other international education goals in a wider range of countries, particularly high population countries, countries affected by conflict, and fragile states;
  - more attention needs to be given to the role of education in poverty reduction, economic growth, human development, better governance and environmental challenges;
  - there is a need for more syntheses and communication of current knowledge;
  - more attention should be given to working collaboratively with a wider range of partners;
  - education is relevant to a range of research capacity and use issues, including the communication of research, the uptake of new technologies, the development of science capacity and the need for institutional reform in higher education to enhance research capacity and ensure a more enabling environment for applied and policy-orientated research.

## IMPLICATIONS OF DEVELOPMENTS IN DFID AND GLOBAL POLICIES AND PRIORITIES FOR EDUCATION

20. DFID's policy and programme commitments on education are developing rapidly. For example the Prime Minister has issued an international MDG Call to Action enlisting support from a wider range of both public and private sector partners to ensure that the main education-related MDG is achieved. Education is a very high policy and programme priority for DFID, with £8.5 billion committed to it up to 2015. There is a growing focus by country governments and the international community on the significant challenges which will have to be met to achieve the Millennium Development and other goals for education – including how to reach the many disadvantaged children still excluded from school, increase the quality of education, and extend and improve education in those countries most at risk of not achieving the MDGs, such as high population countries, countries affected by conflict and fragile states.
21. And in common with country partners and an increasing number of donor agencies, DFID is now putting more emphasis on the development of post-primary education, within the context of a sector-wide approach, in order to increase economic growth and meet a range of higher-level knowledge, skill and capacity needs. These trends need to be reflected in future research on education.

## IMPLICATIONS OF DFID RESEARCH STRATEGY MORE GENERALLY

22. The future strategy for education research also needs to reflect existing and potential links with other components of DFID's research. Several proposed research directions and themes are relevant to education, in particular:
- the commitment to fund more research that helps partner countries to grow their economies, including skills development and use of new technologies;
  - more concern with conflict affected and fragile states in relation to making states work for poor people; and
  - a more inter-disciplinary approach to health and education research, for better human development.
23. DFID's proposed intentions to produce more syntheses of current knowledge, and address research capacity development in a variety of innovative and sustainable ways, have implications for the objectives and organisation of future education research.
24. The focus on evidence for policy making, and the need for a range of research partnerships, are also very relevant to education.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

25. DFID will continue to invest in research on education to support achievement of the MDGs and beyond. Our main focus will be the continuing and emerging challenges for education as a sector, but we will also address the contribution of education to human development more generally, and the role of education in economic growth and better governance. We will also work with developing country partners, and key international agencies and other partners, to improve the development, synthesis, communication and use of research on education.
26. We recognise that future investment in education research needs to be more commensurate with DFID's policy and financing commitments on education, its growing international role and influence in relation to education policy, the strengths of its country partnerships and programmes and its links to civil society and other organisations concerned with education. We will therefore both increase our direct funding for education research and support some strategic international research partnerships.
27. We consider that future research should build on the three themes of access, quality and outcomes in DFID's current research on education, but with some new elements, a wider geographical focus, and a broader set of partners and contributors.
28. Such research should include both new research and syntheses of what is "known to work" in a range of countries, particularly those with more successful trajectories towards the MDGs, and how these experiences and lessons, or alternative solutions, can be developed and adapted for more challenging needs and circumstances. Our research will also involve more agenda-setting with country government partners, further capacity building of southern institutions and stronger partnerships with civil society and other organisations. The communication strategy will focus on research users and other stakeholders in developing countries and in donor and other international agencies.

## STRAND 1

29. The first strand will focus on ensuring that the international community and partner countries have sufficient knowledge and evidence to meet the education-related MDGs. It will build on current research on access but focus more in future on inclusion issues, on children who are 'hard to reach' and on less effective/fragile states. It will involve commissioning research with a remit to look at both primary and lower secondary education and a requirement to address both the participation of groups of children still excluded from school and the need for research in a wider range of countries, including high population countries and the more challenging service delivery environments associated with fragile states.
30. This strand will also include some inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary links between education and health, as part of the priority theme of human development. The focus here will be on the pressing priority of improving service delivery in fragile states. This focus will also draw on and strengthen other interdisciplinary links, particularly with DFID's research and programmes on better governance.

## STRAND 2

31. The second strand will focus on the determinants of quality and how these can be incorporated in long-term education sector plans. This strand will also address the continuing need to improve the quality of education through effective implementation of strategies to ensure more and better teachers, more monitoring of learning achievements, and better school leadership and management. This research will focus on basic education but also consider how the quality of basic education is related to quality issues across the whole education sector. It will also comprise a wider geographical focus, for example the challenges associated with high population and federal states.

## STRAND 3

32. This will focus on the outcomes of education and training, looking at the links between education, poverty reduction, employment and economic growth as well as the outcomes of DFID's and the international community's investment in education in partner countries. Research on the role of education in relation to economic growth is particularly critical due to increasing investment by developing countries in post-primary education for economic growth, weaknesses in both basic and post-basic education in relation to teaching and learning in mathematics, science and technologies, and the mixed efficacy of investment to date in technical and vocational education.

33. We still need to finalise the key issues for future research, but anticipate they will build on current research on how and why education has an impact on poverty reduction and also reflect more attention to the role of education in ensuring more effective uptake of new technologies and other strategies for increased productivity and diversification. There will be a number of links with our sector-centred research on education, since experience from emerging economies suggests that equitable access to a good quality basic education is essential to increase the high-level knowledge and skills to be competitive in a global economy, sustain a step change in a country's economy more generally and ensure that the benefits of growth include poor people.

## RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

34. There are a wide range of potential partnerships that can strengthen the impact of the research and maximise DFID's contribution. Possible partners include the World Bank, the UN, European Community and bilateral donors as well as civil society organisations and research institutions and networks. We will consider the most appropriate configuration of such partnerships together with the potential value of regionally-based research hubs which may be better able to respond to regional demands, and how resource networks can be best developed. This will require a flexible approach, such as joint development of research hypotheses and joint involvement in dissemination networks. Such investment will also be complemented by ongoing work with UNESCO, including support for the Institute of Statistics and for the annual Global Monitoring Report on education, and programme support for university networks and individual and institutional research capacity development in Africa.

## CAPACITY AND COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT

35. Capacity development is at the core of education research and feeds into all DFID's research work. We will address the responses in the consultations about the role of education in capacity development and research into use. We are already engaged in dialogue on, and support for, higher education through our education sector programmes with partner countries and through our partnerships with the World Bank which takes a leading role globally in tertiary education reform. In addition, DFID supports a number of scholarship and other schemes designed to develop individual and institutional capacity in higher education. Both our research and our programmes address the quality of science teaching in schools, as part of the drive to improve science capacity in developing countries.
36. We will ensure that capacity development, and communication and use of research, are integral to research programmes focusing on education. We can provide advice to DFID research teams on the relationship between basic education and the capacity of stakeholders to understand and use research, and also draw on the work of researchers on education and training to support the institutional capacity development agenda in all research programmes. We can also liaise with other UK government departments – particularly the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) – to ensure that lessons from UK capacity development and institutional reform related to higher education can be shared with research teams and their partners, and that innovative approaches to research communication and use, including in schools, are also shared.

The Department for International Development (DFID) will spend up to £1 billion on research between 2008-2013. DFID's Research Strategy describes how the money will be used for maximum impact on reducing poverty in developing countries.

This paper is one of ten Working Papers which were produced to accompany the Strategy. Their purpose was twofold: first to record the key issues raised during a global consultation that DFID convened in 2007 about its future research; and second to spell out DFID's decisions on new directions, as informed by the consultation.

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