
Government Office for Science: Review of the Department for International Development's (DFID) use of science and engineering**Response by the Wellcome Trust**

November 2010

Introduction

1. The Wellcome Trust is a global charity dedicated to achieving extraordinary improvements in human and animal health. We support the brightest minds in biomedical research and the medical humanities. Our breadth of support includes public engagement, education and the application of research to improve health. We are independent of both political and commercial interests.
2. Globally we have significantly increased our international activity and funding over the past five years, specifically in supporting health research in low-and middle-income countries. Therefore, we have recently had several opportunities to engage with DFID and welcome the opportunity to contribute to the GO-Science review of DFID's use of science and engineering.
3. Our key messages are:
 - Our working relationship with DFID has been positive and we hope to engage with them on future initiatives;
 - We encourage DFID to engage in more partnership working to leverage its own funding and expertise and that of other funders and donors;
 - Since the 2004 Spending Review and the resulting Science and Technology Select Committee report, DFID has better utilised science and engineering in research and policy work;
 - We welcome the substantial budget allocation to research and the creation of the DFID Research Strategy;
 - We have been encouraged by the recent engagement of DFID staff in Wellcome Trust research activities;
 - We encourage DFID to engage with us prior to their bids for spending reviews, to explore the potential for joint activity;
 - We appreciate DFID's flexibility in working in partnership and enabling other partners to lead when appropriate. We also appreciate the increased time and expertise of DFID technical staff available through the Global Outreach team to better engage in research partnerships and hope this trend continues.

Nature of Engagement with DFID:

4. We have engaged directly with DFID through several partnerships, including the Medicines for Malaria Venture (MMV), the Health Research Capacity Strengthening Initiative and the Global Health Trials Scheme.

Views Regarding Working Arrangements

5. In general our working arrangements with DFID have been positive. We have confidence in them as a partner and hope to engage with them on future initiatives. We have found our relationship to be particularly beneficial because DFID, as a government entity, adds a complementary perspective to our activities. We have also found our dealings with DFID to be straightforward, as we are able to engage directly with them rather than going through multiple channels for approval.
6. We are pleased to work in close partnership with DFID, for example on the Global Health Trials Scheme¹. DFID has a vital role to play in facilitating partnership working and identifying synergies between UK partners to maximise engagement in overseas activities as recommended in the government's approach in its science and engineering report.²
7. We support the fact that DFID provides 'untied aid': aid which can be used by the recipient country to purchase goods and services from virtually any country. The UK is seen as a leader in this area and is often cited as an example of best practice. We hope that in the future UK aid will continue to be delivered in this way and that DFID research activities will continue to be independent in this way.
8. We support the move towards cross-Whitehall coordination of development research, however, we are keen to maintain DFID as our lead contact in the UK government.

DFID's use of Science and Engineering

9. As acknowledged by the UK government, research evidence is essential for DFID's understanding and tackling of development challenges in low-and middle-incomes countries. We feel that DFID has recently made some good progress in utilising science and engineering research in its policy and research funding work. We believe this has been particularly so since the 2004 Spending Review and the resulting Science and Technology Select Committee report³ on the use of science in UK development policy, which led to two key outcomes:
 - The appointment of Professor Chris Whitty, as Director of Research & Evidence Division and current DFID Chief Scientific Adviser, and several DFID research fellows, has substantially improved the prioritisation of research.
 - The creation of the Central Research Department has allowed for strategic and coordinated research. The further merger of the research and policy departments (to create the Research and Evidence Division) will hopefully ensure that DFID supported research is relevant and that findings are translated into policy as appropriate.
10. The Trust welcomes the budget allocation of £1 billion (over five years) to research, and the creation of the DFID Research Strategy (2008 – 2013). We are pleased that this budget has been protected in the 2010 Spending Review. It will be important to ensure that sufficient DFID technical staff are retained, particularly in the Research and Evidence Division of DFID to help ensure that these funds are spent wisely and to best possible effect.
11. The Trust has been encouraged by the recent engagement of DFID staff in Wellcome Trust research activities, including their support for climate change mitigation and public health, as well as the participation of Chris Whitty in our 'Frontiers Meeting' on 'Public health responses in disasters and humanitarian emergencies' in June 2010. We hope that this trend will continue and that there will be opportunities for follow-up in these areas.

¹ <http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Newspublications/News/MRC006857>

² <http://www.bis.gov.uk/go-science/science-in-government/strategy-and-guidance>

³ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmsctech/133/133.pdf>

12. While we have been pleased with the recent involvement of DFID in our activities, we note DFID's lack of engagement with us leading up to the recent Spending Review compared to previous Reviews. We hope that in the future DFID will engage with us, as a funding partner in developing their strategy for spending review bids and in exploring potential partnership opportunities.
13. In terms of meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it is difficult to determine the direct impact of investment in research and in particular 'attribution' of impact to a particular funder in a complex global research funding environment. In fact, the area of monitoring, evaluation and learning is one in which DFID could add significant value.
14. In the DFID Research Strategy (2008-2013) research for improving the effectiveness of health programmes was a key priority area, this research can be utilised for improving existing MDG programmes and in creating future ones. Several case studies on the 'Research for Development' (R4D)⁴ website provide examples of how research is having a real impact and we would support DFID's use of science and technology through R4D and development of other strategies and communication resources in this respect.

Concerns or Issues

15. Although the DFID research communication team has many strengths, there are a few areas where DFID's research communications could be improved.
 - *Country office communication.* One area of the review we feel was not adequately taken up is increasing communication and research activity and engagement between DFID country offices and the UK office of DFID. Having country offices is a strength of DFID, but currently they are often not being effectively involved in DFID research. We are pleased to learn that the Global Outreach team plan to increase communication and engagement relating to DFID research activities and assist country offices to help shape research questions. It will also assist the UK office to provide the county office with support and research evidence to guide their activities.
 - *Internal and external dissemination.* Along with communication between UK and country offices, DFID should maintain a clear focus on its overall research communication activities. For research to influence development, findings must be appropriately disseminated in order that appropriate evidence can be implemented through policy and practice. DFID has been progressive in its support of communications through its research communications unit. However, in the current structure there is a risk that research communications activities may be diluted. We hope that DFID will continue to ensure that the research communication team is supported in its role
 - *Influencing the development agenda.* External communication of research findings is also important for coordinating and influencing international policies and decisions. DFID's research should be used not only to direct DFID's own work but also to help inform that of partner governments, regional institutions and the international development community.
16. We are pleased to note DFID's increasing focus on developing health research capacity. In the 2004 Science and Technology Select Committee report, the need to build capacity of science and research systems in low-and middle-income countries was identified. While strategic interventions are important and should not be disregarded, it is important not to take a purely vertical approach to research for development.

⁴ <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/r4d/>