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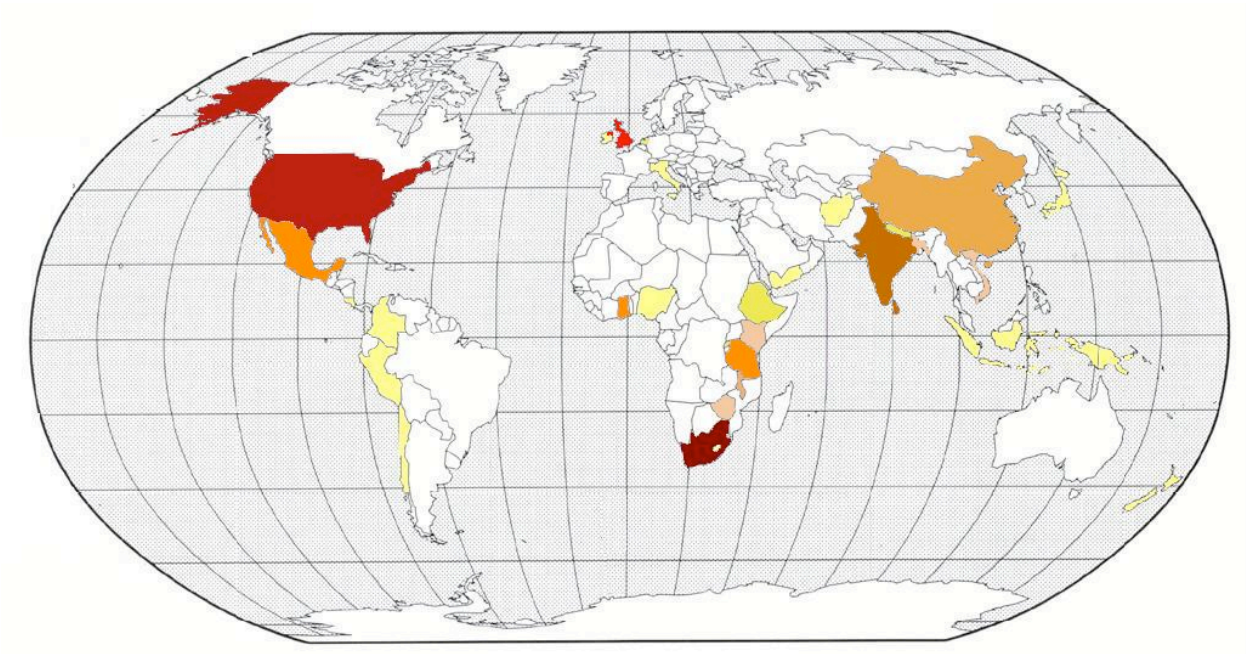
*18 February 2009*

# Review of the ESRC/DFID Joint Research Scheme

## Report to ESRC and DFID



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# Summary

*The ESRC and DFID have jointly funded a programme of research in social science for development since 2005, aiming 'to enhance the quality and impact of social science research addressing the key international development goal of reducing poverty amongst the poorest countries and peoples of the world.' DFID contributed £7m and ESRC £6.5m to the Scheme budget, with ESRC additionally taking on the administrative cost of approximately £0.5m. The Scheme has funded 46 projects via three calls for proposals.*

*This Scheme is in important ways unique. It is open to non-UK participants not only as cooperating partners but also as Principal Investigators and it focuses on raising the quality and impact of social science research in development, unlike the great bulk of development work, which is more applied and operational in character. It has the opportunity to function as the 'fundamental research department' of this larger and more practical effort, while also making a contribution to development. Its mission to do so should be more crisply expressed, emphasising that the Scheme's key role is to produce generic and transferable knowledge, unlike the bulk of more applied work that needs to be very context-specific in order to be effective. It should use a foresight exercise to link its thematic interests to needs, rather than try to retrofit links from knowledge producers to users as it does today. Foresight-derived desiderata should co-exist with freedom for researcher-initiated themes in parts of the Scheme.*

*While the Scheme is useful and is well managed in the research council tradition of bottom-up, researcher-initiated programmes, its links to the wider body of development research whose quality it should improve are not articulated and its thematic relationship with wider needs for increased knowledge are unsystematic.*

*The division of labour in the Scheme between UK and Southern participants tends to put the UK in charge while the Southerners collect data. There are few Southern Principal Investigators. The scheme values but does not prioritise the capacity development in the South that would be a precondition for more active involvement. A handful of non-UK Northern country institutions have taken advantage of the Scheme themselves to take on a PI role – although there are no reciprocal arrangements that would enable UK institutions to participate in these countries' programmes. ESRC and DFID should seek to develop such reciprocal arrangements as a condition for the participation of other Northern institutions.*

*The Scheme's administration functions well. However, the use of UK-centric administrative tools and funding principles not only complicates administration but also impedes Southern participation.*

*The Scheme should be continued at a larger scale than today and its call for proposals should become an annual fixture each Spring. Some of the increased resource should be used to increase participation by PhD students in the South. The Scheme needs a director to handle its more active orchestration and linkage needs, compared with normal research council programmes.*

*The uniqueness of the Scheme's role as a 'fundamental research department' and its current youth both argue for a more substantial evaluation of impacts in about three years' time.*

# Table of Contents

# Review of the ESRC/DFID Joint Research Scheme

## 1. Introduction

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Department for International Development (DFID) commissioned this review of the ESRC/DFID Joint Research Scheme (the Scheme) in late Spring, 2008. It has been carried out during the Summer of 2008 and is intended inform a decision by ESRC and DFID about whether and how to continue the Scheme in the future.

### 1.1 Terms of Reference

Our terms of reference (given in full at the Appendix) were to consider

1. The scope of Scheme
2. Its impact, relevance and dissemination activities
3. The management of the Scheme – Application process and decision-making
4. The management of the Scheme – Post award issuing, monitoring and reporting

### 1.2 Methods

We originally proposed to tackle the evaluation by

- Using a logic model to chart the expected relationships between undertaking the programme and the projects and impacts on poverty, health and other problems in the developing world
- Analysing the composition of the Scheme to understand its scope, the division of labour involved, its geography and so on
- Web-based questionnaire surveys of participants and a sample of unsuccessful applicants to the Scheme
- Interviews with Scheme participants in the UK and internationally – both principal investigators and cooperating partners
- Interviews with officials at DFID and ESRC, members of the Scheme panel and interested observers at other organisations involved in social science research for development
- Reviewing the processes through which the Scheme selected successful projects

While DFID routinely uses a variety of logic model (a logical framework) in order to try to ensure that project planning is done in a way that will generate desirable social impacts, there is no equivalent tradition at ESRC. This, combined with the diversity of the projects funded, rather frustrated our intention to use logic models. We return to the issues this raises about the Scheme's goals in the conclusions.

We obtained the following response rates in the surveys

- We e-mailed 189 successful applicants, of whom 92 (49%) completed the questionnaire. Some 53 responses were from the UK and 39 from other countries

- We e-mailed 343 unsuccessful applicants, of whom 178 (52%) completed our questionnaire

We conducted a total of 29 interviews (10 face to face and 19 telephone interviews)

- 23 project participants (10 UK and 13 overseas) comprising 7 face-to-face and 15 telephone interviews, covering 18 different projects. We managed to talk to five of the nine overseas PIs
- Five of the panel members: chair, vice-chair (2 face-to-face), a user member (phone) and two others who have at different times been panel members and received grants
- The Scheme's International Research Broker (phone)
- Two representative organisations: ODI and ISSC (phone)
- Representatives of DFID and ESRC (face to face)

## 1.3 Structure of the Report

The report broadly follows the issues raised in the Terms of Reference

- Chapter 2 discusses the scope of the Scheme
- Chapter 3 looks at actual and potential impacts
- Chapter 4 considers Scheme management, both pre- and post-award
- Chapter 5 draws conclusions and makes recommendations about the Scheme

## 1.4 Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the support of ESRC and DFID staff in conducting this review, those who kindly filled in our questionnaires and the interview partners listed at the Appendix. As ever, the usual disclaimer applies – judgements and any possible errors contained in the report are the sole responsibility of its authors. Nothing in this report should be taken as necessarily reflecting the positions of either ESRC or DFID.

# 2. The Scheme and its Scope

The DFID-ESRC International Development (Poverty Reduction) Research Scheme was launched in 2005 and aimed, according to the call for proposals, "to enhance the quality and impact of social science research addressing the key international development goal of reducing poverty amongst the poorest countries and peoples of the world." The Scheme takes the place of previous schemes run in-house by DFID. Finally, 46 research proposals were funded in three rounds of calls for proposals with a budget of £13.5million. During its first three calls for proposals the scheme was open to all disciplines and academic subject fields focusing on poverty reduction and development issues although with a restriction that social sciences should represent more than 50% of the research activities.

## 2.1 What the Scheme aims to achieve

The ESRC's overall mission is to build capacity, fund high-quality research and increase public understanding in the social sciences. Its strategic plan[1] lists five priorities

- Knowledge transfer and research engagement
- Seizing new research opportunities
- Addressing key research challenges
- Strengthening the social science research base
- Operating in a global context

The Scheme is consistent with this permissive framework, which sets no priorities at the thematic level.

DFID's research strategy has six foci[2] (though collectively these comprise a rather comprehensive set of themes)

1. Growth
2. Sustainable agriculture
3. Climate change
4. Health
5. Governance in challenging environments
6. Future challenges and opportunities

The sixth priority is a sensible catchall, allowing the Department the flexibility to fund research on new or unexpected topics as and when needed. The Scheme is also generally consistent with these priorities – though it is not limited to them, since the Scheme has no priorities within the overall theme of development.

The Scheme was funded to the tune of £7.5m by DFID and £6.0m by ESRC. From this total, ESRC took a 5% administration fee – a level towards the upper end of the range of international practice for research council administration, and one that is consistent with the complexity of managing a collaborative, international scheme. The scheme

[1] Economic and Social Research Council, ESRC Strategic Plan 2005-2010,

[2] Department for International Development, *Research Strategy 208-2013*, London: DFID (undated)

was open to non-UK participation and this was in principle paid from the DFID contribution, since the ESRC was not entitled to spend its grant in aid outside the UK.

The scheme has no ROAME statement or other form of 'programming document' that represents the joint view of the funders over and above the texts of the Calls for Proposals. DFID has an internal programming document[3] that describes its perspective on the programme but, unusually, DFID decided not to produce a logical framework analysis, as this was not normal ESRC practice. DFID's document says that the purpose of the scheme is "to provide funding for social science researchers to generate new knowledge that contributes to poverty reduction in developing countries and the achievement of the MDGs".

All three calls for proposals say that, " The new scheme aims to enhance the quality and impact of social science research addressing the key international development goal of reducing poverty among the poorest peoples of the world. The new scheme will foster high-quality basic research that enhances understanding, develops thinking and facilitates policy on this most difficult and fundamental issue." The wording is subtle but clear: the programme is not only about reducing poverty; it is about improving the quality of the research done in order to reduce poverty and about achieving policy impact. In particular, the Scheme aims to fund **basic research**, with all that inevitably applies about indirect rather than direct links to poverty reduction.

The first Call points out that DFID has a wide portfolio of thematic research programmes, often run in cooperation with other agencies and generally focused on achieving specific social results, notably the Millennium Development Goals. DFID needs some longer-term, more fundamental counterbalance to this large body of medium-term, applied work. By inference, therefore, it has an interest in having a component in its research portfolio whose bottom-up, quality-focused nature is a **complement** to the thematic work. Here, unlike in other parts of its research portfolio, it has a common interest with ESRC in a research council style of funding.

The interest in new knowledge means that the Scheme takes a different position on building research capacity in the South, which is otherwise a key concern of DFID funding. "DFID and ESRC are not seeking through this scheme to fund capacity building *per se*. However, both sponsors recognise that a lack of adequate intellectual and human capital hinders the prospects of real advances in understanding, and also undermines the prospects for long-term sustainability of research effort, evolving insights and new knowledge. Taking a holistic approach, in cases where the intellectual agenda would be furthered through capacity-related activities, the sponsors will accept some issues of research capacity to be addressed explicitly within research proposals…"

In the context of what amounts to a fundamental research programme, the requirements of the Scheme are nonetheless practical as well as theoretical. Requirements of proposals included

- Critical analysis of the problems or shortcomings in the current state of knowledge
- Intellectual innovation in the identification of problems and formation of research questions to address those issues
- Specificity, clarity and coherence between research questions, research methods and anticipated intellectual outcomes
- Clear and rigorous articulation of appropriate research methods and data analysis regime

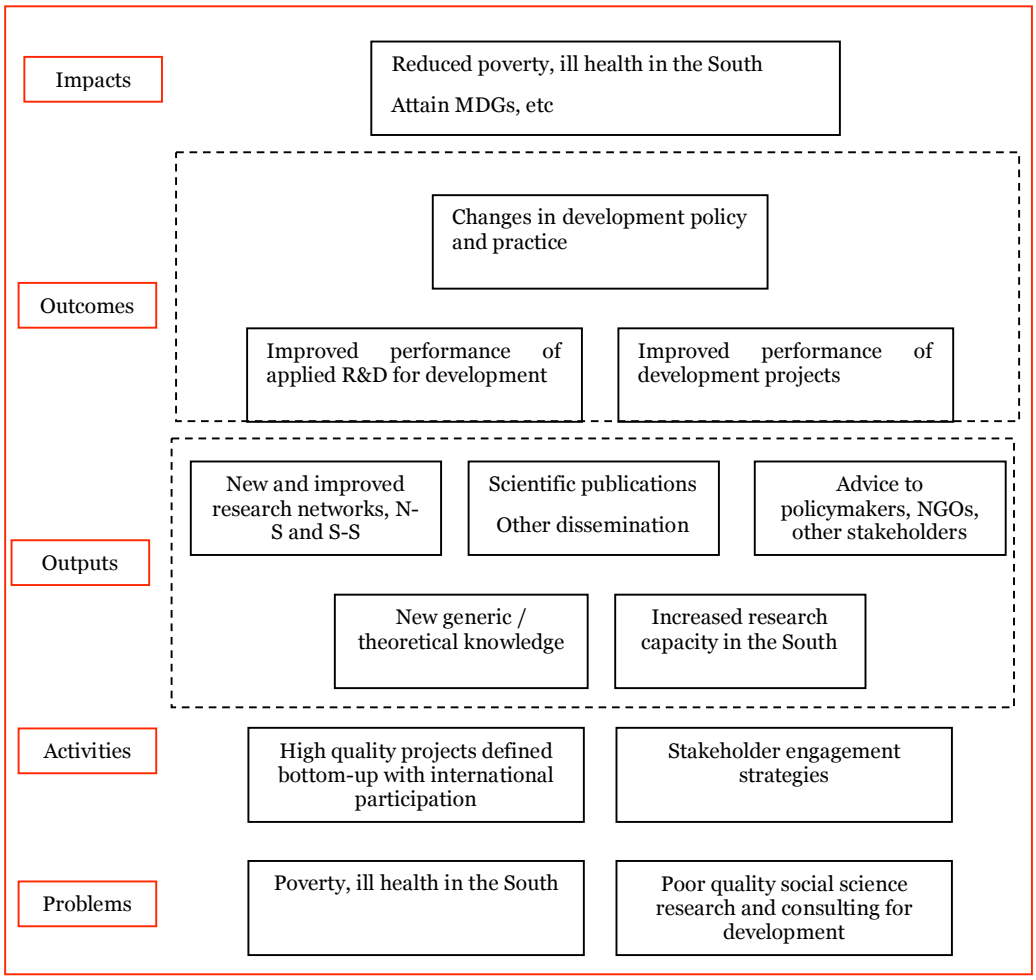
[3] Department for International Development (DFID)/Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) International Development (Poverty Reduction) Research Scheme, *Outline Project Document*, (mimeo), London: DFID (undated)

- How the anticipated intellectual outcomes will provide new understanding, insights, advice or solutions to the problems under consideration
- Clear articulation of how and why those intellectual outcomes have the potential for impact on the poverty reduction agenda
- The engagement strategy to be deployed for academic and non-academic stakeholders to maximise potential for impact

The overriding assessment criterion, however, was scientific quality.

Figure 1 shows the 'programme logic' of the Scheme: that is, an explanation or hypothesis about how the intervention is expected to impact on society. In this case we have deduced it from programme documentation and discussions with ESRC and DFID staff.

Figure 1 Programme logic of the ESRC/DFID Scheme




The programme logic of the Scheme is that funding researcher-initiated basic social science projects concerned with development, where the proposers have taken care to engage stakeholders in their projects, will lead not only to the generation of new knowledge and associated publications but also to direct influence on policymakers and policymaking. This will be all the more effective if the Scheme is prepared to fund non-UK participants as project partners or even as principal investigators. A (more or less incidental, since it is not a purpose of the Scheme) effect is likely to be an increase

of research capacity among Southern partners. Based on these outputs, the programme logic suggests that the practices both of research and policymaking will improve, helping to generate the poverty reductions and health improvements at which development efforts are aimed. We explore in subsequent Chapters the extent to which there is evidence that this logic is being realised through the projects.

The Calls suggest that the Scheme addresses not only development per se but also what is described as a need to improve the quality of social science research associated with development. This emphasis on quality was strongly confirmed in our interviews with panel members. 'Quality' is a complex construct in the sciences, having different meanings in different fields and situations. It may include methodological rigour, novelty, the extent to which knowledge produced is fundamental rather than applied and so on.

Our interviews suggest that the great bulk of research and study activity funded by DFID and other international agencies is highly applied, aiming to tackle specific problems and situations, and may be rather operational in character. It is more likely to involve the use and reuse of established techniques than the generation of new theoretical or instrumental knowledge and many of our university-based interview partners referred to this rather condescendingly as 'consulting', which by the norms of 'basic' science cannot represent 'quality'. The relevant quality standards for such applied work include of course rigour, knowledge of the accumulated stock of research and experience relevant to solving the problem at hand, appropriateness of method and quality of interpretation. A useful contribution in any future scheme would be to disentangle the idea of 'quality' – in particular, to consider the relative importance of methodological rigour on the one hand and the generation of new and potentially fundamental knowledge on the other. If we follow Kuhn[4] then radical changes in knowledge tend to be accompanied by disputes about methods, so that methodological definitions of quality tend to crowd out new knowledge. This dilemma needs to be reflected in Scheme design.

The perceived quality problem nonetheless deserves to be taken seriously. DFID spent about £125m on research in 2007/8. There is significant additional expenditure on policy analysis as well as research within country programmes[5]. Taken together with funding from other research funders, interviewees suggested that the total UK spend on various kinds of development research was of the order of £200m per year. Seen in this light, and as apparently the unique programme funding source for fundamental research in the UK, then £13m over three years amounts to 2% or less of total expenditure and seems very modest. There is no theory or evidence base that tells us what the 'right' balance is between fundamental and more applied research. Many research organisations (famously, for example, Bell Labs) use '10%' as a working rule of thumb. Thus, general practice in R&D would also suggest that the Scheme's scale is small.

## 2.2 Participation

Figure 2 shows that the Scheme has successfully attracted participations from a large number of countries, building or supporting an extensive network of research relationships across 34 countries, including the UK. In total, we identified 207 participants, of whom 92 were principal investigators or co-applicants.

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4 T S Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd edn. University of Chicago Press, 1970

5 In 2002/3, DFID's central research spending was £76.5m, but it spent an additional £11.1m on 'policy analysis' and a further £33.3m in country and regional programmes, suggesting there is considerably more work than the central research budget that could be influenced by the Scheme. See Martin Surr et al, *Research for Policy Reduction*, DFID Research Policy Paper, November 2002

UK participants dominate the Scheme: 80% of the PIs are from the UK as are 69% of the Co-applicants. The collaborating partners are almost all from outside the UK. Of the 46 PIs, 42 are from high-income countries, 2 from international organisations and 2 from middle-income countries. The data we have about how the grant money is divided among beneficiaries are imperfect and may under-represent the flow of money out of the UK. However, on the data that we have, two thirds of the money granted stays in the UK. Some 80% of the money granted goes to high-income countries or international organisations. According to panel members, the country distribution of applications was similar to that of grants, so this pattern results form demand pressure rather than systematic quality differences. summarises the way partners from different groups of countries play different roles in the Scheme. The UK participants clearly dominate both overall and in terms of the key roles as Principal Investigators (PIs) and co-applicants. Most developing country partners have the junior role of collaborating partners.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of project sizes (measured as Full Economic Costs – actual grants will be smaller than this). There is an obvious cluster of projects just below the limit on the size of Small Projects. Seven projects under £200k collectively account for 7% of the Scheme. The other 23 Small Grants (£200-260k) are collectively worth 48% while the 12 Large Grants account for 45% of the funding.

Figure 2 Participations by country

| Countries | Principal Investigators | Co-Applicants | Collaborating Partners | Total Partners | Total £ Granted | £ % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total** | 46 | 77 | 84 | 207 | £ 14,629,763 | 0.00% |
| **UK** | 37 | 53 | 2 | 92 | £ 9,732,025 | 66.52% |
| **South Africa** | 1 | 5 | 10 | 16 | £ 1,078,518 | 7.37% |
| **Int'l Org** | 2 | 4 | 7 | 13 | £ 942,747 | 6.44% |
| **Mexico** | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 | £ 698,939 | 4.78% |
| **USA** | 3 | 4 | 4 | 11 | £ 647,032 | 4.42% |
| **New Zealand** | 1 | | | 1 | £ 248,306 | 1.70% |
| **Afghanistan** | | | 1 | 1 | £ 205,470 | 1.40% |
| **Italy** | 1 | | | 1 | £ 173,244 | 1.18% |
| **Ghana** | | 1 | 4 | 5 | £ 158,884 | 1.09% |
| **Bangladesh** | | 1 | 2 | 3 | £ 131,720 | 0.90% |
| **Tanzania** | | | 5 | 5 | £ 130,062 | 0.89% |
| **China** | | 4 | 5 | 9 | £ 107,086 | 0.73% |
| **Kenya** | | | 3 | 3 | £ 83,370 | 0.57% |
| **India** | | 1 | 9 | 10 | £ 82,624 | 0.56% |
| **South Pacific** | | | 1 | 1 | £ 68,560 | 0.47% |
| **Ethiopia** | | | 2 | 2 | £ 38,876 | 0.27% |
| **Nepal** | | | 2 | 2 | £ 38,876 | 0.27% |
| **Yemen** | | | 1 | 1 | £ 38,876 | 0.27% |
| **Vietnam** | | | 3 | 3 | £ 24,549 | 0.17% |
| **Chile** | | | 1 | 1 | | |
| **Colombia** | | | 1 | 1 | | |
| **Costa Rica** | | | 1 | 1 | | |
| **Indonesia** | | | 1 | 1 | | |
| **Ireland** | | 1 | | 1 | | |
| **Japan** | | 1 | | 1 | | |
| **Lesotho** | | | 1 | 1 | | |
| **Malawi** | | | 4 | 4 | | |
| **Namibia** | | | 2 | 2 | | |
| **Nigeria** | | | 1 | 1 | | |
| **Papua New Guinea** | | | 1 | 1 | | |
| **Peru** | | | 1 | 1 | | |
| **Rwanda** | | | 2 | 2 | | |
| **Netherlands** | | | 2 | 2 | | |
| **Zimbabwe** | | | 3 | 3 | | |

Source: ESRC; Technopolis analysis

Figure 3 Groups of partners' roles

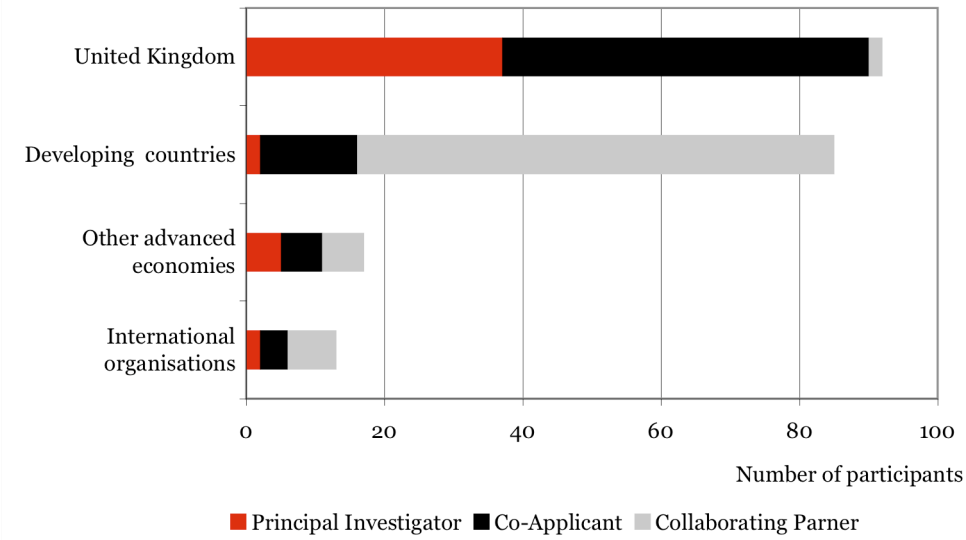



Figure 4 Size distribution of scheme grants (FEC)

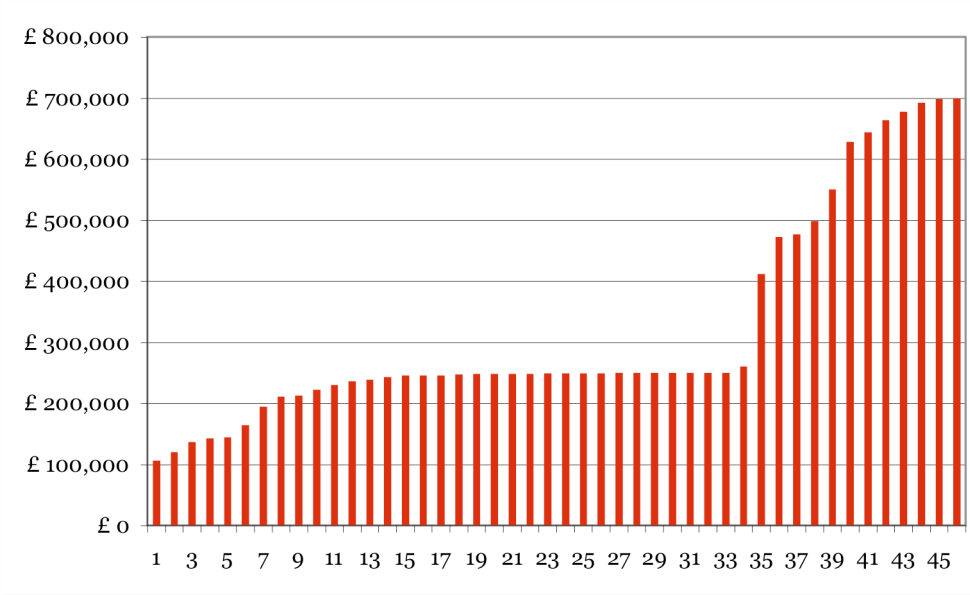
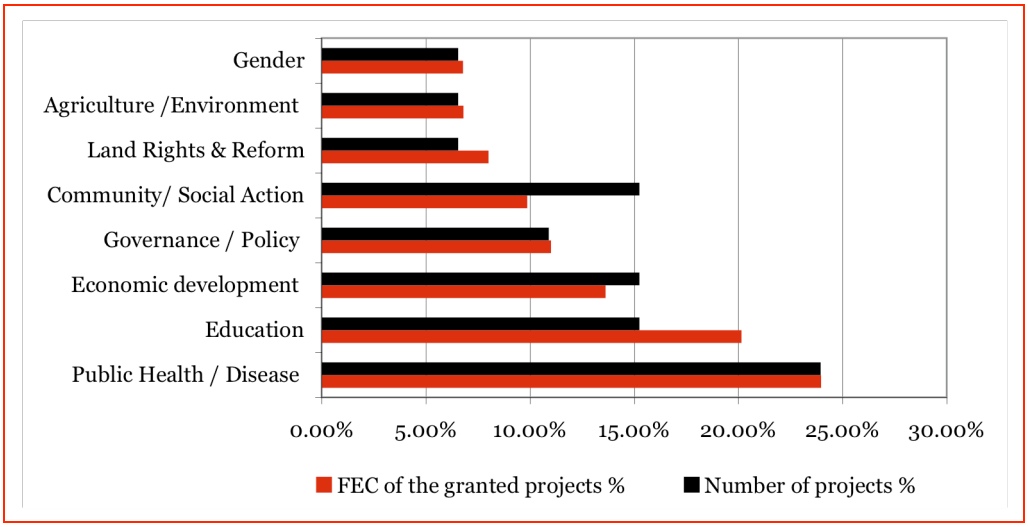



Figure 5 shows the way the projects and the money awarded divide among major themes within the Scheme. The scheme therefore covered a wide range of themes relevant to the social science of development and to DFID's overall research priorities.

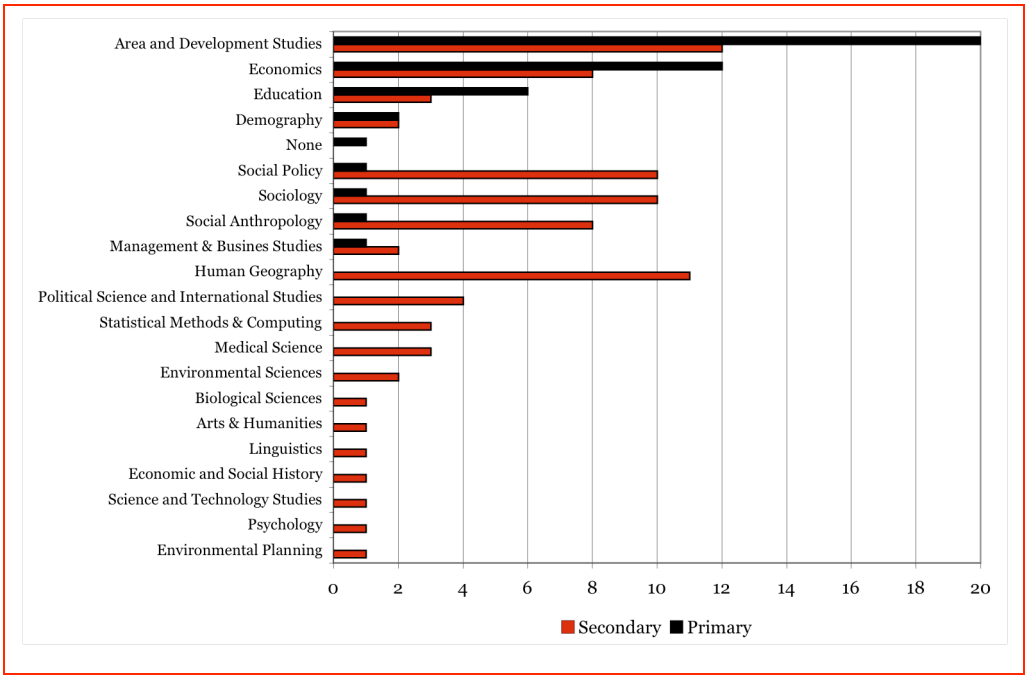
Figure 5 Proportions of Scheme Grants by Theme: Number and FEC




Source: ESRC; Technopolis analysis

An analysis of the disciplinary composition of the projects was beyond the scope of this review. ESRC has kindly provided its own analysis of the disciplinary breakdown. This shows (Figure 6) that Area and Development Studies was the major primary discipline (20 out of 46 projects), followed by Economics (12) and Education (6), so the Scheme was rather focused on disciplines traditional in development. However there was a wide range of secondary disciplines involved (20, in all), of which the commonest were Area and Development Studies (12 projects), Human Geography (11), Sociology and Social Policy (10 each) and Economics (8). The overall impression is therefore of traditional development disciplines reaching out to other disciplines in order to extend their methods, perhaps because the development focus of the Scheme led people on other disciplines to ignore it. (It should be noted, however, that development is already an area of considerable interdisciplinarity.)

Figure 6 Number of Projects Involving Various Disciplines



**Source:** ESRC; Technopolis analysis

Some observers remarked on the absence of political science from the Scheme; our interviewees did not note other omissions. The ESRC data confirm that no project has Political Science and International Studies as its primary discipline, though in four cases this is a secondary discipline.

Analysis of the links between primary and secondary disciplines shows that projects with the primary discipline of Area and Development Studies had the most links to other disciplines (21 projects had 42 links with other disciplines in total). These links tended to concentrate in the disciplines shown in Figure 7. The 12 Economics projects had a total of 20 links to other disciplines, but these were very fragmented, with the main cluster of links being to Area and Development Studies. This tends to confirm our interviewees' impression that economics behaves very differently from the other disciplines involved: it is more autarchic and – aside from the well-established overlap with development studies via development economics – does not have such a strong tradition of interdisciplinarity.

Figure 7 Links Between Primary and Secondary Disciplines

| **Primary Disciplines** | **Secondary Disciplines** | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Area and Development Studies | Econ–omics | Educat–ion | Socio–logy | Social Policy | Social Anthro pology | Political Science and Interna tional Studies | Human Geogra phy | Medical Science |
| Area and Development Studies | | 6 | 2 | 8 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 8 | 2 |
| Economics | 7 | | | | | | | 2 | |
| Education | 2 | | | 2 | 3 | | | | |
| Demography | | 2 | | | 2 | | | | |

**Note**: Only cases with 2 or more links are shown

The ESRC's analysis of the use of quantitative and non-quantitative methods shows that quantitative methods were used in 36 of 46 cases

- 13 projects used exclusively quantitative methods
- 23 used mixed quantitative and qualitative methods
- 10 used only qualitative methods

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Most of our interviewees with experience of the proposal assessment process remarked that the high level of oversubscription in all three calls drove the assessment process to require extreme methodological rigour and that this favoured mono- rather than multi-disciplinary approaches. However, the ESRC discipline data classify only 2 of the 46 projects as mono-disciplinary. These two perspectives can be consistent only if the primary discipline is rather dominant in the projects.

Looking at the kinds of problems tackled in the research, we were surprised to see an absence of research on shifts in geopolitics and its drivers, such as he increasing competition for energy resources that has brought China into Africa as a significant development partner. Equally, while market forces are in the short term bringing

down the recent spike in food prices apparently induced by US biofuels policy, the supply of food-grade carbohydrates is not infinitely elastic and the conflict between rich people driving cars and poor people eating will reassert itself, raising a large number of questions about problems and opportunities for low-income countries. Such forward-looking questions were absent in the programme.

Figure 8 shows that both successful and unsuccessful applicants to the scheme had quite a broad range of research funding sources. The Scheme participants are a little more likely than the non-participants to get money from national development ministries or agencies and from international organisations, suggesting that they are a little more specialised in development issues and more experienced in dealing with the priorities of funders in the development world. But the difference between the two groups is not so big as to be striking. However, given their funding sources, successful and unsuccessful applicants alike are likely to have experience of the development research field.

Figure 8 Respondents' Normal Research Funding Sources

| | Unsuccessful applicants | | Participants | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | % | Count | % | Count |
| **University or research institute's internal funds** | 45% | 73 | 43% | 37 |
| **National research funders, eg research council** | 64% | 103 | 67% | 58 |
| **National agency or ministry responsible for development aid** | 42% | 68 | 52% | 45 |
| **International organisations such as UNIDO, UNCTAD, World Bank, European Commission** | 46% | 74 | 62% | 53 |
| **Charitable foundations, eg Ford, Rockefeller** | 48% | 78 | 50% | 43 |
| **Other** | 17% | 27 | 13% | 11 |

We asked participants to describe their own importance in their projects across a number of dimensions of project performance using a five-point scale (5=high). Figure 9 shows the mean responses by type of participant. As one would expect, the PIs are relatively more important in proposal writing, project management, literature review and taking responsibility for report writing. Overseas partners have bigger roles than the UK partners in data collection whereas the roles are more equal in data analysis. Given the small number of PIs in developing countries, this self-assessment suggests a division of labour where overseas (developing country) participants largely acting as the junior partners. The positive aspect of this unequal relationship is, of course, capacity building, and the inequality suggests a need to build more senior capacity in the South. Much of the capacity building in the Scheme was at the level of PhD students, which is important but which is several steps away from building the kind of strong research groups that can lead high quality basic and policy-orientated research. This would require a less fragmented and bottom-up programme than the ESRC/DFID Scheme, or one focused on funding research centres.

Figure 9 Self-Assessed Importance of Project Roles

| | Writing proposal | Project manage-ment | Literature review | Fieldwork/data collection | Data analysis | Team meetings | Writing parts of report | Writing overall report |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PI overseas (6) | 4.6 | 4.4 | 4.4 | 2.8 | 4.6 | 4.4 | 4.4 | 4.4 |
| CP overseas (25) | 2.4 | 2.2 | 2.8 | 4.3 | 3.8 | 3.8 | 3.9 | 3.3 |
| COI overseas (8) | 3.1 | 3.5 | 3.6 | 4.0 | 4.3 | 4.6 | 4.1 | 3.6 |
| PI UK (27) | 4.8 | 4.7 | 4.1 | 3.0 | 4.0 | 4.7 | 4.5 | 4.8 |
| COI UK (27) | 4.0 | 3.0 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 3.8 | 4.3 | 4.0 | 3.3 |

PI = Principal Investigator CP = Cooperating Partner COI = Co-Investigator

We asked participants to rate their **potential** roles on the same scales. There were surprisingly few differences between the two ratings, suggesting that most people felt the division of labour was about right. Co-applicants and Collaborating Partners felt they could be a bit more involved in project management and report writing. Principal Investigators wanted to do more data collection. But the differences in scores are so

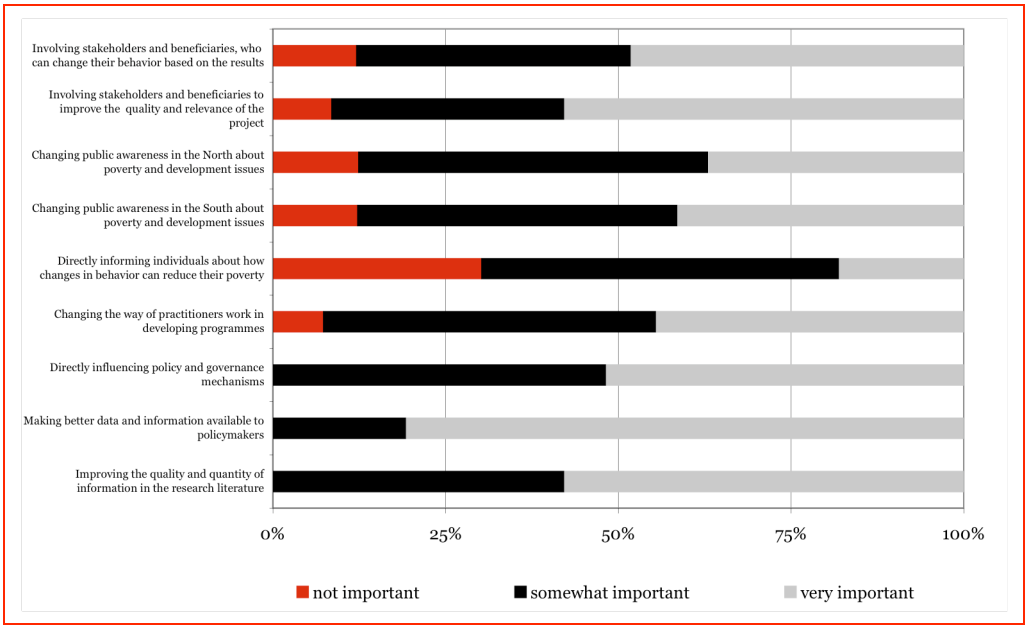
small as to suggest little discomfort with the present situation. They back up the impression from our interviews that the division of labour within projects tends to be rational and to be based on complementary capacities.

# 3. Impacts of the Scheme

In a swift review, based largely upon interacting with Scheme participants and stakeholders, the evidence we can obtain about impacts is indirect and relies heavily upon both the views of those involved and upon what we believe we know more broadly about dissemination and impacts in this kind of intervention. To the extent that participants report impacts or can be clear and credible about routes to achieving impact it is reasonable to expect the Scheme to have effects in society but it would take a larger, broader (and later) evaluation to provide more solid empirical evidence for this.

In our survey, we asked about the ways in which participants expected their work to have impacts, using questions derived from the programme logic discussed earlier. The most important mechanism is to make information available to policymakers – though interviewees stressed the difficulty in practice of communicating general findings to policymakers. The responses make it clear that participants understand the importance of stakeholder engagement (including policymakers) in order to improve the likelihood of projects having impacts in their immediate contexts, though this does not solve the problem of generalisation. Their emphasis on availability of information and quality support the programme logic of trying to improve the quality of development research.

Figure 10 Participants' views on the importance of impact channels




While capacity building is only a subordinate aim of the Scheme, most projects appear to include at least some capacity building element. In discussion with researchers, this seemed partly to be a reflex – an automatic part of what you do in a development research project – but many researchers also saw it as a necessity, without which it would be impossible to collect data and maintain the professional relationships that enable Northern researchers' continuing presence in the research field. A constraint upon capacity building was the requirement for PhD students associated with the

scheme to be registered in the UK. The high level of UK university fees meant that in a number of cases applicants' originally intended numbers of non-UK registered students had to be reduced in order to pay the comparatively high UK fees. This reduces the quantitative capacity building potential of the scheme at PhD level.

We invited questionnaire respondents to describe in their own words how their project would affect poverty. A small minority said their project was academic in nature and would have an effect through the scientific literature. More described a two- or three-pronged approach, where stakeholders and beneficiaries of the project would be directly empowered through the new knowledge produced; policymakers would learn in more general terms from the project and there would be a still broader influence through the scientific literature. Many participants stressed the use of workshops, both with participants and stakeholders and wherever possible with national policymakers and NGOs. Interviews suggested that the ability to link to national policymakers was seen as important but that it depended very much on personal relationships and could therefore not always be relied upon. Few projects appeared to have any connection to DFID national offices, which would have been a natural way for them to link with development planning. One respondent argued that a better connection to DFID would increase his prospects of policy influence and that he intended to take action to build such an alliance as his research matured.

ODI has recently reviewed dissemination practices among DFID-funded Research Programme Consortia (RPCs) and found that the major lesson centres have absorbed into their practice about effective dissemination is to involve stakeholders from the start of projects[6]. The weakness of the RPCs was a failure to think through 'impact pathways' in a systematic manner. In terms of 'programme logic' this means that he parts of the logic diagram that would deal with the connection between the intervention and take-up of ideas from the project are poorly articulated. The ESRC/DFID Scheme has similar characteristics, with wide variations in how explicitly the links have been drawn between knowledge production and its take-up by those who can use it to change the world.

ODI's long-running RAPID project suggests the following lessons from experience of trying to get research results into practice

- Policy processes are fantastically complicated. Simply presenting research results to policymakers and expecting them to put these into practice is very unlikely to work
- Research-based evidence usually plays a very minor role in policymaking
- There are nonetheless positive examples where this has been achieved
- To influence policy, researchers need holistic understanding of the context: external influences; political; the type of evidence available; and the links affecting communication from research to policy level
- The need for additional, non-research skills ranging from communications to engineering
- Intent – researchers really need to want to do it[7]

Most of our interviewees were surprised by the question: Could either ESRC or DFID usefully support or add resources to any parts of your dissemination plan? Part of the shock was no doubt the idea that a funder would come back after an award and offer more money. The general response was to suggest more workshops, with the aim of

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[6] Ingie Hovland, *Review of Communications in DFID-funded Research Programme Consortia*, London: ODI, March 2008 (mimeo)

[7] John Young,, "Strategies to Enhance Research Impact", (handout), London: ODI (undated)

more fully involving stakeholders in the project and understanding its conclusions. Some suggested additional money for publications, both scientific and in local languages. One of the 58 responses mentioned the research broker's (see below) case study work as a potential source of learning for how better to disseminate. A handful of respondents said that building links to the relevant national DFID office would be useful. Since people in these offices were not involved in the commissioning process they were unaware of (and sometime not interested in) the research. (This seems to be a persistent characteristic of DFID's centrally commissioned work. Our evaluation of DFID's EngKaR programme found that the lack of engagement of the national offices in research commissioning and the projects' resulting lack of relevance to their work was a barrier to take-up of results to the extent that national office staff were sometimes even negative in their attitudes to EngKaR projects[8].)

Late in the Scheme, ESRC and DFID decided to appoint an International Research Broker. This involves about 100 days of effort across 2008 and 2009 in order[9] "to increase the impact of our research on policy and practice". The main activities so far have been a workshop on dissemination in May 2008 and the launch of a project to write cases studies of selected projects. Those of our interviewees who had attended the workshop said they had enjoyed it, appreciated the interaction with other grant-holders and increased their awareness and understanding of dissemination. Other interviewees said they had not heard of the broker or her function – which is reasonable at this early stage but underlines the need for internal communication about this function. The case studies respond to the broker's perception that the links between research and policy influence are "under-theorised"[10] and are intended to contribute to a definition of good practice. It is not clear from the broker's brief to what extent such work is intended to inform the general public and to what extent it should feed back to current and future practice. The function could benefit from having clearer (and probably fewer) goals as well as exploration of its expected impact paths. To the extent that research/policy links are indeed under-theorised, the area might benefit from some research at a more significant scale.

Our terms of reference ask a question about the effectiveness of the Scheme's web presence. In terms of communicating about the Calls, the web presence appears to have been adequate, especially as it feeds into the UK university grants' offices' search processes. However, the presence is inadequate as a way to communicate to participants and others about the contents, participants and results of the Scheme. Interviewees said they were not aware of who else was involved in the Scheme so there was no real opportunity to exchange experiences with other participants or build up a 'programme community'. The lack of other cross-Scheme activities exacerbated this problem.

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[8] Erik Arnold, Julius Court, James Stroyan and John Young, *Evaluation of DFID's Engineering Knowledge and Research (EngKaR) Programme*, Brighton: Technopolis, 2005; available at http://www.dfid.gov.uk/research/eval-engkar.pdf

[9] According to the advertisement for the post

[10] Katie Wright, *Report of the ERSC-DFID Research Influence/Impact Spring Workshop, 29-30 May 2008,* Medical Research Council, London

# 4. Scheme management

## 4.1 Proposal Assessment

Overall, the process of project acquisition followed a normal ESRC pattern. Applicants were invited to suggest potential peer reviewers. Staff checked proposals for completeness and consistency with the terms of the Call for proposals. ESRC personnel told us they rejected a smaller proportion of proposals for administrative reasons than is their normal practice and that where it was possible to rectify obvious mistakes without in effect allowing the proposer substantively to modify the proposal, this was done. (For example, if CVs were missing, the applicant was asked to send them.)

Proposals were sent out to peer review by ESRC staff, based on their knowledge of the relevant fields and ESRC's experience. (Unlike some other research councils, ESRC does not maintain a college of peers.) Whether the peers suggested by the proposers were used appears to have been a matter for the judgement of ESRC staff. ESRC followed its normal principle of seeking three peer reviews for applications up to £500k and four for larger projects. About half the peers used were from outside the UK. Peers' comments were sent to applicants. Many of our interviewees said that they liked this and appreciated the opportunity they were given to answer peers' criticisms. The staff aggregated the peers' grades and provided the commissioning panel with a ranked list. Two academic members and one user member of the panel were allocated the task of reading each proposal and the peers' comments and one of the academics then presented a view to the panel meeting. Feedback to unsuccessful applicants was generated during the meeting by an ESRC staff member and was therefore necessarily brief – briefer than a number of our interviewees felt was appropriate.

ESRC staff regard the timetable for assessment as challenging, with a small number of people having to handle an unusually high level of demand while remaining within the Council's normal three months or so to move from receiving proposals to making decisions. Some individual grants have taken longer than normal to process because of the new elements in dealing with non-UK university administrations that led to a need for learning on both sides. Few of our respondents felt the monitoring and reporting requirements involved were onerous – the exceptions tending to be people outside the UK who had not dealt with this administration before.

The peer reviewers were asked to assess proposals using four major criteria

- Academic and intellectual quality (with a strong caveat that nothing less than world class work was to be considered fundable)
- Relevance and potential impact of research outcomes
- Suitability of investigators and their host institutions
- Project management and resource allocation

Interviews with members of the commissioning panels indicate that the panels focused initially on quality and that their de facto definition of quality was methodological. The panels rejected any application that could be criticised on this dimension. Impact criteria were applied thereafter.

According to panellists, the large number of proposals and the stress on methodology made the Scheme conservative in its choice of projects. In so far as good methods were regarded as quantitative, it proved difficult to fund projects in places where statistics are poor, such as DR Congo. To this extent, the importance of South African institutions in the Scheme may partly be testimony to the existence of good statistical systems established under apartheid. The quality focus was also said by some to work against inter-disciplinary proposals. Some panel members also argued that the quality

focus meant applicants from the South would be disadvantaged. In fact, as Figure 11 shows, their success rate was a little higher than that of UK applicants – though the numbers of projects and applications involved are small. Applicants from the South were not discouraged from applying as PIs but tended to be were unaware (or unconvinced) that they could do so. In our interviews, a particularly high level of disbelief seems to have prevailed in India and Pakistan – where it was assumed that, whatever the rules might say, PI positions were essentially reserved for the Brits.

Figure 11 Successful and Unsuccessful Applications by Location of PI

| | UK | | Other North | | South | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % |
| **Successful** | 37 | 80% | 5 | 11% | 4 | 9% | 46 | 100% |
| **Unsuccessful** | 385 | 89% | 24 | 6% | 24 | 6% | 433 | 100% |
| **Success rate** | | 10% | | 21% | | 17% | | 11% |

The eligibility and funding criteria of the Scheme discriminated against institutions such as IDS and ODI, which are outside the university system, because they assume the presence of a binary funding system. IDS, in fact, routinely applies for and wins ESRC funding, finding ways to cross-subsidise these projects. ODI said it was unable to do that and therefore had not applied to the Scheme.

In total, 40 people were involved as members of the commissioning panels (Figure 12). The chair, deputy chair and four other people were members of all three panels. Five were present for two meetings and 29 only for one. Despite this apparent lack of continuity, those involved or in contact with the panel were generally impressed with the way it worked. Other interviewees were frequently a bit puzzled because they knew so few of the panellists; this may chiefly be testimony to the fragmentation of the social science for development community.

Figure 12 Commissioning panel membership in the three calls

| Name | Organisation | Call 1 | Call 2 | Call 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Catherine Porter | DFID | | | |
| Dr Brita Fernanadez Schmidt | WomanKind Worldwide | | | |
| Dr Camilla Toolmin | IIED | | | |
| Dr Christopher Adam | University of Oxford | | | |
| Dr Ebrima Sall | CODESRIA, Senegal | | | |
| Dr Gina Porter | University of Durham | | | |
| Dr Helen O'Connell | One World Action | | | |
| Dr Kate Raworth | Oxfam | | | |
| Dr Keith Bezanson | Former Director IDS | | | |
| Dr Leon Tikly | University of Bristol | | | |
| Dr Neil Price | University of Swansea | | | |
| Dr Sujata Patel | University of Pune | | | |
| Dr Thandika Mkandawire | UN Research Institute for Social Development | | | |
| Dr Thomas Molony | University of Edinburgh | | | |
| Dr Uma Lele | University of Maryland | | | |
| Iain Jones | DFID | | | |
| Jaime Atienza Azcona | Fundacion Carolina | | | |
| Pauline Martin | Oxfam International | | | |
| Professor Alan Smith | University of Ulster | | | |
| Professor Carole Rakodi | University of Birmingham | | | |
| Professor Elizabeth Croll | SOAS | | | |
| Professor James Fairhead | University of Sussex, ESRC Strategic Research Board | | | |
| Professor Jan Gunning | Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam | | | |
| Professor John Harriss | Simon Fraser University | | | |
| Professor Jonathan Rigg | Durham Univesity | | | |
| Professor Kaivan Munshi | Brown University | | | |
| Professor Kate Brown | University of East Anglia | | | |
| Professor Lawrence Haddad | IDS | | | |
| Professor Marcel Fafchamps | Oxford University | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Professor Maureen Mackintosh | The Open University | | | |
| Professor Niraja Jayal | JNU Delhi | | | |
| Professor Orazio Attanasio | University College London | | | |
| Professor Paul Gertler | Berkeley and World Bank | | | |
| Professor Paul Mosley | University of Sheffield | | | |
| Professor Paulina Adebusoye | Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research | | | |
| Professor Philip Burnham | University College London | | | |
| Professor Richard Batley | University of Birmingham | | | |
| Professor Robin Burgess | The London School of Economics | | | |
| Professor Shiva Kumar | Harvard Kennedy School/Indian School of Business in Hyderabad/UNICEF | | | |
| Professor Timothy Besley | The London School of Economics | | | |

Note: Shaded boxes denote membership

The panels were all rather well balanced in terms of gender and of a mix of UK and non-UK representation (Figure 13).

Figure 13 Panel composition

| Panel members | Female | Male | UK | Non-UK |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1st Call** | 8 | 11 | 12 | 7 |
| **2nd Call** | 6 | 10 | 6 | 10 |
| **3rd Call** | 9 | 14 | 17 | 6 |

Figure 14 shows the degree to which different disciplines were represented in successive panels. The large role of the economists is striking, making up almost a third of the memberships, although the ESRC and DFID point out that their intellectual interests go well beyond their own disciplines, as was also the case with the other disciplines involved. This did not result in economics having a high share of the projects – only 15% or so are concerned with economic development and related topics. There were apparently disputes within the panel about the lack of reference in economics-based applications to literatures other than economics, while other successful projects were more catholic in their use of various disciplines. (This is consistent with the analysis of interdisciplinary links shown in Figure 7.) It was also suggested that the economics faction may have pushed the panel overly to focus on quantitative methods and therefore to perceive proposals as being inherently of poor quality in areas where existing data sets are scanty and methods have to be more qualitative. This is not wholly borne out by the ESRC's analysis of project methods: 10 of the 46 projects relied on qualitative methods.

Figure 14 Panel member disciplines by call

| Disciplines | Call 1 | Call 2 | Call 3 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Anthropology** | 3 | 2 | 3 | 8 |
| **Education** | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| **Economics** | 6 | 6 | 6 | 18 |
| **Social policy** | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| **Political Science / Sociology** | 3 | 1 | 2 | 6 |
| **Environment / Natural Resources** | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| **Other subject fields including IT and Geography** | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| **User member** | 4 | 3 | 4 | 11 |
| **Total** | 19 | 16 | 23 | 58 |

The subsequent history of unsuccessful applications reported in our survey (Figure 15) tends to support the quality of the panel's decisions[11]. Some 65% of unsuccessful

[11] A *caveat* is necessary here. Applicants to many R&D funding schemes have alternative sources to which they can apply. If the ESRC/DFID scheme is unique in its focus on more

project ideas were either abandoned or modified but then continued to prove unfundable. Correspondingly, 35% were funded from other sources. Of those, one third were funded interlay on a smaller scale; another third were funded elsewhere after varying degrees of modification; and the final third was were accepted more or less unchanged by another funder. Another way to interpret these data is to say that the projects were mostly **additional**: based on the fate of the rejected applications, funded projects are unlikely to have been funded without the existence of the Scheme and the degree of free riding is small.

Figure 15 What happened to rejected proposals

| Subsequent fate of unsuccessful proposals | % | No |
|---|---|---|
| We abandoned the idea | 37% | 53 |
| We took essentially the same project elsewhere but still have not succeeded in getting it funded | 17% | 24 |
| We made major revisions to the proposal but still have not succeeded in getting it funded | 6% | 9 |
| We designed a smaller project but still have not succeeded in getting it funded | 6% | 8 |
| **Not implemented** | **65%** | **94** |
| We took essentially the same project elsewhere and received funding | 12% | 18 |
| We funded the project or a variation on the project internally | 11% | 16 |
| We designed a smaller project, which has since received funding | 10% | 15 |
| We made major revisions to the proposal and subsequently received funding elsewhere | 1% | 2 |
| **Implemented** | **35%** | **51** |
| **Total** | **100%** | **145** |

Panel members told us that the large number of proposals forced the panel to work very quickly. The first step was to consider the methodology of each proposal. If this was in any way deficient, the proposal was rejected without further consideration. There was said to be a preference for quantitative methods and this meant that it was difficult to get approval for projects in places where the statistical basis is poor – an approach that would discriminate against the poorest countries, whose national statistical services are weak. The focus on method also meant that projects needed to be fully defined: iterative approaches that developed methods on the fly could not succeed. Inter-disciplinary projects were disadvantaged by the need for intra-disciplinary depth. The overall view was that application pressure and the need to move quickly led the scheme to be risk-averse and conservative. While it was likely to lead to solid work of good quality, there was no scope for high-risk projects and little prospect of breakthrough research being funded. In effect, this means the process pushed the scheme towards a (conservative) methodological definition of quality, as opposed to a 'new knowledge' or fundamental research focus. This suggests that a clearer articulation of programme logic – and an explicit consideration of the characteristics of 'quality' that are desired – would be useful in any future scheme.

## 4.2 Other aspects of project acquisition and management

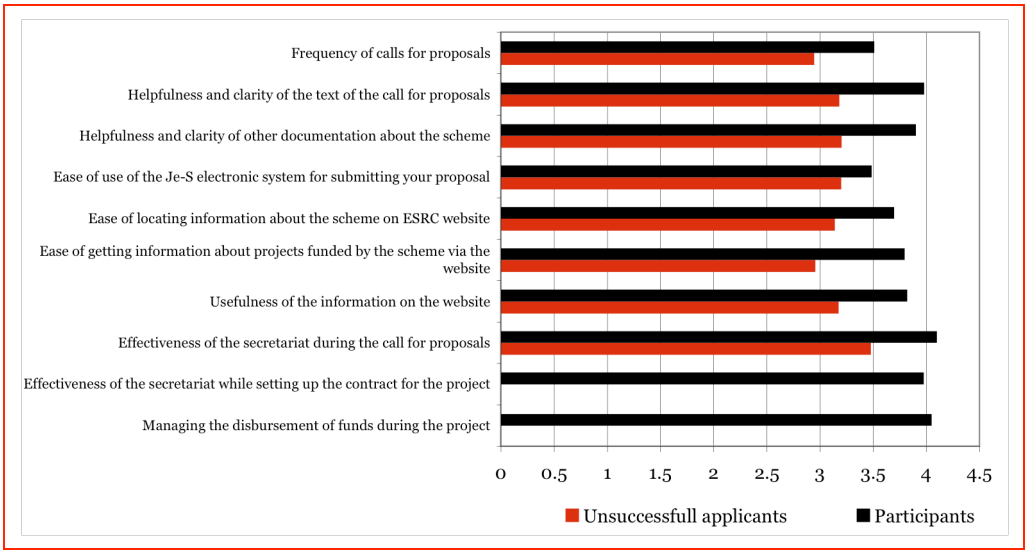
Figure 16 shows a number of comparisons made by successful and unsuccessful applicants between the Scheme and their other normal sources of funding. These are made on five-point scales ('much poorer' to 'much better'). Strictly, these are Lickert scales and should be analysed using frequency distributions, but provided the distributions of responses are not bimodal (we have checked – they are not) then the arithmetic average of the responses gives a reasonably good and much more compact

fundamental research than is sponsored by other development research funders, then such alternatives may not exist or may be less available

representation of the data. Generally, the mean of all the responses is about '3', meaning that respondents viewed these administrative aspects of the Scheme as rather similar to administrative aspects of other funding sources. Successful applicants were more consistently positive about these aspects than unsuccessful ones.

Successful applicants felt the frequency of the Scheme's calls for proposals was a little better than that of their normal funding sources; unsuccessful applicants felt it was a little worse. Interviews did not elicit strong views on this subject and in view of the risk that a continuously open call would further increase the level of over-subscription there seems to be no strong reason to move from a pattern of annual calls. A couple of UK interviewees argued that Calls would be better timed if issued in the Spring, so that associated PhD students could be put in place by the following October, on the normal academic cycle.

Figure 16 Respondents' Views on the Scheme Compared with Other Funding Sources




Successful and unsuccessful survey respondents disagreed quite strongly on the adequacy of the call specifications and their supporting materials. There was no evident geographic bias to those who criticised the call materials. The interviews yielded few specific complaints about the calls, which our partners saw as clear, though there were criticisms of the lack of wider information about the Scheme and its participants. One complaint that appeared a number of times was that the selection criteria used by the commissioning panel differed from those published in the Calls. In our experience of surveying unsuccessful applicants for R&D grant funding, there tends to be a degree of stereotypical and self-justifying complaints about lack of clarity in terms of reference, nepotism or incompetence among peer reviewers and so on. In the absence of any corroborating evidence we have tended to ignore such complaints. However, this question of a deviation between the terms of reference and the criteria actually applied by the panel is consistent with panellists' accounts of the use of method as a filter before other criteria were considered. Most of the applicants will be used to seeking funding from development sources and the Scheme's requirements for dissemination plans, identification of stakeholders and so on encourage them to treat the scheme as belonging to the development category.

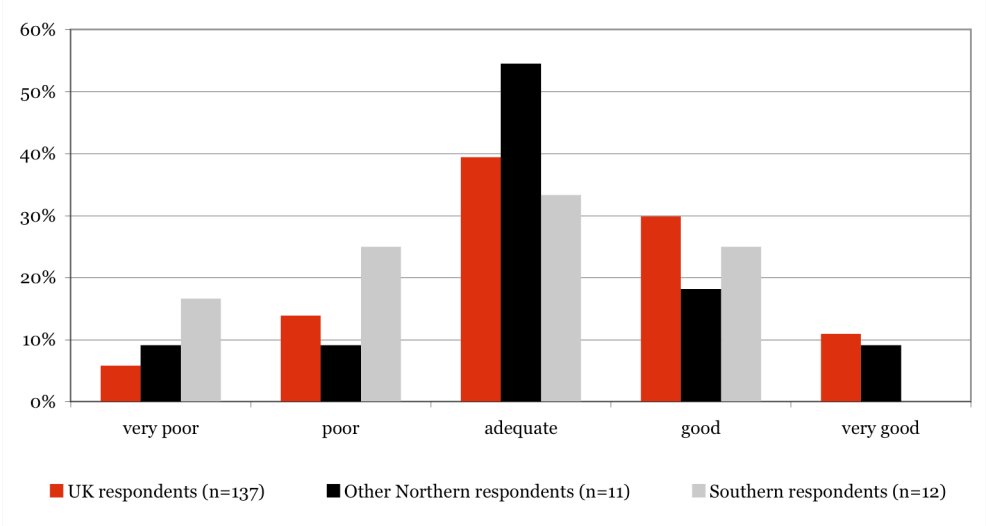
The Joint Electronic Submission (JeS) system proved problematic for non-habitual users. The UK university faculty members we interviewed could al rely on a high level of support from university administration grants offices, which often identified the opportunity to bid and normally handled all the interaction via the JeS. In contrast, researchers in the South did not appear to have grant offices from which they could

obtain support and struggled to learn how to use it. They were also bewildered by the idea that their universities had to be accredited in the system and consistently underestimated the amount of time and trouble this would involve.

One of our collaborating partner interviewees at a research institute in the South said it took 3-4 months to get his organisation registered on the JeS and that the administration or the helpline staff through the system effectively prevented him from registering as a PI. His conclusion was that – whatever the publicity materials say – there is a more or less effective ban on Southern PIs. An alternative interpretation may involve the status of his organisation as a non-university research institute. The UK division of labour within the research community is different from that in many other countries, so the ESRC assumption that having the right to grant doctorates is a valid test of research standing is not necessarily valid abroad. (Nor is it clear that it is valid in the UK – it may simply reflect the prejudices of the university community and its desire to protect its monopoly of certain research funding channels.)

More broadly, several of our non-UK interviewees reported that the JeS was slow and difficult to use, being essentially constructed upon UK assumptions and systems. Both UK and overseas respondents found the JeS helpline unhelpful on occasion: some felt the JeS helpline functioned more as a gatekeeper to keep people and institutions out of the system than as a helper. The number of successful non-UK applicants to the Scheme is so small that we cannot use their responses to help us understand the appropriateness of the JeS. However, while we are aware of efforts being made both at the level of the system itself and of the advice offered to applicants, the evidence from the survey of unsuccessful applicants and from interviews with participants is that using the JeS is not an appropriate way to garner applications for the Scheme. Our interviews suggested that the great majority of non-UK participants who became involved in the application process were caught in its administrative trammels and that the JeS gave them particular problems. An alternative should be found that does not presuppose applicants are already well versed in RCUK's project acquisition practices.

Figure 17 Unsuccessful Applicants' Ratings of JeS Ease of Use

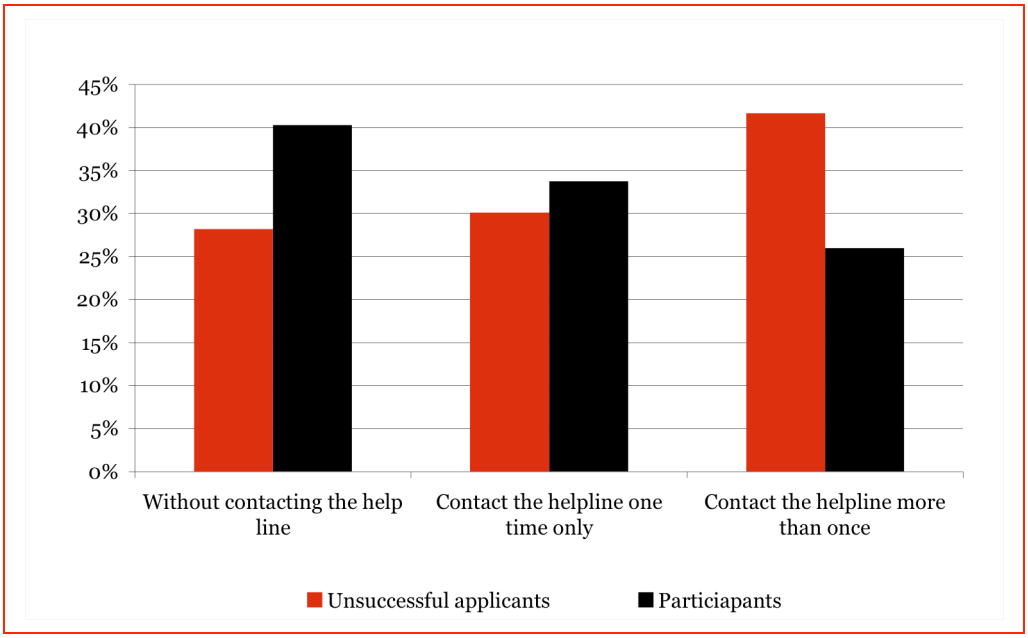



While survey respondents were lukewarm about the adequacy of web-based information about the Scheme, we were able to have a broader discussion with interviewees, who felt that the research brokerage event in May 2008 was the first sign of ESRC/DFID trying to build a programme community. The lack of Scheme-wide communications or information on the Web about the Scheme meant members were largely ignorant of who else was involved and lacked opportunities for inter-project

learning and cooperation. Comments on the scheme's web presence – and, indeed, on the ESRC web site more generally – were negative. "The ESRC website is really dreadful and unhelpful." "The ESRC website generally is poor in its organisation and the availability of information. I could not see anywhere how to find out what projects had been funded in the first round."

Figure 18 shows that unsuccessful applicants were more likely to ask for help during the applications procedure than successful ones, implying that success goes to the more experienced or better supported (in terms of grants administration). While there was no meaningful difference between UK and non-UK participants in their use of the support facilities, we believe this was a result of the use of UK partner experience in tackling the application process, especially the Joint Electronic Submission (JeS) system.

Figure 18 Use of Helpline and Secretariat Support During Application




While some of the responses were quite colourful in their disapproval of the web site and the JeS, the helpfulness and effectiveness of the secretariat were rated highly by the survey respondents and our interviewees alike. Unsuccessful applicants rated the Scheme more positively on this than on any other dimension. Post-award, the secretariat was seen as flexible and helpful and as working with the successful performance of projects rather than the imposition of bureaucratic rules as its highest priority.

Some 35% (70) of unsuccessful applicants responding to our survey had attended one of the Scheme's introductory workshops, which aimed to explain the programme to potential applicants. While only 27% (23) of successful applicants had attended workshops, we would hesitate to draw any conclusions from such a small difference. Sixty-two percent of workshop participants had found them useful or very useful, with unsuccessful applicants finding them somewhat more useful than successful ones. The London workshop attracted 48 participants from among our respondents; the next biggest was Manchester with 7 – a number so small as to raise a question about the cost-effectiveness of this form of communication outside the capital. The problem of communicating to a fragmented applicant community is nonetheless a real one and may require innovative solutions – such, perhaps, as posting a presentation on Youtube.

Respondents rated the Scheme as having a poorer probability of success than other funding sources – with, naturally, those unsuccessful in their applications being more negative than the successful applicants. But this response tends to confirm that the interview evidence that the low success rate of the Scheme is well known.

The middling response to the question on the openness of the scheme to people in all countries is a surprise: based on the rules, this question should have elicited a score of '5' from both responding groups. This confirms the scepticism expressed at interview and the apparently widespread belief that – whatever the rules may say – the Scheme is rigged in favour of UK applicants.

We asked respondents the traditional market research question: Would you use the product again in the future? Figure 19 shows that (unsurprisingly) the responses from successful applicants were overwhelmingly positive, as were the majority of those whose proposals had been turned down. The fact that one third of this second group said they did not know whether they would apply to the scheme again suggests that it remains quite attractive to them – only 10% offered an outright "No" in response to the question.

Figure 19 Would respondents apply to the scheme in future?

| | Successful Applicants | | Unsuccessful Applicants | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | % | Number | % |
| **Yes** | 72 | 91% | 92 | 58% |
| **No** | 1 | 1% | 16 | 10% |
| **Do not know** | 6 | 8% | 52 | 33% |
| **Total** | 79 | 100% | 160 | 100% |

The scheme has a well-developed analysis of risks and measures in place to tackle them. Most risks, such as researcher under-performance or discontent with peer reviewer judgements, are generic to running research programmes. Difficulties for non-UK applicants in using the JeS and in working within the UK norm of grants being 80% of Full Economic Cost (as defined in the UK academic system) were anticipated in the 2007 version of the risk assessment and management strategy (by which time these were no longer risks but realities). Foreign exchange risk is also identified and has become an issue in the past year, when the pound has fallen significantly in value against some other currencies.

# 5. Findings, conclusions and recommendations

As we indicated at the outset, we were asked to tackle a very long list of evaluation questions in this review. In this Chapter, we begin by providing short answers to each – recognising that with the resources available the depth of some of the answers cannot be as profound as we might have liked. (The full list of evaluation questions is in Appendix A.) Next we draw some wider conclusions and finally we make recommendations about the future of the Scheme.

## 5.1 Findings

The **scope** of the scheme within development research is more or less unlimited. If the Scheme is to focus on more fundamental research within the field of development this appears to us to be proper. However, adding a mechanism that would draw applicants' attention to areas of development research where more fundamental understanding is known to be needed should both increase the usefulness of the scheme in improving the quality ad impact of other development research and reduce application pressure.

The **range** of the scheme is correspondingly wide. It lacks focus, both thematically and geographically. It omits the key area of political science. Crucially, it is backward-looking, taking no account of the emerging major issues for development raised by globalisation, major geopolitical changes such as the emergence of China and India as industrial superpowers and major resource consumers, climate change, wider energy supply issues and the competition between the use of agriculture to produce food and fuel. This is not to say that the Scheme deals with unimportant matters – the projects are both interesting and policy-relevant; but some rather crucial things are missing and the bottom-up nature of the programme is probably one key reason **why** they are missing.

The **geography** of the scheme is UK-centric, which is hardly a surprise – but is probably more so than its designers intended. We will argue below that the programme should remain UK-centric to a certain extent.

The **division of labour** among developed and developing country participants confirms the need for capacity building in the South. By and large, the project design and management happens in the North and the data collection in the South. This is partly natural, given the need to develop more Southern capacity and the fact that UK applicants are better informed about the Scheme and how to apply to it – so they naturally take the initiative. The division of labour may change over time but in order to achieve this the Scheme may need to increase the priority given to capacity building.

A **potential for impact on poverty reduction** is present in all the projects. The Scheme's desire for more fundamental or generic knowledge production than is normally the case in development research may increase the difficulty of achieving such impacts but may also – over the long term – increase the potential size of any such impacts. However, there is so little evidence about impacts at this stage that most of what wee say here has to be speculation. If the intervention logic of the scheme is first to improve research quality and second, based on that improvement, to obtain poverty impacts then it must expect to see these impacts appearing in that order and not to demand both simultaneously.

**Capacity building** is present in very many of the projects, though the degree of formality involved varies. Raising the priority of capacity building in the Scheme assessment criteria would provide a basis for more effective capacity building, especially by attaching more PhD students to the projects, with a greater proportion of these students being registered in developing countries (but perhaps co-supervised from the UK). Growing the capacity for more universities in the South to act as PIs requires more focused funding – either via centres of excellence or via a more top-down approach – which is not compatible with this scheme.

The rubric for applications to the Scheme in effect demands that projects **engage stakeholders**. This is widely recognised as good practice in connecting policy research to social change. It was refreshing in our interviews to note how reflexive this behaviour was. The Scheme community knows it has to engage stakeholders because that is the right thing to do. It does not appear to be driven to do so by the rules of the Scheme.

That said, few project participants could offer especially innovative ideas for **using more resources to increase projects' policy influence'**. To this extent, the Scheme managers have rightly identified a need to go beyond the projects in order to increase impact. However, we will argue that a retrofitted case study and dissemination function is not what is needed. Rather, the Scheme and its projects need to be better directed at areas of recognised need for new and more fundamental knowledge.

It follows that the **research broker** function is of limited value. The programme should be more directed and should be based on better intelligence about knowledge needs.

The **Internet presence** of the scheme is inadequate in two senses. First, it does not bind the programme community together, so there is a loss of synergy within the Scheme. Second, it does not provide a meaningful source of information or dissemination of results. In this second respect, it is not clear that the Scheme should have its own web site and dissemination channels. The important thing is to inject knowledge fro the scheme into the channels that already inform research methods and policy rather than further to increase the fragmentation of knowledge resources in cyberspace. We recognise that the internet 'face' of the Scheme is under improvement and expect that this will bring benefits for applicants.

The Scheme **manages risk** in a largely sensible way, using the established knowledge and routines of the ESRC. It has thought about exchange rate risks and is willing to tolerate some losses as a result of these. It applies sensible quality controls and has processes in place to ensure that it gives money to organisations that actually exist and that are legitimate. There is a limit to the tightness of financial control that can be exercised at a distance, especially in developing countries, and in practice the Scheme appears to have found a way to keep an eye on the big issues and avoid wasting too much effort on little or uncontrollable things. The level of documentation of risk management appears to us to be excessive.

The **frequency of calls** appears not to raise any significant problems. In the light of the heavy demand pressure, we see no reason to increase the frequency. *A priori*, we would argue that an annual call is sufficient to retain 'share of mind' among potential applicants and that longer gaps between calls may reduce not only demand pressure but also the quality of proposals by making communication with the research community too intermittent.

By and large the Calls and specifications of the Scheme are **clear**. However, the discussion of the underlying intervention logic is inadequate. In particular, if the object of the exercise is to improve research quality and **as a result** to have policy impact then this should be made clearer as it implies (1) greater quality focus in applications – perhaps including attention for innovative ways to overcome the poor availability of background statistics in less developed countries; and (2) a need for explicit tactics to connect the improvement in research quality to increased policy impact.

The **JeS** is, by all accounts, a very useful tool for collecting and processing submissions from UK universities. Neither the JeS nor its supporting staff appears to be suited to dealing with non-UK universities. More broadly, the Scheme contains assumptions about the division of labour between universities and research institutes that apply in the UK but not in many other countries and preconceptions about university wages, cost- and overhead-accounting systems that are not always valid outside the UK. There is a strong case for tackling non-UK applicants directly rather than trying to use the JeS with a small stream of applications and applicants for which it has not been designed.

The **ESRC website** was not well regarded as a source of Scheme information by the research community. The site appears to have improved in recent months but this part of the ESRC's web presence would benefit from more consideration of its purposes and integration into a more active style of Scheme management. The DFID web site essentially serves as a signpost to ESRC.

Despite the issues associated with the JeS and the web sites, the **Scheme secretariat** was widely praised for its professionalism and efficiency.

Attendees appreciated the **Scheme workshops**, though the efficiency of the regional workshops as a way to reach potential applicants is questionable. We were not able to collect enough feedback on the South African workshop to develop a view on its effects.

The commissioning panel's use of quality as a filter, rather than as one among a number of assessment criteria, suggest that the **assessment criteria** were at the

least used in a way, which the community found surprising. Panellists also suggested that this compromised the adventurousness and innovativeness of the scheme itself. If the intervention logic is that quality should come first and impacts should increase as a result is valid, then the panel's tactics were reasonable (especially in the light of the high demand pressure). But this logic needs yet clearer explanation – especially for the benefit of a community that is used to dealing with DFID-like relevance criteria.

Economists were over-represented in the **composition of the commissioning panels**. Given that (1) economics is intellectually isolated from much of the rest of social science and (2) that it uses methods that are often qualitatively different from those of other parts of social science, this over-representation is said to have influenced project choice. Future panels should have fewer economists[12].

The **feedback** from the panel to successful and unsuccessful applicants alike was widely regarded as unsatisfactory. It was too brief and it was sometimes seen as inconsistent between Calls. We have not been able to form a clear view on this point. Such answers are normal in surveys about R&D funding administration. Given the way in which the feedback was generated – in real time during the panel meetings –we tend to take the issue of brevity seriously. But we also have to recognise the human tendency to regard any negative feedback as unsatisfactory. ESRC will have to form its own judgement of when enough is enough.

The process of **issuing awards** is done largely according to the normal ESRC timetable. The international nature of the programme means some aspects of administration will take longer than usual. ESRC could devote a specialist to dealing with international funding, but since this is outside its normal remit it would have to ask questions about the cost effectiveness of doing so.

**Monitoring and reporting** gave little trouble to practised ESRC grant recipients and the level of complaint from others was low, suggesting there are no major issues here.

**Internet information** on the Scheme has been modest and not always timely but improving. Provided information is communicated (as it is) to UK university grants offices, most potential UK applicants will be reached. Directed mailings may be more useful for reaching researchers in developing countries who would not normally benefit from a service that monitors ESRC funding opportunities.

There is a **risk management process** in place.

The Scheme is broadly **consistent with the strategies of both sponsors**.

## 5.2 Conclusions

While many of the evaluation questions in our brief invite quibbles and criticisms, our overall conclusions on the Scheme are rather positive.

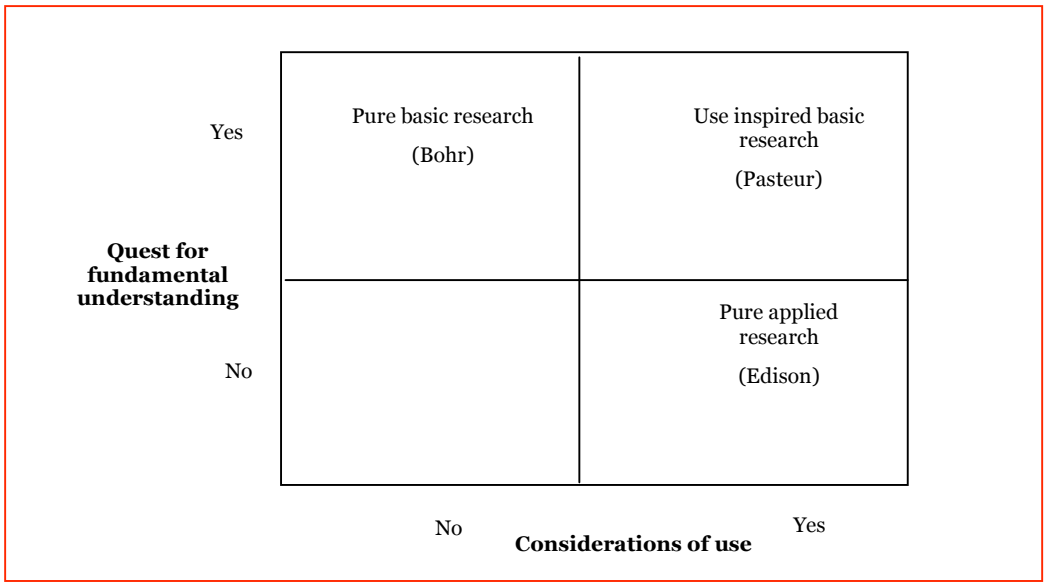
### *5.2.1 What is the Scheme for?*

It is internationally unique (or close to being so) in being a bottom-up, quality-driven research-funding scheme in the area of development. Most funding in this area is for applied research and more operational work (things that, were they in technical subjects, might better be described as 'experimental development' or 'development' in the OECD terminology). To the extent that the Scheme funds more fundamental work in development, there are opportunities for it to act as the 'R&D department' for this wider effort. But because it is purely a bottom-up programme, the points of contact between themes in the Scheme and themes in the larger world of more applied

[12] Lest the reader suspect the authors of bias in this matter, we should in fairness point out that we are both economists

research are in principle stochastic. If the Scheme is to improve the quality of development research over and above the projects it itself funds, there need to be some systematic links between the themes in the scheme and the themes – such as those in DFID's priority areas – in which larger amounts of applied research money are being invested. In effect, the Scheme needs to be positioned in 'Pasteur's Quadrant (Figure 20) – with especial focus on comparatively fundamental research that addresses themes of relevance to the applied development effort.

Figure 20 Sources of Research Inspiration




Source: Donald Stokes, *Pasteur's Quadrant: Basic Science and Technological Innovation*, Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 1997

Some of our interviewees said they were using the Scheme to explore issues arising from their more applied work but in a more fundamental way, and that the Scheme was a unique way to fund this kind of activity. In these cases, there will tend to be a relationship between the longer- and shorter-term research agendas. In other cases, the connection to wider thematic issues is weaker.

There should be opportunities to increase the impact of the Scheme on research and policy if we can build what Nathan Rosenberg called (in the context of innovation) "focusing devices"[13] – things that in effect signal opportunities to develop and link opportunities to make knowledge and create change.

How would it be possible to develop such focusing devices that signal potentially interesting research themes to the social science for development community without at the same time making the Scheme so directed that we lock out the unexpected? The obvious mechanism would be a foresight exercise spanning developing country and UK practitioners, culminating in a conference that would additionally serve to bring the Scheme community and others together. The output should be a list of key themes and research issues for inclusion in subsequent Calls as desiderata (they could even be allocated a defined proportion of the budget), while still leaving the Scheme open to other suggestions. Making a better connection between the Scheme agenda and the knowledge needs of the development research community would reduce the need to broker such links after the event and enable the resources currently devoted to such

[13] Nathan Rosenberg, *Perspectives on Technology*, Cambridge University Press, 1976

activity to be put to more productive use, for example in ESRC and DFID's wider work on promoting public understanding of research and its importance in development.

A corollary of viewing the scheme as the more 'fundamental research department' of the wider development research and development effort is that it really should concentrate on the more fundamental questions: in the sense of generating knowledge that is transferable and that therefore transcends – or can systematically be related to – specific contexts. At present, the Scheme contains a mixture of interesting questions but whose generality varies. Some are deeply context-dependent; others (notably the comparative studies) help get past the contextual dependence. If the Scheme is to play an 'fundamental research department' role, then generality of research questions and transferability of answers should feature more clearly in its priorities. Its size also seems to be too modest to fulfil this role, so there is scope to increase the budget.

### *5.2.2 Who should be involved?*

The Scheme is open to people from all countries, following the principle that aid should be 'untied'. However, the application of this principle in the context of the Scheme leads to unexpected and potentially undesirable consequences.

- It brings a long-term risk of eroding UK capacity in fundamental development research. This matters because that capacity is needed if the UK is to continue to be a useful contributor to international development research and aid
- There is also an international relations and geopolitical dimension to participating in the international development effort – as is conspicuously being demonstrated by China in Africa at present. For defensive reasons, as well as the positive need to demonstrate that the UK is an actor for good among poor countries, UK resources need clearly to be labelled as such
- It has started to generate a flow of research money from the UK to rich countries such as the USA, none of which have a reciprocally open scheme and it is less than obvious why the UK taxpayer should fund rich US universities or pay for them to establish international networks that displace UK-orientated networks

Even if it is not a priority of the Scheme, the need to develop capacity in poor countries is not contentious. Taken together, these arguments imply that the Scheme rules should require UK membership in all consortia; strongly recommend Southern participation (whether as PI or as another kind of partner); but forbid other Northern country institutions from acting as PIs unless and until reciprocal schemes are in place. We are aware that this would be counter to legislation upon which some of DFID's activities are based. However, we regard this as a category mistake: research in an aid context is not the same as food or other goods, and the legislation needs amendment in the light of this fact – which was probably not considered in framing the law.

It is noteworthy that the EU Framework Programme and certain North European funders are increasingly interested in funding the kind of North-South collaborations addressed by this scheme. There is probably scope for increased joint action, whether by funders working directly with each other or through using an international funding instrument such as an ERA-NET.

### *5.2.3 Project roles and capacity*

While the division of labour within projects often looks somewhat unequal this appears to a large extent to reflect capacity levels. It would be pointless to insist that low-capacity institutions in the South should lead projects – they would simply be rejected in the applications process. This argues for a stronger capacity-building component in the programme. Focusing resources on increased PhD training in the South would enable this without leading to a need to compromise quality.

#### *5.2.4 Whom is the Scheme trying to inform?*

The Scheme puts a great deal of effort into building policy links and, as far as we can tell without ourselves being able to cross check with the policymaking community, it does a reasonably good job of this. In addition to offering direct policy benefits, this has the important unction of 'keeping the work real'. The Scheme should not lower its sights in this respect.

However, if the intervention logic involves improving the quality of development research more generally, then the scheme needs to develop channels to communicate with the international research community and with the 'consultants' whom a number of our interviewees vilify. Clearly this must involve a degree of scientific publication but also some more practical measures to communicate improvements in methods to those who need to use them. Otherwise the claim in the calls for proposals that the Scheme "aims to enhance the quality … of social science research addressing the key international development goal of reducing poverty" is mere chatter.

#### *5.2.5 Administration or direction for the Scheme?*

The Scheme today is administered rather than directed, and the evidence is that the administration is done well. However, our analysis implies a need for greater activism in Scheme management. Someone needs to organise the foresight process, tackle the communications issues, bring the community together, ensure the Internet presence is more timely and effective, extract the Scheme from the inappropriate use of the JeS and associated Anglo-centric assumptions about the nature and roles of research-performing institutions and to champion a scheme that is as unusual as it is special. These needs imply a need for a programme director rather than only an administration. This will cost more money but give better value.

#### *5.2.6 Acquiring projects*

The Scheme currently communicates a mixture of 'mainstream' ESRC and DFID messages, giving it the appearance of goal overload. Projects have in effect to satisfy the (somewhat conflicting) requirements of ESRC for quality and DFID or relevance. The commissioning panels clearly prioritised quality in the way they selected projects, while still bringing DFID-like relevance criteria to bear. This way of doing things should be more clearly communicated to the research community as part of a wider effort to clarify the position of the programme as a producer of generic and transferable knowledge, as distinct from other more applied development research schemes.

### 5.3 Recommendations

In our view, this is a fundamentally good Scheme that deserves further to be developed. We therefore recommend that

1. The Scheme should be continued at a larger scale. Any specific suggestion is necessarily arbitrary, but we would see an increase of at least 50% in the annual budget as appropriate. An increase in the DFID contribution would be justified as bringing the Scheme's 'fundamental research department' role up towards a more normal scale, relative to other research expenditures on development. There is no logic that dictates that the two contributing organisations' monetary inputs should be equal. The Scheme should be made as permanent a feature of the funding landscape as possible, with a regular annual call for proposals each Spring
2. The sponsors should review and further clarify the central purpose of the scheme to produce 'quality' research. It should decide and explain the extent to which this means 'new, fundamental knowledge' contra 'rigorous use of established methods' and revise the assessment process in line with this decision. The logic of the Scheme acting as a 'fundamental research department' for the overall development research activity suggests the former role should receive greater emphasis

3. Some of the increase in resources should be used to attach additional PhD students registered at Southern universities to the Scheme in order to build longer-term capacity in the South without compromising project quality
4. ESRC has demonstrated its competence as Scheme administrator and should continue in this role. However, this role should be expanded to include a programme director, whose role will include improving communication within and about the programme, tackling the administrative complexities of funding non-UK organisations and ensuring that the Scheme includes tools that transfer the improved methodologies developed within the development research community. One aspect of this role should be to replace the research brokerage approach, which is inherently flawed
5. ESRC and DFID should seek cooperation with other Northern agencies and ministries with an interest in similar schemes. Initial approaches might be best received in North European countries with strong traditions in development and social science such as Germany, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries
6. The immediate future period should be used to run a foresight exercise that will inform, but not to 100% determine, the thematic priorities of the scheme
7. Scheme documentation should be more clearly available on the Internet and more distinctly describe the quality-enhancing role of the Scheme
8. The Scheme should be open only to consortia that contain at least one UK partner. Greater effort should be devoted to communicating the fact that PIs may be from the South. The Scheme should not fund PIs from other Northern countries, except in cases where a reciprocal arrangement is in place
9. The de facto restriction of the scheme in the UK to universities (ie places that award doctorates and have the means to work with grants that cover 80% of Full Economic Cost) effectively excludes some quite important development researchers and undermines the Scheme's claim to fund on the basis of quality. The universities do not have (and never have had) a monopoly of knowledge production. We recognise that this issue is bigger than the Scheme. Logic nonetheless requires that we recommend the extension of eligibility to all UK research-performing institutions on the basis of Full Economic Cost and that the Scheme should pay 100% of these in cases where other subsidies do not cover the 20% not normally paid by the Scheme
10. By about 2011, it should be possible to see the first such impacts and an evaluation should the be commissioned that is resourced (in both money and calendar time) so as to be able to collect and analyse evidence on impacts as well as to explore the effects of focusing the Scheme more clearly on a 'fundamental research department ' role

# Appendix A

## A.1. Terms of Reference

**1 Scope of Scheme**

1.1 ***Scope of the Scheme*** - the scheme currently operates in responsive mode with a relevance to broadly-defined poverty reduction the only prescription. However, the sponsors are considering whether the scheme should be more targeted in the future. What are the arguments and supporting evidence for either position, and what are the options for better targeting of calls (i.e., discipline-based? topic-based? Policy-based? User defined?).

1.2 ***Range of scheme*** - from an analysis of the applications and awards received and made thus far, is there a balance across the different subjects and disciplines, and are there concentrations or gaps in specific development topics? Does the range of awards reflect the discipline or topic balance of applications? If not, which disciplines or topics are favoured and which appear less successful? Is the overall success rate viable in the longer term, and if not, to what extent is this a demand or supply management issue?

1.3 ***Geographical spread of the scheme*** – what has been the balance between UK and non-UK participation in the scheme, both as lead investigators and as co-investigators, and what is the country or region distribution? Are there any surprising distributions either in terms of over-representation or under-representation?

1.4 Specific involvement of developing country institutions and researchers - This question moves beyond the distribution issue to focus on the actual nature of the involvement of developing country researchers and their institutions. What roles have they taken (eg lead roles?, co-investigator?, genuine partners? intellectual lead? implementing partners? project management role? How might their role and involvement be enhanced? (See below also re: process issues). How does this scheme compare with other schemes?

**2 Impact, Relevance and Dissemination activities:**

2.2 Potential for impact on poverty reduction - drawing on applicants' statements, peer comments and review of progress reports to date, what can be deduced about the potential impact of a) individual grants, and b) clusters of grants relating to specific subjects? How does the potential for impact vary between large and small grants?

2.3 Potential for capacity building – capacity building is a subordinate aim of the scheme; to what extent do the research projects contribute to capacity development (whether human or technical)?

2.4 Engagement with key stakeholders – to what extent is there evidence of engagement and links with key stakeholders?

2.5 Are there forthcoming dissemination plans or events that warrant specific attention or that could form the basis for more concerted support from either sponsoring agency?

2.6 Working in conjunction with the newly appointed International Research Broker, are there opportunities for either funding agency (unilaterally or bilaterally) to support further dissemination or exploitation activities?

2.7 Is there clear and accessible information about what has been funded by the two sponsors, especially on their respective websites and related other information portals?

2.8 Risk management – how does the scheme cope with the funding, management and delivery of high risk projects?

2.9 Does the scheme offer value-for-money?

## 3 Management of Scheme – Application Process and Decision-making

3.1 Frequency of calls – How frequent should calls for applications be made? Should there be an open-dated call with a stated decision-making timetable?

3.2 Clarity and helpfulness of the call specification and supporting material – are the specifications clear and helpful? How could they be improved?

3.3 Access to, and use of, the Research Councils' Joint Electronic Submission system – are applicants able to access and submit their applications without too much recourse to the Je-S Helpdesk or the Scheme Secretariat?

3.4 Access to, and use of, ESRC website as a source of material for potential applicants – how visible is scheme information on the ESRC website and how easy is it to locate and download key information?

3.5 Support of the Secretariat – have the Scheme Secretariat provided an effective and efficient service during the call and in any award negotiation after decision-making? Where there have been any concerns, how can the service be improved?

3.6 Usefulness of scheme workshops – did the applicants find the scheme workshops useful and helpful, and if not, how could they be improved? In particular, what evidence is there that the South African Workshop helped with applications in the second and subsequent calls?

3.7 Assessment criteria – have we got the right assessment criteria for peer reviewers (Panel and external peers)? If not, how can they be improved? Should there be explicit weighting of criteria? Is there already implicit weighting exercised through panel judgements?

3.8 Decision-making process – is the composition of the Commissioning Panel reasonable and adequate for the role it must perform, and if not, why and how could it be improved? (This question should address geographical membership, discipline/subject balance, gender balance, mono-, multi- and interdisciplinary perspectives)

3.9 Quality and nature of feedback – Do applicants receive clear and informative feedback on why their applications were not funded by the scheme? If not, what would people suggest to improve the system (taking into account the scale of applications and the pressures on peer reviewers)?

## 4 Management of Scheme – Post award issuing, monitoring and reporting

4.1 Issuing of awards – are grants notified, negotiated and issued in an effective and timely fashion? How could the process be improved?

4.2 Monitoring and Reporting requirements – what monitoring and reporting requirements are in place for award-holders? How could the process be improved without imposing unnecessary bureaucratic burdens? How is the disbursement of funds to award-holders managed and monitored?

4.3 Availability of award information on the internet – is information about the scheme, and awards within it, readily available on the internet?

4.4 Management scheme risk – is there a risk management regime? Is this appropriate to manage the potential risks posed by the scheme to both funders? How does the scheme address ethical considerations? Is this effective and if not, how could it be improved?

4.5 Strategic value of the scheme – to what extent is the scheme addressing the strategies of both sponsors?

## A.2. List of Interview Partners

| Name | HEI / Organisation | Role |
|---|---|---|
| **Professor Timothy Besley** | LSE | Chair of the panel |
| **Professor James Fairhead** | Sussex University | Vice-chair of the panel |
| **Brita Fernandez Schmidt** | Womenkind Worldwide | User member of the panel |
| | | |
| **Dr Simon Maxwell** | Overseas Development Institute | Director |
| **Dr Heide Hackmann** | International Social Science Council | Director |
| **Katie Wright** | ESRC | International Research Broker |
| | | |
| **Professor Katy Gardner** | University of Sussex | PI |
| **Professor Orazio Attanasio** | Institute for Fiscal Studies | PI and panel member |
| **Professor Ben Cousins** | University of the Western Cape | PI |
| **Professor Louise Morley** | University of Sussex | PI |
| **Professor Ian Timaeus** | London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine | PI |
| **Professor Felix Wu** | Cardiff University | PI |
| **Dr Gina Porter** | Durham University | PI |
| **Dr Pat Pridmore** | Institute of Education, University of London | PI |
| **Professor Cecile Jackson** | University of East Anglia | PI |
| **Dr Sven Wunder** | CIFOR | PI |
| **Dr Emmily Hannum** | University of Pennsylvania | PI |
| **Dr Stefano Bertozzi** | National Institute of Public Health | PI |
| **Professor Paul Gertler** | Harvard Univesity | PI and panel member |
| **Dr Angela Baschieri** | London School of Hygiene and Tropical medicine | COI |
| **Dr Sridhar Venkatapuram** | University College London | COI |
| **Professor Julian May** | University of KwaZulu-Natal | COI |
| **Veerle Dieltiens** | University of the Witwatersrand | COI |
| **Professor Albert Park** | University of Michigan | COI |
| **Dr Abbas Bhuiya** | ICDDRB | COI |
| **Professor Sergio Bautista** | National Institute of Public Health | COI |
| **Dr Adam Pain** | AREU | COI |
| **Damien de Walque** | World Bank | Collaborating partner |
| **Melkamsew Teferi** | TB Control Programme Ethiopia | Collaborating partner |
| **Dr Paulin Basinga** | **National University of Rwanda** | **Collaborating partner** |

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