



EUROPE

# Review of Six DFID-funded Growth Research Programmes

Main report

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# 1 Growth Research Programmes

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Sustainable economic growth is crucial for developing countries if they are to continue lifting their populations out of poverty.<sup>1</sup> To foster economic research on growth in poor and developing countries, and building on the findings of the 2008 Commission on Growth and Development,<sup>2</sup> the Department for International Development (DFID) in the UK has provided funding to several external organisations focused on economic growth research.

Currently the programmes encompass a number of initiatives. Of interest for this study are six individual programmes within the wider portfolio of DFID. In this study we will refer to this subset as ‘the programmes’ and to any programme or project within a programme as a ‘project’. These six programmes are diverse, ranging from established research institutions to new funding initiatives. Each of the six programmes works towards a set of individual objectives to be achieved through different ways of conducting and commissioning research. The six programmes considered are:

## Group A

- The International Growth Centre (IGC) (Phase I: 2009–2013 – Phase II: 2013–2016)
- United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER) (Phase 2: 2010–2013 ; Phase 3: January 2014–December 2018)
- Institutions for Pro Poor growth (IIG) (Phase 1: Jan 2007–Dec 2012; Phase 2: July 2011–June 2015)

## Group B

- DFID ESRC Growth Research Programme (DEGRP) (started in 2011)
- Growth and Labor Markets in Low Income Countries (GLM-LIC) (started in 2011)
- Private Enterprise Development in Low Income Countries (PEDL) (started in 2011)

## 1.1 Research objectives

The report is structured around the objectives set out in the Terms of Reference (ToR) and the discussion at the Inception Meeting at DFID in London on the 17 September 2015. The ToR specified seven main objectives for the review, which covered organisational characteristics as well as outputs and outcomes. Our understanding of the key objectives is as follows:

**(1) Grant process and balance** – This objective refers to the process and outcome of organising the calls for proposals and allocation of grants, and the balance of projects across thematic areas and geographical locations. In addition, the objective focuses on the experience of researchers with the programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Sachs, J. D. (2012) and Banerjee & Duflo (2011).

<sup>2</sup> Spence (2008).

(2) **Governance structure** – This objective refers to the organisational structure of the programmes, their management and the quality assurance processes in place.

(3) **Field of engagement** – This objective refers to the thematic fields in which the programmes are active, how these have been chosen and why these have been prioritised. The chosen themes have been compared to the original aims of the programmes to check whether they are aligned.

(4) **Outputs** – This objective refers to the ‘products’ produced by the different programmes. These can range from publications, such as journal articles and working papers, to capacity building activities, conferences and potential other outputs.

(5) **Value for Money and cost-effectiveness** – This objective refers to the degree to which individual programmes are able to deliver outcomes efficiently. In our understanding, however, VfM is not synonymous to preferring the least costly intervention, but rather the one that delivers the best outcomes in relation to its inputs. Expressed slightly differently, this means delivering products and services of the required quality for the lowest cost.<sup>3</sup>

(6) **Policy influence** – This objective refers to the wider impact that the outputs of the programmes have had on policy and policymakers. This is the most difficult question to answer empirically and from the outset this objective has been more exploratory in nature than the other objectives.

(7) **Cross-cutting all objectives: Theory of Change** – The research question on the robustness of the Theory of Change (ToC) cuts across all the other objectives, as the ToC will touch upon all the activities undertaken by the programmes as well as the outputs and impacts for which they aim. For the ToC to be robust, for instance, the grant processes will need to be aligned with the intended outputs. If the grant processes are not ensuring that the intended outputs are produced, this will reflect negatively on the ToC and the governance of a given programme. As such, the robustness of the ToC is the last question to address, as it builds on the data collected through all the other research questions.

**Gender** – cross-cutting all the objectives is the consideration of gender. In order to systematically address gender in the programmes, it is explicitly discussed under the first objective. This section however, draws on data from all the other sections to assess the consideration of gender in the programmes.

### *1.1.1 Comparative review of Group A and Group B*

The programmes included were divided into two groups in the ToR. The first group (Group A), UNU-WIDER, iiG and IGC, are research institutes and we will refer to this group as ‘institutes’. The institutes were primarily set up to conduct research in-house and rely on internal research staff, though differences may exist within this group in terms of how decisions about funded projects are made.<sup>4</sup> The second group (Group B), DFID-ESRC, GLM-LIC and PEDL, are research funders and we will refer to this group as ‘funders’. This group consists of programmes which fund research through grants to external organisations and researchers on the basis of open calls for proposals. Group B programmes are also more recently established than Group A programmes, which have been operational for a longer time. We used

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<sup>3</sup> The VfM analysis has not been included in this public executive summary as the data underlying it is commercially sensitive.

<sup>4</sup> IGC have moved away from this model in their second phase of funding (Phase II), and now hold open calls for proposals more akin to Group B programmes since 2012.

both groups to examine whether there are differences between them in terms of their performance. We compare the groups to see whether differences can be explained through their respective governance structures or funding mechanisms, while keeping in mind the very different circumstances under which they have been implemented.

## 1.2 Methodology

In designing our methodological approach, we kept in mind relevant evaluation best practices, which serve as standards for the execution of the proposed work.

### 1.2.1 *Review of administrative data*

For a number of the objectives we reviewed administrative data, particularly in relation to grant processes and outcomes; the value-for-money of the programmes; and the governance structure. Administrative data was provided both by the programmes, for example in the calls and in the publications produced, and by DFID, for example in their annual reviews of programmes.

### 1.2.2 *Assessment of research quality*

Rather than conducting a full bibliometric assessment, which is both costly and may miss important outputs produced by the programmes, we have assessed research quality by using available data associated with the publications produced by the programmes. For each programme, we took the list of peer-reviewed articles produced and assessed their quality using the 2014 ranking of their journals using SCImago Journal Rank. This indicator expresses the average number of weighted citations received in the selected year by the documents published in the journal in the three previous years.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.2.3 *Survey of grantees/researchers*

To capture the experience of researchers with the programmes, and to capture researcher perspectives on outputs and potential impacts, we used a survey of researchers based at, or funded through, each of the six programmes. The aim has been to contact all researchers active at the programmes over the last five years or, in the case of programmes established less than five years ago, since their inception. In discussions with the programmes it became apparent that surveys of both successful and unsuccessful applicants could not be conducted for all programmes. The International Growth Centre (IGC) had conducted a survey of its Phase I researchers (2009–2012) not long before our study started, and to avoid over-burdening researchers it was decided to use the data previously collected rather than launch a new survey. The survey of IGC researchers contained several similar questions and the results are used in our findings.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, two separate surveys were developed for UNU-WIDER: one for resident and non-resident researchers (i.e. similar to the surveys for other Group A institutes) and one for respondents to UNU-WIDER's calls for papers (i.e. external researchers without a standing affiliation or contract with the

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<sup>5</sup> For more information see: <http://www.scimagojr.com/index.php>

<sup>6</sup> Survey data does not cover Phase II of IGC or any projects funded through the IGC Country Programme.

institute). The two surveys were labelled UNU-WIDER C (centre) and UNU-WIDER F (funder), respectively<sup>7</sup>. Overall participation and response rates are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Researcher survey participation and response rate**

|                          | UNU-WIDER-C | UNU-WIDER-F | iiG | DFID-ESRC | GLM-LIC | PEDL |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----|-----------|---------|------|
| N Successful             | 23          | 60          | 12  | 13        | 13      | 60   |
| Total group <sup>8</sup> | 44          | 197         | 39  | 35        | 30      | 100  |
| Participation rate (%)   | 52%         | 30%         | 31% | 37%       | 43%     | 60%  |
| N Unsuccessful           | n/a         | 141         | n/a | 25        | 11      | 9    |
| Total group              | n/a         | 1399        | n/a | 185       | 78      | 34   |
| Participation rate (%)   | n/a         | 10%         | n/a | 14%       | 14%     | 26%  |

The differences between the programmes (Groups A and B) are of particular interest in the case of the researcher survey and this difference has been taken into account in the content and phrasing of the questions.

#### 1.2.4 Survey of policymakers

To complement the researcher survey with a more external perspective on the work of the programmes, we conducted a short survey among the contacts on the email distribution list of the Growth Research Team at DFID, which includes policymakers from different countries and organisations, staff of multilateral organisations and staff from NGOs. The list contains 450 contacts and was supplemented with emails to DFID staff. The survey included questions on the use of research by policymakers and their familiarity with the programmes.

A total of 52 responses were received, which constitutes a response rate of 12 per cent. Taking into account that around 10 to 15 per cent of contact information was outdated (as estimated by DFID), the response rate rises to around 13 per cent. As this response rate is somewhat low, the data collected through the short policy survey is used to provide ‘perceptions’ of the programmes and their work, rather than as representative views.

#### 1.2.5 Semi-structured interviews

To complement data collected through the researcher survey and the administrative data review, we conducted 29 semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders. Interviews followed a standardised

<sup>7</sup> We acknowledge that the researcher survey did not go to the full UNU-WIDER network of researchers and institutions that have contributed to WIDER research. However, keeping in mind the comparative nature of this review, this group of people does not have an immediately clear counterpart in the work of other programmes covered by this review. As such, we took the view that a custom-built survey of this group of people would yield only a limited amount of applicable evidence that could answer the research questions at hand.

<sup>8</sup> This number does not include undeliverable email addresses. For Group B (and UNU-WIDER-F), where applicants were both successful and unsuccessful in different calls, they were included in successful only.



template developed by the research team in the interest of comparability, but allowed for unique discussions to capture any context-specific views and insights.

### *1.2.6 Online focus group*

To capture different opinions on the pathway to impact, and to reach as many policymakers as possible, we adopted a two-stage approach to data collection. First, we created the short survey on the familiarity of policymakers with the growth programmes and on the use they make of their outputs outlined above. Second, we developed an online focus group for a smaller selection of informed stakeholders on policy impact.

Recruitment for the focus group garnered 18 interested participants prior to the launch. The focus group began on 18 January and closed on 22 January. As some original participants were unavailable or did not respond to their invitations, only 13 participants actually started the focus group, of which 7 participants completed it in its entirety.

### *1.2.7 Data limitations*

It is important to recognise that each data collection method has its inherent limitations, which are briefly discussed below. With respect to the online focus group, it is important to note that it included a strong element of self-selection from a group of DFID stakeholders and that it had uneven rates of participation. While these stakeholders are in a good position to comment on the programmes and their outputs, findings derived from this exercise build on a relatively small number of testimonies. Similarly, the number of interviews conducted with programme stakeholders was constrained by the timescale of this study. It may be that further points and observations could have been elicited had more stakeholders been consulted; however, every effort was made to identify interviewees with the best knowledge of the programmes.

The survey results also need to be read with potential limitations and biases in mind. For instance, although guarantees of confidentiality were communicated by the research team, desirability bias is a possibility with respondents focusing on positive comments, particularly if they intended to participate in any future programme or DFID-sponsored funding calls. Non-response bias may also be an issue as it is possible that some groups of researchers were overly represented among survey respondents. In order to mitigate against this bias, respondents were asked a series of background questions, such as where they were based and which year they received funding. These data were then checked against administrative data received from each programme to ensure the responses were not skewed towards a particular call or group of researchers. Caution is also required with the disaggregation of survey data in questions pertinent only to successful applicants, due to small sample sizes. In summary, in our judgement, and based on later data collection confirming earlier findings, further resources might have strengthened the detail of the conclusions presented here, but not the overall balance.

## 2 Findings

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The aim of the study is not to rank the programmes. The diversity of the programmes and the nature of the data would mean that rankings for most indicators would give a distorted picture. Rather, the aim was to identify differences between the programmes in their performance on a number of indicators. This focus on individual performance against particular indicators allows for a richer identification of strengths and weaknesses when the programmes are compared to each other. Lessons and recommendations for the future can be drawn from this comparative analysis.

### 2.1 Grant process and balance

The first objective refers to the process and outcome of organising the calls for proposals and allocation of grants, and the balance of projects across thematic areas and geographical locations. In addition, the objective focuses on the experience of researchers with the programmes.

#### 2.1.1 *Geographical distribution of projects*

The geographical distribution of projects funded or executed by five of the programmes shows that a majority of the projects included have a clear country focus of which the vast majority are involved with DFID-priority countries.<sup>9</sup> Of all the projects identified, half (50 per cent) are in Sub-Saharan Africa and 40 per cent are in South Asia. The remaining 10 per cent of projects are focused on the rest of the world. In addition, based on World Bank classifications of countries, around a third of all projects (30 per cent) are focused on low-income economies, while the majority of projects (62 per cent) are focused on lower-middle-income economies.<sup>10</sup>

This assessment is more challenging for UNU-WIDER because the nature of the projects undertaken and funded by UNU-WIDER does not allow for the same kind of classification. The geographical distribution of the UNU-WIDER work has therefore been assessed separately through the researcher survey of external respondents to calls for papers, although we note that this analysis is based on a small subset of researchers. The survey results show that the majority of successful respondents to calls for papers (58 per cent) focused their work on Sub-Saharan Africa with the remainder spread across the globe. However, it should also be noted that lessons learned in non-DFID priority countries might be relevant in priority countries.

#### 2.1.2 *Geographical distribution of researchers*

When they were created, the six programmes included in this study were part of an initiative by DFID to address a gap in economic growth research. Previous growth research strongly focused on developed

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<sup>9</sup> The DFID priority countries are the 28 countries in which DFID is active: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, South Sudan, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Uganda, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that a number of these countries have changed status since the research was commissioned. Classifications are taken as of December 2015.

countries with little work being done on low- or middle-income countries. The world-leading researchers conducting high quality work were therefore predominantly located at well-known American and British institutions. The relative concentration of researchers at these institutions is reflected in the current spread of principal investigators (PIs) funded through the programmes. 238 PIs are US based, while 148 PIs are based in the UK. There is a relatively lower number of PIs from the global South. Only South Africa (9), India (9) and Pakistan (8) have more than five registered PIs on programme projects.<sup>11</sup>

Within the US and the UK, a relatively small group of institutions accounts for a large number of the projects. The institutions with the highest number of projects in Group B are Harvard University, followed by the University of Oxford and then other US and UK based institutions. An exception is the University of Cape Town which has been the lead institution on 6 projects.<sup>12</sup>

The administrative data also show that across the six programmes there are a number of PIs associated with one or more projects. The majority of PIs are associated with only one project, but a quarter of PIs (25 per cent) are associated with more than one. In fact, a group of 10 PIs is associated with 6 or more projects. In addition, 47 PIs (15 per cent) have received funding from two or more programmes.<sup>13</sup>

Together the data of PIs show a degree of concentration. PIs are generally based at a relatively small number of American and British institutions. Furthermore, 25 per cent of PIs are associated with multiple projects and 15 per cent of PIs have grants from multiple programmes. This may not necessarily be the result of a conscious choice, but rather may flow from the ambition to fund research of the 'highest quality'. The supply of high-quality researchers may be limited and researchers at renowned institutions generally score well on the quality criteria used for the selection of projects.

Of the programmes, PEDL has supported a substantially larger number of junior researchers, such as PhD students and post-docs, through some of its dedicated grant programmes. In addition, PEDL runs exploratory research grants (ERG), which have been targeted by early-career researchers. However, of the eight ERGs that have moved into Major Research Grants (MRGs), four of the PIs were researchers who also held grants with other DFID-funded research programmes.

### *2.1.3 Thematic balance*

The thematic balance across the programmes is less straightforward to compare, as the programmes work towards different objectives, which entail different themes. The portfolios of most programmes consist of relatively clear themes. For DFID-ESRC, it is more difficult to unpack the thematic balance in a granular way, as the titles of the themes are quite broad and generic (e.g. Agriculture, Finance). Across the portfolio there are a number of themes that appear frequently:

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<sup>11</sup> While useful, it is beyond the scope of the project to identify the nationality of the PIs.

<sup>12</sup> Group A has been excluded from this list since its inclusion would only serve to push LSE and Oxford, the host institutions of iiG and IGC, further up the list.

<sup>13</sup> It is not unusual for researchers to have multiple grants at the same time. It is in the nature of research that researchers build a portfolio of work in an area which is accompanied by multiple grants.

- **Firms/SMEs:** firm growth and firm capacities are themes that occur frequently in the portfolios of various programmes. In the case of iiG there was an explicit attempt to increase the emphasis on firms in Phase 2, which appears to have resulted in an increase in studies.
- **Market functioning:** a second theme that is prominent in various guises is focused on the functioning of the market. Topics around accountability and institutions feature frequently across the programme.

The two broad topics of firms/SMEs and market functioning confirm that the work conducted is on core economic themes. Combined with the geographical distribution outlined above, it appears that the overall balance of the portfolios is targeted at economic growth research.

#### *2.1.4 Support and coordination of researchers*

The support and coordination of researchers is assessed through the researcher surveys. The survey included several questions on the running of research projects and interactions with the programmes. The earlier survey of IGC-funded researchers showed that, of 45 respondents, only 18 per cent (eight respondents) reported having received support from the IGC London hub in implementing their project. Seventy-three per cent stated that they had not received any support and nine per cent did not know. Of the eight respondents who reported receiving support, all indicated that support from the IGC hub had helped their project to achieve its objectives.

The data for the other five programmes show first that researchers do experience challenges in conducting the research, yet that these are mainly related to relatively common research problems such as data collection (mentioned by 30–40 per cent of respondents), engagement of local partners (mentioned by 20–30 per cent of respondents) and finances. There are several things the programmes can do to support researchers tackling these challenges, the most frequently reported of which is flexibility and openness to consultation (mentioned by 40–60 per cent of respondents). This support is not evenly distributed across the programmes however, as higher levels of support appear to be reported for UNU-WIDER and iiG. The reported level of support received from DFID-ESRC is the lowest, with the highest proportion of respondents (46 per cent) indicating that they did not receive any of the support listed, such as providing flexibility around research implementation, being open to consultation, or providing technical advice.<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that not all programmes set out to deliver the same level of support to researchers, so what is noted here is difference rather than greater or poorer performance.

For the Group B programmes, a number of additional questions were included in the researcher survey on the running and implementation of the grant. Some of these questions are comparative and ask for a judgment in relation to other funders (Table 2). The response patterns for PEDL and GLM-LIC are fairly similar, with around half of the respondents indicating they agree that the programme provides contacts

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<sup>14</sup> By comparison, a recent Mid Term Review of the Strategic Impact Evaluation Fund (SIEF), a relatively similar research funding organisation, found that 54 per cent of respondents thought SIEF was open to consultation about problems, 20 per cent thought that SIEF provided greater access to in-country contacts or partners, and 24 per cent that SIEF provided greater access to (in-country) policymakers. These figures are largely in line with the programmes.

and makes use of the network. The share is lower for DFID-ESRC, for which only between 10 and 20 per cent of respondents indicated such agreement.

**Table 2: Researcher survey – project implementation**

| Share of respondents who strongly agree/agree with the following statements (absolute number in brackets):          |           |          |          |          |           |          |
|---|-----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|
|   | ESRC      |          | PEDL     |          | GLM LIC   |          |
|   | Agree     | Disagree | Agree    | Disagree | Agree     | Disagree |
| The cost and burden associated with reporting requirements are reasonable when compared with the potential benefits | 100% (13) | 0% (0)   | 95% (56) | 5% (3)   | 85% (11)  | 15% (2)  |
| [programme] is open to consultation about any problems encountered in the project                                   | 100% (10) | 0% (0)   | 91% (53) | 9% (5)   | 100% (12) | 0% (0)   |
| [programme] provides greater access to in-country contacts or partners than other funders                           | 18% (2)   | 82% (9)  | 53% (26) | 47% (23) | 50% (5)   | 50% (5)  |
| [programme] provides greater access to (in-country) policymakers than other funders                                 | 9% (1)    | 91% (10) | 48% (23) | 52% (25) | 50% (5)   | 50% (5)  |
| [programme] makes use of the local networks and contacts to support the project                                     | 18% (2)   | 82% (9)  | 50% (24) | 50% (24) | 45% (5)   | 55% (6)  |

Note: the column agree combines the answers 'strongly agree' and 'agree'; the column disagree combines the answers 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'.

### 2.1.5 Degree of competitiveness

The degree of competitiveness of a programme, defined as the attractiveness of the programme to researchers, as demonstrated by the number of responses, is partly determined by the ease with which researchers can apply for funding and the speed and fairness with which the applications are processed.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, programmes might be more competitive when they carve out a niche of research that aims to directly address a recognised knowledge gap. Finally, understanding the funding situation of researchers provides an insight into where they have applied and what would have happened, or actually happened, in the absence of funding.

First, however, we reviewed the success rates of applications to the Group B programmes as an indication of competitiveness. Overall, the rates are fairly consistent at around 15 to 20 per cent. The rationale for applying to the programmes, apart from the financial reasons, provides a second indication of the potentially 'unique' nature of some of the programmes. For example, it could be argued that a unique profile could enhance the competitiveness of a programme if it is seen to fill a gap or address a particular research need. Table 3 provides an overview of the reasons behind the applications for funding and the additional benefits that successful applicants anticipated the programmes could provide. The results seem

<sup>15</sup> The size of grants may also play a role in the attractiveness of programmes. As there are predetermined ceilings however, this is generally not a trait that programmes 'compete' on, and we have therefore not included it in the analysis.

to suggest that UNU-WIDER stands out for anticipated benefits, for example in capacity building. This demonstrates that the perception and expectation of working with UNU-WIDER is in line with the capacity-building aspect of its mission. Less than half of successful applicants to UNU-WIDER’s call for proposals, however, deemed it one of the few potential funders that would consider their project. A slightly different profile appears for GLM-LIC. It is generally perceived as one of the few potential funders to consider the projects of the successful applicants, even though, aside from post-project communication and dissemination, not many additional benefits were anticipated by the researchers. The profiles of the programmes can therefore be considered to be quite different.

**Table 3: Researcher survey – additional perceived benefits**

| In addition to funding support, were there any potential benefits that you considered beyond receiving financing from [programme]? (absolute number in brackets) |             |             |                |                    |
|--|-------------|-------------|----------------|--------------------|
|  | ESRC (n=13) | PEDL (n=60) | GLM LIC (n=13) | UNU-WIDER-F (n=60) |
| Technical support with project execution   | 8% (1)      | 22% (13)    | 0% (0)         | 23% (14)           |
| Access to (in-country) contacts and partners   | 8% (1)      | 5% (3)      | 15% (2)        | 15% (9)            |
| Capacity building  | 15% (2)     | 22% (13)    | 15% (2)        | 42% (25)           |
| Access to (in-country) policymakers  | 15% (2)     | 5% (3)      | 8% (1)         | 18% (11)           |
| Post-project communication and dissemination   | 46% (6)     | 58% (35)    | 69% (9)        | 50% (30)           |
| Engaging with the network  | 8% (1)      | 8% (5)      | 23%(3)         | 2% (1)             |
| Events and conferences   | 0%          | 7% (4)      | 0%             | 2% (1)             |
| None of the above  | 38% (5)     | 25% (15)    | 23% (3)        | 17% (10)           |
| Other, please specify  | 8% (1)      | 3% (2)      | 0%             | 2% (1)             |

Turning to the actual application process, there is an arguably predictable difference of opinion between the successful and the unsuccessful applicants to the three Group B programmes and UNU-WIDER. Successful applicants appear to hold a broadly positive perception of the operations at the programmes, suggesting a competitive profile. The survey of IGC also showed that applicants were generally content with the process. The majority of respondents (74 per cent) agreed with the following statement: ‘I received useful feedback from the IGC on my proposal (e.g. requests for additional information)’.

By contrast, unsuccessful applicants indicate problems with communication around, and the perceived fairness of, the application process. While the application process itself is seen as useful, the communication on the outcomes and the process underlying it are questioned. In our judgement, given the balance of responses and their tone, the concerns of unsuccessful candidates should not be dismissed as ‘sour grapes’. Around 75 per cent of unsuccessful applicants to DFID-ESRC and GLM-LIC disagreed with the statement that ‘The application assessment and decision were fair’. This is relatively high, as the Mid Term Review of SIEF found that 71 per cent of unsuccessful applicants *agreed* with the statement that ‘The application assessment and decision were fair’.<sup>16</sup> The results for PEDL are similar to those of SIEF, reinforcing the sense that not all unsuccessful candidates are critical of the application process.

<sup>16</sup> Krapels et al. (2015).

In the case of PEDL and SIEF, 56 per cent and 55 per cent of unsuccessful applicants, respectively, agreed that ‘The decision and reasons underlying the outcome were transparent.’ This again contrasts with the 18 per cent and 21 per cent of unsuccessful applicants who agreed for GLM-LIC and DFID-ESRC, respectively. However, given the small sample sizes, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions on whether communication and perceived fairness is a problem for these programmes. Even so, it is an area that would merit closer attention by some funders, and which could possibly benefit from the exchange of good practice across the programmes.

### *2.1.6 Consideration and inclusion of gender*

From interviews with current and former staff at DFID, it emerged that a consideration of gender has increased in importance over time and is seen to be encouraged where appropriate. Gender, however, is not a strict requirement for all of the work undertaken under the programmes. One reason suggested was that for a number of the topics of interest it would be difficult to incorporate gender-based analyses. Examples given included research on trade agreements and trade barriers, and exchange rate policy. The analysis of the consideration of gender reveals a mixed picture across the programmes.

A review of the Group A programmes shows that gender has increasingly become an important consideration, probably driven at least in part by increasing demands from DFID.

**UNU-WIDER:** in the current (2014–2018) and the previous (2010–2013) work programmes, gender was an explicit theme of the research portfolio. While not every project includes a focus on gender, there are streams of work dedicated to gender. UNU-WIDER also works with indicators on outputs that address gender and is currently on track to achieve these. UNU-WIDER has also exceeded publication targets on research outputs that explicitly address gender issues.

**iiG:** a specific focus on gender was not part of the original requirements for the work programme of iiG. In the second phase, however, an indicator was added to cover the number of papers per year on the theme of firms and markets with a clear gender dimension.

**IGC:** the latest logframe for IGC Phase 2 does not include any indicators referring to gender. After recommendation by DFID, it was reported in the 2015 DFID Annual Review of IGC that a project database had been introduced to monitor gender-related work.

With regard to Group B, the dimension of gender can be considered at multiple stages:

- Gender-informed call for proposals or setting of themes
- Gender-informed research design
- Gender-disaggregated data reported

For each of these stages the consideration of gender by the programmes has been reviewed and several findings are worth highlighting per programme.

**DFID-ESRC:** while the logframe does not specify any explicit requirements around gender, DFID-ESRC does incorporate gender as a component of the calls for proposals. Gender is listed under the ‘Structural inequalities’ that researchers are requested to pay attention to. This is a substantial requirement and displays an understanding of gender that is more elaborate than the disaggregation of data.

**GLM-LIC:** one of the five main projects is explicitly dedicated to gender: Gender and Employment. This is unique among the Group B funders, as neither PEDL nor DFID-ESRC have a thematic breakdown in which gender appears as a dedicated theme (although PEDL has gender as a cross-cutting theme).

**PEDL:** while not a research theme on its own, gender is one of three cross-cutting themes that PEDL works with. The rationale behind this setup is that, ‘In the context of private sector development, these issues are most appropriately addressed by being woven into the research themes, rather than being specific themes themselves.’<sup>17</sup>

### **Box 1: the thematic versus the cross-cutting approach**

To increase the number of projects that contain a serious consideration of gender, GLM-LIC and PEDL have relied on different approaches. In the case of GLM-LIC, one call has been dedicated to gender, whereas PEDL has made gender a cross-cutting theme for all calls. In the case of GLM-LIC, this approach has resulted in 7 out of the 30 funded projects (23 per cent) having a strong gender component, and 3 out of the 11 publications (27 per cent) having a gender focus. The latter number is on par with the highest target set out in the logframe. In 2014–2015 PEDL introduced stricter criteria for projects to be recognised as having a gender consideration. Of projects started during the period in which the stricter criteria were introduced, 19 per cent of Exploratory Research Grants (4 out of 21), 15 per cent of Special Exploratory Research Grants (2 out of 13) and 18 per cent of Major Research Grants (2 out of 11) addressed gender. Overall, since stricter criteria have been in place, 17.7 per cent of projects started (8 out of 45) have addressed gender. This figure is slightly above the ‘high’ benchmark of 17.5 per cent.<sup>18</sup>

In the case of both GLM-LIC and PEDL, the benchmarks for gender-focused projects have therefore been reached, with the overall number being slightly higher for GLM-LIC, albeit not much. There do not appear to be very clear differences in the results from these approaches.

The dimension of gender is incorporated in different ways and to a different extent across the programmes. Important to remember here is that, for the programmes in Group B, gender was a more explicit requirement at the design stage of the programme. Hence the seemingly greater attention given to gender among this group will also stem from a shift in thinking among both researchers and donors. Overall, the attention to gender is mixed, yet the programmes provide very interesting examples of how gender can genuinely be taken into consideration. Programmes could learn from these examples to further develop a holistic approach to gender.

## **2.2 Governance structure**

The objective on governance refers to the organisational structure of the programmes, their management and the quality assurance processes in place. This objective is confined to the governance of research at the

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<sup>17</sup> PEDL (2016).

<sup>18</sup> Exploratory Research Grants of between £10,000 and £30,000 aim to support projects which explore new approaches or improve the quality and availability of data on firms in LICs. Major Research Grants, with a minimum value of £100,000 and no upper limit, are designed to fund research assistance and data collection in LICs, as well as teaching buyouts for principal investigators.



programmes, that is, the activities that are funded by DFID. Any other activities at the programmes falling outside the research activities funded by DFID are not taken into account.

Comparing programmes on their governance structure requires some form of benchmark of good governance. On the basis of our experience with research funders and partly drawing on the literature of grant making,<sup>19</sup> we specify seven broad criteria of good governance in Box 2 below, against which we compare the performance of the programmes.

#### **Box 2: Criteria for good governance**

**Clarity of vision and mission** – Only when a clear vision and mission are in place can a rationale for governance be formulated.

**Rationale** – Clarity of the process by which priorities for research funding are set and the process by which funding is subsequently allocated. Good governance is characterised by a clear outline of these processes and a shared understanding of these processes by all stakeholders.

**Quality assurance** – Presence of quality assurance (QA).

**Responsibility and accountability** – Clarity of roles and responsibilities.

**Transparency and learning** – Communication of, and reporting on, the processes of funding and conducting research, and on the outcomes of funding decisions. Furthermore, transparency includes the presence of mechanisms to track progress and learn from problems identified.

**Appropriateness and effectiveness** – Appropriateness and effectiveness of the governance processes in place. Processes of good governance should not overburden staff and researchers or lead to undue delays.

**Representativeness** – Representation of different groups in the governance boards of the programme.

The individual programme reports provide substantial detail on the governance arrangements for each programme. To summarise and compare the programmes the main governance characteristics for each programme are listed in Table 4 below. For each criterion, the table provides a brief summary of the main traits of a programme. This allows for an assessment against the criteria and for some comparison across the programmes. A number of observations can be made on the individual programmes on the basis of the governance review:

**UNU-WIDER:** as an institution embedded within the global United Nations University, and with a long history, UNU-WIDER operate with a clear structure in which the roles and responsibilities of governance are well defined. There is still potential for improvement: the quality assurance of UNU-WIDER documents, such as working papers, could be strengthened and the UNU-WIDER Board currently appears to have an overrepresentation of members from high-income countries.

**iiG:** as a smaller programme, many processes and criteria for decisions were not explicit and documented. Changes in key management staff have also appeared to introduce changes to governance processes that suggest a dependence on personal leadership styles. The management structure appears to have improved in Phase 2, also following the recommendations of a mid-term review.

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Johnston (2012) and Meachen (2010).

**IGC:** the detailed ToC provided is grounded in a clearly defined mission and objectives. The management structure and division of responsibilities are clear, and there is regular reporting to DFID. Procedures for internal quality assurance of research are in place, but the details of these procedures are unclear. As unsuccessful applicants were not surveyed, there is limited evidence on the perceived openness and fairness of the selection process.

**DFID-ESRC:** there is a clear mission that is shared by both partners (i.e. ESRC and ODI). As a UK research council, ESRC has very clear and strict QA and governance processes in place, which help to ensure the quality, yet may reduce the timeliness, of the work. While the peer-review system is clear on paper, there have been several negative comments on the communication of outcomes and the perceived fairness of the application and selection process by researchers in the survey that need to be taken into account.

**GLM-LIC:** the governance and management appears to be lean and clear. Quality is assured through external reviewers and a clear process of selection. Similar to DFID-ESRC, however, concerns are raised over the perceived fairness of the process by researchers. Furthermore, as with other programmes, the representation of LMIC in the oversight board is incomplete.

**PEDL:** the management structure is clear and governance procedures are appropriate and effective, with mechanisms in place to ensure regular progress reports by grantees to PEDL, and regular reporting by PEDL to DFID. The overall mission and related objectives are clearly defined in the ToC and regular reviews of the logframe display evidence of learning and adaptability. LMICs are not clearly represented in the process of identifying research themes and selecting projects.

**Table 4: Governance arrangements summarised by criterion**

|                                   | UNU-WIDER   | iiG  | IGC  | DFID-ESRC   | GLM-LIC  | PEDL   |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|---|--|--|
| Clarity of vision and mission     | Objectives well defined   | Objectives well defined  | Clear mission and objectives   | Clear mission   | Clear mission and objectives   | Clear mission and objectives   |
|                                   | Clear communication   | Clear reflection in the logframe of objectives   | Both reflected in ToC  | No ToC available but reflected in logframe                      | Both reflected in ToC  | Both reflected in ToC  |
| Rationale                         | Clear, guided by criteria and including stakeholders                          | The process for funding changed several times; not completely clear or institutionalised | 'Demand-driven' selection themes through interaction with LMIC policymakers              | Clear and guided by predefined processes including stakeholders | Evidence-based process of identification of research themes                      | Themes agreed and regularly reviewed with DFID   |
| Quality assurance                 | Reliance on external peer review for external publications                    | No set criteria used   | IGC Advisory Board provides internal quality assurance of outputs.                       | Peer review process for applications                            | External review of proposals   | Peer review process for applications; based on clearly defined scoring system but scoring system is not the only factor in decisions |
|                                   | Internal publications not subject to peer review, but require senior sign-off | Quality deemed a 'given', projects selected on basis of feasibility                      |  | International Advisory Board                                    | Researchers aim to publish in peer-reviewed journals                             |  |
| Responsibility and accountability | Clear structure and accountabilities, also for research projects              | Management structure more clear in Phase 2; more explicit incorporation of the partners  | Clear management structure and division of responsibilities                              | Division of central roles between ODI and ESRC are clear        | Clear structure of management and division of labour                             | Clear management structure and accountability  |
| Transparency and learning         | Regular monitoring and reporting  | Regular monitoring by CSAE, some reporting in writing                                    | Regular reporting to DFID  | Some questions over ownership                                   | Regular reporting to and monitoring by DFID                                      | Regular monitoring through DFID presence   |
|                                   | Evidence of learning  | Evidence of learning   | Evidence of learning   |   |  |  |
| Appropriateness and effectiveness | Processes appear to be appropriate  | Processes changed, yet outputs were delivered  | Processes appear to be appropriate   | Processes appear appropriate; some concerns over timeliness     | Processes appear to be appropriate   | Processes appear to be appropriate   |
| Representativeness                | UNU-WIDER Board mainly from high income country institutions                  | No LMIC institutions represented on Board  | No LMIC institutions represented on Steering Group or among Research Programme Directors | No LMIC institutions represented on Board                       | Independent Oversight Committee has no institutional representation of LMICs yet | Management Committee has no representation of LMICs.   |
|                                   | Regular consultation with donors and global network                           |  |  |   |  |  |



## 2.3 Field of engagement

This objective refers to the thematic fields in which the programmes are active, how these have been chosen and why these have been prioritised.

### 2.3.1 Governance of topic identification

The governance arrangements by which topics are identified in each individual programme have been covered briefly in the previous section on Governance. Under the heading ‘rationale’, the clarity and setup of these arrangements has been reviewed. As the selection of topics is crucially important to the work of the programmes, this section will specify in more detail the arrangements of each programme. On the basis of these data a more general comparison between Group A and Group B programmes can be conducted later on. Table 5 summarises the main governance arrangement of topic identification at each programme.

**Table 5: Summary governance of topic identification**

| Governance of topic identification |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| UNU-WIDER                          | The framework for UNU-WIDER’s activities is captured in its work programme. This programme is formulated by the director of UNU-WIDER in consultation with its partners and stakeholders, including leading economists, policymakers, UN experts, funders and developing country representatives, as well as the WIDER Board and the research staff of the institute. Subsequently, the research programme is reviewed by the WIDER Board and submitted for approval to the UNU Council.  |
| iiG                                | While no formal process existed for the selection of topics, the following process can be identified on the basis of the interviews:<br><br>The themes of Phase 1 were set out in the initial proposal/call and developed in discussion with staff at CSAE and other joining consortia. Phase 2 themes followed from Phase 1 themes as DFID preferred a continuation of the research, particularly the focus on private-sector growth. The research themes then developed as a combination of funder preferences and researcher interests and expertise.  |
| IGC                                | Similarly to iiG, no formal procedure appears to exist to select topics, yet the process by which the current topics have been identified have been described in the interviews:<br><br>In Phase 1, the leadership of IGC originally identified ten thematic areas and six key countries, which were subsequently agreed with DFID. Gradually the number of countries IGC works on increased, following a demand from policymakers in different countries or through the identification by researchers of relevant policy questions. At the beginning of Phase 2 (after roughly 4 years), IGC went from ten themes to four themes, which were again agreed with DFID. |
| DFID-ESRC                          | The topics were selected by DFID and subsequently distributed by the ESRC through their network for feedback. After feedback had been received, the calls were finalised.   |
| GLM-LIC                            | GLM-LIC’s mission and objectives were formulated by DFID, in consultation with IZA, and subsequently reflected in the business case in which the focus on labour markets was clarified. This focus has been used as the starting point for the identification of the topics, in which there were again requirements specified by DFID, such as the emphasis on gender.  |
| PEDL                               | The themes were developed in cooperation with DFID but are intentionally flexible to be supply-driven (dependent on proposals received). PEDL receive feedback from DFID at management committee meetings (3 or 4 per year) on what themes are of interest to DFID.   |

### 2.3.2 *Relevance of topics*

Relevance is defined as the usefulness of the research topics to policymaking. Relevance is thus judged from the perspective of the needs of low-income countries and policymakers in donor countries. The relevance of any research to the future needs of policymakers is, of course, not easy to predict and will at best be a matter of informed judgement. However, to assess whether the research commissioned and conducted by the programmes is relevant we reviewed a number of data sources:

- 1) Researcher survey: the survey asks both successful and unsuccessful applicants to comment on the relevance of the research themes of the programmes through questions on, for example, the needs and policy concerns of low- and middle-income countries.
- 2) Policy survey: slightly different from the researcher survey, the policy survey asks about the type of research that is useful to policymakers and their actual interactions with the programmes.

Both sources shine a slightly different, but complementary light on the relevance of the research topics and themes of the programmes.

#### *Researcher survey on relevance*

Data from the researcher survey suggests that both successful and unsuccessful applicants believe that the topics addressed by the programmes are relevant (

Table 6). The topics are seen to address the needs and policy concerns of low- and middle-income countries by all participants. One caveat around these data is, of course, that they are purely based on the perspective of researchers who are predominantly located in high-income countries. Furthermore, it has been observed in studies on research in international development that the research topics of interest to researchers may not align with the actual needs of policymakers.<sup>20</sup> While researchers might, therefore, have a good understanding of what constitutes new advances of knowledge, they may be less aware of the actual needs of policymakers.

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<sup>20</sup> Pamiés-Sumner (2015).

**Table 6: Researcher survey – relevance**

| Share of respondents who strongly agree/agree with the following statements (absolute number in brackets): |                            |                            |                   |                    |                       |                    |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Successful   | UNU-WIDER-<br>C (n=21)     | UNU-WIDER-<br>F (n varies) | iiG (n=11)        | ESRC<br>(n=13)     | GLM LI<br>C<br>(n=13) | PEDL<br>(n varies) |
| [programme]'s research themes reflect the needs of low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)                | 86% (18)                   | 96% (55)                   | 91% (10)          | 100%               | 100%                  | 98% (59)           |
| [programme]'s research themes reflect the policy concerns of LMICs   | 90% (19)                   | 96% (53)                   | 82% (9)           | 92% (12)           | 100%                  | 98% (57)           |
| [programme]'s research themes address gaps in the evidence base  | 86% (18)                   | 93% (52)                   | 100%              | 92% (12)           | 100%                  | 100% (59)          |
| [programme]'s research themes focus on areas that are amenable to policy intervention                      | 81% (17)                   | 94% (51)                   | 100%              | 92% (12)           | 100%                  | 100% (59)          |
| Unsuccessful   | UNU-WIDER-<br>F (n varies) | ESRC (n=25)                | GLM LIC<br>(n=12) | PEDL<br>(n varies) |                       |                    |
| [programme]'s research themes reflect the needs of low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)                | 94% (133)                  | 96% (24)                   | 100%              | 89% (8)            |                       |                    |
| [programme]'s research themes reflect the policy concerns of LMICs   | 95% (132)                  | 80% (20)                   | 100%              | 89% (8)            |                       |                    |
| [programme]'s research themes address gaps in the evidence base  | 83% (116)                  | 84% (21)                   | 91%               | 100% (9)           |                       |                    |
| [programme]'s research themes focus on areas that are amenable to policy intervention                      | 91% (128)                  | 80% (20)                   | 91%               | 100% (8)           |                       |                    |

Note: as the 'N' varies across the questions for some programmes, the actual number is provided in brackets in cases where such variation occurs.

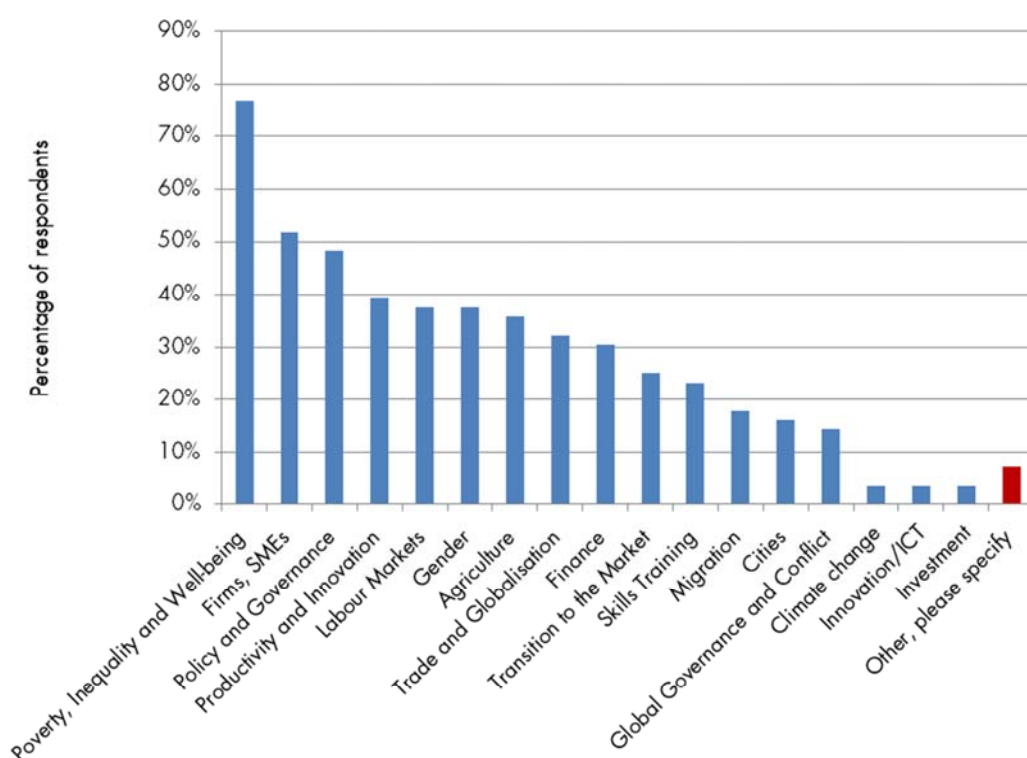
### *Policy survey on usefulness*

To complement the data from researchers with a more external perspective, the policy survey asked respondents to comment on the areas of economic growth research that are deemed useful for their daily work and on the actual programme with which they are familiar. Together, the data provide an indication of the type of work that is deemed useful and of the programmes that are considered helpful to policymakers.

The first observation from the policy survey is that a large share of respondents use economic growth research on low- and middle-income countries in their work. Asked to what extent they use it, 52 per cent (26 respondents) indicated a 'significant extent' and 30 per cent (15 respondents) a 'moderate extent'. Figure 1 shows the areas of research that the respondents deem most applicable to their work. The prominent topics are not surprising and include poverty, firms, governance, productivity and innovation. These are all topics that appear to be closely related to the work of the programmes. The topics the programmes work on therefore seem to align well with the topics deemed useful by the respondents to the policy survey.



**Figure 1: Policy survey – research areas applicable to work**



There are however, different dimensions to economic growth research. Some work is more theoretical or empirical than others. Apart from the topics, the respondents commented on the relevance of different dimensions of economic growth research to their work. Most relevant appears to be research that has a practical orientation, e.g. ‘Evidence on effectiveness/impact of specific policies/interventions’ (mentioned as relevant by 87 per cent or 41 respondents); ‘Descriptions of the factors that can contribute to economic growth (e.g. institutions, rule of law, SMEs, etc.)’ (mentioned as relevant by 98 per cent or 48 respondents); and ‘Practical guidance on the implementation of specific policies/interventions’ (mentioned as relevant by 92 per cent or 45 respondents). Less relevant, it was thought, are theoretical discussions.

Building on these categories, respondents were also asked which of these dimensions is often missing from economic growth research. Again, the practical dimensions of economic growth research are mentioned, with around half of the respondents indicating that the following dimensions are frequently missing: ‘Evidence on effectiveness/impact of specific policies/interventions’ (48 per cent or 27 respondents) and ‘Practical guidance on the implementation of specific policies/interventions’ (57 per cent or 32 respondents). In addition, for the participants of the online focus group, ‘policy recommendations’ ranked highest among a number of elements that are important to include in publications, such as ‘national/institutional context of the research’ or ‘references and academic literature’. None of the participants deemed the ‘technical methodology’ as one of the important elements to include, highlighting the practical nature of publications for policymakers.

## 2.4 Outputs

The objective on outputs refers to the products resulting from the work of the different programmes. These can range from publications, such as journal articles and working papers, to capacity-building activities, conferences and potential other outputs. As research programmes, however, most of their outputs will be journal articles, working papers and other written outputs.

### 2.4.1 *Quantity of output*

Publications are by far the most common output and come in various shapes and forms, ranging from peer-reviewed journal articles, to working papers, policy briefs, and opinion pieces. The more recent establishment of the Group B programmes means that for these programmes the actual number of outputs is so far limited. This difference needs to be taken into account as the inevitably lower output figures of Group B are at this stage not a reflection of poorer performance.

The comparison of outputs, in particular publications, is not straightforward and we can identify two caveats upfront. The first is the difference between attribution and contribution. In the case of Group B, and to a lesser extent of Group A, it is usually possible to establish whether a publication, and by extension an impact, has been contributed to. It is generally not possible to attribute the output, let alone the impact, to one programme only. Often multiple funders, researchers and others contributed to an output and subsequent impacts, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to establish to whom the output and impact can be attributed.<sup>21</sup>

The second caveat relates to the variation within outputs. Not all outputs are the same, nor should they be treated as such. A publication based on a randomised controlled trial in a low-income country will have likely required more resources than an article on the rule of law of the same country. Both outputs can be equally valuable, but it is important to distinguish them. It has not been possible for us to identify the amount of resources that were required for each output (e.g. for each publication), yet where possible we provide indications as to the nature of the research underlying the publications of a programme.

#### *Publications*

The publications of the programmes in Group A are summarised in

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<sup>21</sup> We have recently explored this issue of attribution in the field of mental health research, using bibliometric data on funding acknowledgements associated with academic papers. See Pollitt et al. (2016).

Table 7, which adopts a simplified version of the classification system for outputs used by UNU-WIDER. It is clear a substantial number of outputs have been produced and the outputs are generally in line with the targets set for the programmes. iiG's Phase 2 is yet to capitalise on the investments made. Given the inevitable time-lags in publishing academic articles, the expectation is that these publications will soon be public.

**Table 7: Publications for Group A**

|                                  | UNU-WIDER <sup>a</sup> |           |                        | iiG       |           | IGC       |           |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|-----------|------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                                  | Phase 1                | Phase 2   | Phase 3                | Phase 1   | Phase 2   | Phase 1   | Phase 2   |
|                                  | 2008–2009              | 2010–2013 | 2014–2015 <sup>b</sup> | 2007–2012 | 2011–2015 | 2009–2013 | 2013–2016 |
| Books                            | 13                     | 18        | 4                      |           |           |           |           |
| Special journal issues           | 9                      | 11        | 12                     |           |           |           |           |
| Journal articles                 | 70                     | 181       | 133                    | 43        | 2         | 58        | 1         |
| Book chapters                    | 131                    | 253       | 63                     |           |           |           |           |
| Working papers, research reports | 178                    | 476       | 324                    | } 90      | } 11      | 102       | 7         |
| Annual lecture                   | 2                      | 4         | 2                      |           |           |           |           |
| Position papers                  | 0                      | 5         | 0                      |           |           |           |           |
| Research and policy briefs       | 7                      | 128       | 46                     |           |           |           |           |

Note: table based on data as of January 2016

<sup>a</sup> The table includes only periods in which UNU-WIDER received funding from DFID. The institute was founded in 1985 and was a well-established organisation by the time DFID made the decision to provide financial support.

<sup>b</sup> In 2014, UNU-WIDER introduced calls for papers as a feature of its research projects. While the selected researchers have largely not produced their final products yet, it is conceivable this component will influence future output metric.

The outputs of the programmes in Group B are similarly in line with expected milestones (Table 8). All three programmes started in 2011, which implies the time-lags experienced should be relatively similar. Still, comparisons are complicated by the following facts: the budgets differ, calls in each programme have run at different timeframes and the fields in which the programmes operate differ. Furthermore, the share of randomised controlled trials (RCTs) supported by GLM-LIC is highest among the Group B programmes at 50 per cent. RCTs are known to take longer to generate results.

**Table 8: Publications Group B**

|                                  | ESRC                | GLM-LIC   | PEDL  |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|---|---|
|                                  | Call 1 (2011) only* | Total (Call 1: 2011, Call 2: 2012, Call 3: 2013 ) | Total (20 ERG calls; 2011–2015, 4 MRG calls: 2012–2015, additional special calls 2011–2015) |
| Conference papers/working papers | 37                  | 12  | 42  |
| Journal articles                 | 19                  | 3   | 10  |
| Books/book chapters              | 6                   |   |   |
| Synthesis products               |                     | 5   |   |
| Research notes                   |                     |   | 25  |

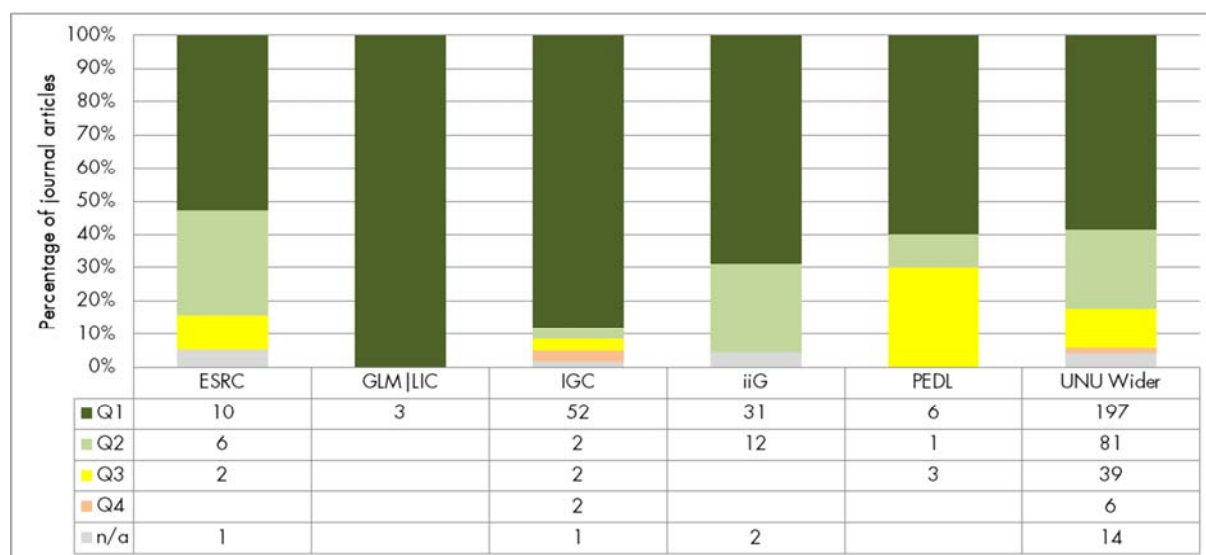
Note: table based on data as of January 2016<sup>22</sup>

\*ESRC published two more calls (call 2 in 2013 and call 3 in 2015); data on outputs associated with these calls are not available.

### 2.4.2 Quality of output

As explained in the methodology section above, we assessed the quality of outputs by looking at journal articles published by the programmes and by using the 2014 ranking of these journals using SCImago Journal Rank. Journals were then placed into quartiles within their field, from highly cited top tier journals (Q1) to less cited journals (Q4)<sup>23</sup>. Figure 2 below shows the distribution of peer-reviewed journals by journal rank quartile across each of the programmes.

**Figure 2: Percentage of journal articles from each programme by quartile of journal ranking**



<sup>22</sup> Since January, Group B programmes have continued the production of publications and the corresponding numbers may have changed rapidly. To illustrate, as of May 2016, GLM-LIC's produced 10 journal articles and 27 working papers.

<sup>23</sup> A small number of the journals are not indexed by SCImago.

Across all the programmes, 59 per cent of peer-review publications were in top-tier journals<sup>24</sup>. For Group A programmes, which have more outputs, IGC have the highest percentage of top-tier journal publications, with 88 per cent in the top quartile for their discipline. Although there are relatively fewer outputs by Group B programmes, all have more than 60 per cent of their journal publications in top-tier journals.

### *2.4.3 Utilisation of networks and resources for research and capacity building*

Collaborations with in-country partners are important, not least as part of capacity building. Building research capacity among researchers from low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) is an important component of all programmes. One way to achieve such capacity building is through joint projects between established researchers from predominantly Northern institutions and researchers from the Global South. Such collaborations imply that researchers make use of either their own existing networks or the networks provided through the programme. While it was beyond the scope of the project to disentangle the degree to which researchers rely on their own or the programme's network for collaboration, the researcher survey does provide data on the involvement of LMIC researchers in the production of outputs.

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<sup>24</sup> Journals in the top quartile for their discipline in terms of the average number of weighted citations received in 2014

Table 9 provides an overview of the self-reported interactions of programme-funded researchers with LMIC-based researchers on projects. It is clear that UNU-WIDER has had most interactions with LMIC-based researchers, especially with regards to published outputs. Despite having institutional partnerships,<sup>25</sup> the figures for iiG are lower, with 42 per cent of respondents stating they have not had any of the interactions listed. For PEDL too, the levels of interaction are lower compared to some others.<sup>26</sup> While the sample sizes are small, this still provides an indication that the interactions with LMIC-based researchers was relatively modest for iiG and PEDL.

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<sup>25</sup> iiG reported systematically on the number of publications that are co-authored with partner institutions (e.g. Lahore School of Economics (LSE) and Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI)). The milestones iiG had in place have been achieved demonstrating that institutionalised links can, on paper, lead to collaborative research (iiG Final Report).

<sup>26</sup> PEDL note that at least half of their peer-reviewed journal articles to date are authored by LMIC researchers.

**Table 9: Researcher survey – interactions with LMIC-based researchers**

| In what ways have LMIC-based researchers been involved in the outputs from your project? (absolute number in brackets) |                     |            |             |             |                   |
|--|---------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
|  | UNU-WIDER<br>(n=20) | iiG (n=12) | ESRC (n=13) | PEDL (n=60) | GLM LIC<br>(n=13) |
| Peer-reviewed publications (co-)authored by LMIC-based researchers   | 60% (12)            | 25% (3)    | 31% (4)     | 8% (5)      | 23% (3)           |
| Training workshops in LMICs  | 40% (8)             | 25% (3)    | 38% (5)     | 18% (11)    | 54% (7)           |
| Collaborated with LMIC-based researchers on dissemination/communication/impact activities                              | 50% (10)            | 33% (4)    | 54% (7)     | 28% (17)    | 54% (7)           |
| Published research outputs (co-)authored by LMIC-based researchers   | 90% (18)            | 33% (4)    | 54% (7)     | 10% (6)     | 38% (5)           |
| Consulted with LMIC-based researchers  | 65% (13)            | 50% (6)    | 46% (6)     | 43% (26)    | 85% (11)          |
| Too early to tell  | 0%                  | 0%         | 0%          | 3% (2)      | 0%                |
| Other, please specify  | 15% (3)             | 0%         | 23% (3)     | 0%          | 15% (2)           |
| None of the above  | 0%                  | 42% (5)    | 15% (2)     | 22% (13)    | 8% (1)            |

## 2.5 Value for Money

This objective refers to the degree to which programmes are able to deliver products and services of the appropriate quality, efficiently and economically. In our understanding, VfM is not synonymous to preferring the least costly intervention, but rather the one that delivers the best outcomes in relation to its inputs.

In examining the programmes' VfM, we adopted a twin-pronged approach. First, we established suitable measures of VfM and assessed what evidence is available regarding the performance of the growth programmes in relation to these measures. Second, we examined what processes the programmes had put in place to increase the likelihood of delivering VfM. Our VfM analysis is predominantly based on an analysis of available administrative documents for each programme, complemented by interviews with DFID and programme staff.

Two general limitations and caveats need to be stressed upfront. First and foremost, this comparison brings together two very distinct groups of organisations. In addition, differences in classification and recording and gaps in data availability across the six programmes pose a significant challenge, which may have obscured important variation across the six programmes.

### 2.5.1 Budget-level VfM indicators

The indicators of interest in this section are the relative size of administrative costs (ideally administrative costs should be the lowest feasible to manage the complexity of the administrative tasks necessary for the successful completion of the work) and, correspondingly, the share of programmes' resources available for research and other activities (ideally as high as is compatible with the effective and fair running of the necessary administrative and decisionmaking tasks). Generally, the administrative costs of Group B projects are broadly in line with external benchmarks set by other similar organisations, such the Strategic



Impact Evaluation Fund.<sup>27</sup> Group A programmes typically had higher administrative costs than Group B programmes. However, this indicator is susceptible to distortions. Group B programmes are generally able to distinguish two types of administrative costs – one associated with the running of the programme itself and one associated with the execution of individual projects. Group A, by contrast, may find it harder to make this distinction, which could lead to the impression of comparatively higher administrative costs, since they may encompass some of the activities that elsewhere are included in individual project budgets. The difference may therefore be accounted for by the scale and complexity of the administrative tasks required. These challenges may be compounded by differences in labelling between individual programmes and/or data gaps. In addition, where a programme cooperates closely with, or is embedded in a partner organisation, it may be difficult to separate costs borne by the programme and those covered by other sources. As such, the uncertainty surrounding the cost breakdowns among Group A programmes makes comparisons inherently difficult.

### *2.5.2 Project-level VfM indicators*

A useful indicator is the degree to which projects are completed a) on time, and b) within the specified budget. Available data indicate that no programme has been able to avoid project extensions. Cost extensions are very infrequent (occurring in 0% to 5% of the total number of projects),<sup>28</sup> while no-cost extensions are more common (25% to 83% of all projects), reflecting the nature of research in international development. Data, predominantly for Group B, also show that the final budget of research projects is generally somewhat less than originally requested in research proposals. This can be understood as a practical demonstration of the fact that proposal budgets are reviewed as part of VfM processes relating to the commissioning process.

### *2.5.3 Unit-cost indicators*

One desirable VfM component is a relatively low cost of output production, taking into consideration quality requirements and standards. In our discussion here we include only research programmes with phases that can be considered complete. The reason for this narrow scope is the fact that the inclusion of an incomplete programme would result in substantial distortions, as not all publications from ongoing research phases have been published yet. Using the programmes' total budgets as the nominator, we calculated three types of unit costs (value ranges in brackets): 1) all written output as a whole (14k–53k), 2) books, book chapters and journal articles only (28k–143k), and 3) high quality research, defined here as articles published in Q1 journals (95k–173k). These indicators do not appear substantially different from those observed in other similar contexts.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Krapels et al. (2015)

<sup>28</sup> In some instances, this is a reflection of the express prohibition of cost extensions.

<sup>29</sup> See, for instance, an evaluation of the Spanish Impact Evaluation Fund (Feinstein et al. 2012).

### 2.5.4 Process-level indicators

In addition to quantitative indicators, an important part of a VfM assessment is an examination of existing processes put in place to ensure VfM, such as research procurement processes installed by individual programmes. Box 1 includes an overview of processes around the commissioning of external research, put in place by all Group B programmes, which are broadly similar to those established by other similar organisations and which build on best practices in research procurement. However, we note their concrete operationalisation may vary.

#### Box 1: Process-level VfM indicators

|   |
|---|
| Use of the best available partners<br>Clear specification of the research required<br>Fully open international competition for research bids<br>Independent peer review of research bids<br>Scrutiny and assessment of bid costs, alongside technical review, as one of the key criteria in bid evaluation<br>Regular monitoring and progress reviews of all projects<br>Requirement for all bidders to set out, and report on, their planned research impacts<br>Ex-post evaluation of the project<br>Encouragement of thinking about the pathway to impact early on |
|---|

In addition to the items presented in the table, several additional mechanisms are present in the Group B programmes. Similarly, although their activities are not based primarily on procuring external research, we note the existence of several processes to ensure VfM among Group A programmes.

## 2.6 Policy influence

The objective on policy influence refers to the wider impact that the outputs of the programmes have had on policy and policymakers. This is the most difficult question to answer empirically and the data is more exploratory in nature than for the other objectives.

### 2.6.1 Policy relevance of output

Throughout the previous sections, reference has already been made to the dissemination of results to policymakers. To explore the policy relevance of the outputs, we reviewed two types of data on policy impact.<sup>30</sup> First, we report the data on self-reported impact from researchers;<sup>31</sup> second, we complement these results with the findings of the online focus group.

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<sup>30</sup> The results from the policy survey are also discussed in the section on 'field of engagement' (p.22).

<sup>31</sup> The researcher survey includes several questions on research dissemination and impact. Through these questions, successful applicants shared their perception of the impacts that their research has already achieved. This approach is similar to a common way of reporting on impacts arising from research in the UK today. Among UK research funders, the use of Researchfish, an online tool through which PIs report on the outputs, outcomes and impacts of their grants, is widespread. See Hinrichs et al. (2015).

The data is self-reported and is used by funders to gain insights into the impacts across their portfolio. These tools allow for relatively quick data collection, but their vulnerability is the reliance on self-reporting by researchers. While it may be possible to verify the results of some researchers, this is too laborious for the entire portfolio and hence the results are generally taken as an indication of potential impact rather than as factual record of impact. We rely on a similar approach in this section, albeit on a smaller scale.

Researchers from the different programmes report very different levels of perceived support in communicating and disseminating the results of their projects. UNU-WIDER researchers report the highest levels of support (around 30 per cent) followed by iiG. The levels of support reported by researchers in the Group B programmes are lower, but this is partly due to the fact that it is too early for dissemination to start. The stakeholders most frequently reached by the programmes are, according to the researchers, academia, policymakers in the study countries, and practitioners and NGOs in the study countries. This is an interesting observation as it may imply that the work of the programmes is reaching policymakers ‘on the ground’, rather than just in the donor countries.

Additional indications that the programmes may be reaching policymakers come from the online focus group. All participants agree that Southern governments and NGOs active in developing countries are among the most important audiences of growth research. The majority of participants answering (6 out of 8) think that the programmes are doing well in reaching these audiences, yet two participants disagree.

To further understand the type of impact that the research may have had, the researcher survey asked another two questions on impact. The answer categories of these questions were intentionally more abstract, to capture as many indications of impact as possible within the confines of a short survey.

While around half of the researchers in Group B deem it too early to detect any impact, a majority of researchers in Group A report some kind of impact. Ranging from increased knowledge to changes in policy and practice, the researchers express a perception that their work has definitely had an impact on the stakeholders. In the case of the IGC survey, 12 participants (31 per cent) thought that their project had had an impact on the research agenda, and nearly half (46 per cent) thought their project had had an impact on ‘policy discussions or on policies and practice in developing countries’. Interviewees at IGC noted that a core component of the IGC model is their in-country teams (15 country offices across 14 countries), which aim to provide support for researchers to engage in-country policymakers.

**Table 10: Researcher survey – main impacts**

| Which of the following best describes the main impacts of your project to date? (absolute number in brackets) |                     |            |                |                   |             |
|---|---------------------|------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------|
|   | UNU-WIDER<br>(n=19) | iiG (n=12) | ESRC<br>(n=13) | GLM LIC<br>(n=13) | PEDL (n=59) |
| Increased knowledge and understanding or changes to attitudes   | 68% (13)            | 67% (8)    | 38% (5)        | 46% (6)           | 50% (30)    |
| Changes to policy outcomes or practice  | 47% (9)             | 50% (6)    | 15% (2)        | 15% (2)           | 17% (10)    |
| Building capacity of researchers to carry out similar research in future                                      | 53% (10)            | 67% (8)    | 54% (7)        | 15% (2)           | 33% (19)    |
| Establishing or strengthening networks of research users  | 53% (10)            | 25% (3)    | 23% (3)        | 0%                | 19% (11)    |
| Too early to tell   | 32% (6)             | 8% (1)     | 46% (6)        | 54% (7)           | 46% (27)    |

The participants in the online focus group are in agreement that the programmes have been designed to reach a policy audience and will reach policymakers. Most participants are cautious, however, in their assessment of the actual impacts achieved. This, they report, is largely because they are not familiar enough with the specifics of the programmes, but also because it is too early to tell.

## 2.7 Cross-cutting all objectives: Theory of Change

The Theory of Change (ToC) touches upon all the activities undertaken by the programmes and incorporates the outputs and impacts they aim for. The robustness of the ToC is the last question to address, as it builds on the data collected through all the other research questions. In addition, the assessment of the ToC will assess whether or not the assumptions about how the programme will lead to outcomes and impacts are realistic.

The assessment of the robustness of the ToC is based on a review against a set of predefined criteria (Box 3), developed previously by RAND to assess the quality and robustness of theories of change.<sup>32</sup> It should be noted that DFID has adopted the use of the ToC analysis over the last few years. The quality of the ToC is in some ways a reflection of when the projects were designed.

### Box 3: ToC criteria

**Coherence:** Consistency of the approach taken

**Rationale:** The logic of the ToC

**Clarity:** Understandable ToC

**Focus:** Precise and targeted information only included in the ToC

**Measurement:** ToC can be implemented in a measurable way

**Scope:** ToC covers relevant activities and elements of strategic plan

The team was unable to find or receive a relevant ToC for iiG and DFID-ESRC as these programmes were developed before a ToC was a requirement. Although a logframe is available for these programmes, these were not sufficient to substitute for a ToC. For the other four programmes, the logframes have been used to complement the ToC, mainly to provide additional detail on the measurement of the ToC.

Comparatively, the ToC of IGC is the most recent, and is the most comprehensive and focused, displaying an elaborate understanding of the environment within which it operates. The pathway by which research can inform and shape policy and hence improve lives is given explicit attention, with clear references to existing literature. Furthermore, the ToC is clear and coherent without losing focus. By contrast, the ToC of GLM-LIC and PEDL were developed when DFID was exploring the value of ToCs and as such are much less elaborate and do not fully address the environment within which they operate.

Finally, the ToC of UNU-WIDER is in part satisfactory, but in places lacks the level of detail that would be required to really understand the planned activities and their relation to outputs, outcomes and impacts.

The theories of change appear to be an area for further attention. The differences between the ToC of the programmes reflects a development of, and change in thinking about, ToCs within DFID. As such, it is

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<sup>32</sup> These criteria have been taken from a previous non-published RAND Europe study for a higher education institution in the UK. These criteria are applied strictly to the ToCs documented, irrespective of information published elsewhere. However, information pertaining to the programmes, through documentation such as the business case and logframes, has been used to inform the review in other sections of the report.

understandable that more recent ToCs will be more developed. It remains important, however, to also revisit the older ToCs. A good ToC is obviously not a guarantee that a programme will be successful. Nor is it the case that programmes without a good ToC will definitely be unsuccessful. But a robust and elaborate TOC, as in the case of IGC, does communicate an understanding of the environment within which a programme must operate and position itself. Furthermore, a clear and public ToC can also create a shared understanding between the programme, donor, and researchers of what the programme seeks to achieve and how. Such clarity can help stakeholders to align their interests and intentions and could contribute to the success of a programme.

## 3 Group A and B comparison

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### 3.1 Introduction: two models of research

One of the underlying issues driving the study is the comparison of the performance of the Group A and Group B programmes. For several years DFID has supported research institutions dedicated to economic growth research: the Group A programmes. In more recent years, however, a new model of commissioning research has been developed. Rather than providing funding to institutions that would carry out the research themselves, new funding vehicles have been set up through which researchers from all over the world are invited to apply: the Group B programmes.<sup>33</sup> Through these vehicles, research can be steered into the directions deemed important by the funder, in consultation with stakeholders such as researchers and beneficiaries. Given their relative newness in the growth research portfolio, the Group B programmes have not been able to deliver the same number of outputs as the Group A programmes have, which means direct comparisons of the entire programme are not possible. Nevertheless, the programmes can be compared on a number of other dimensions, ranging from the commissioning or planning of research to the running of research projects.

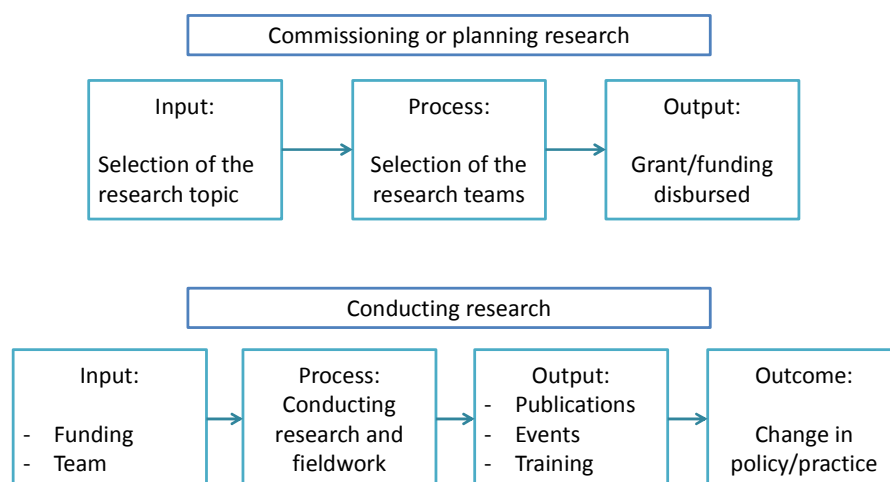
A simple logic model can provide a straightforward framework to structure the comparison between the two types of programme. Both types of programme seek to generate high-quality policy-relevant research, yet the process by which research is commissioned or planned differs. We can, therefore, specify two short logic models to cover: 1) the process of planning/commissioning research; and 2) the process by which research is conducted. While these are very simplified representations of reality, they do draw our attention to the key stages of the entire ‘research lifecycle’. The two logic models are shown in Figure 3 and the steps of each will be used to steer the comparison.

The differences that arise between these two groups along the steps of the logic models can be viewed as trade-offs. Over the course of the review, it has become clear that there is no perfect model. Both models have clear merits and drawbacks and the decision to choose one or the other will require a balance between them. The observations which follow aim to highlight these trade-offs, which are based on the relative performance of the programmes as discussed in the previous sections.

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<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that IGC have moved away from this model in their second phase of funding (Phase II), and now hold open calls for proposals more akin to Group B programmes since 2012.

**Figure 3: Logic models commissioning/planning and conducting research**



## 3.2 Commissioning or planning of research

### 3.2.1 Selection of the research topics and themes

A first and substantial difference is visible in the way topics are selected for research. Group A programmes tend to work according to longer-term research agendas that are developed by senior leadership, possibly in conjunction with input from an oversight board and other stakeholders. By contrast, the themes that form the basis of the calls for proposals of Group B have received direct guidance from DFID. While consultation of the Group A programmes with DFID appears to have increased in recent years, a trade-off still remains in the extent to which DFID provides guidance and steering to the selection of research topics. This is clear, for example, in the case of gender, where the gender dimension has been very explicitly introduced in the work of the Group B programmes following clear instructions from DFID.

An additional difference may lie in the degree to which programmes are able to achieve coordination and linkages among individual projects conducted within defined research themes. In the absence of pre-defined research projects, and the selection of individual projects from externally submitted proposals, Group B programmes relinquish some degree of control over the content of funded projects. As such, there may be limited overlap and coordination within the body of research that gets funded. By contrast, Group A programmes may be in a better position to exercise control over the content of individual research projects and thus develop a coherent portfolio of research in one particular subtopic, should this be desired. The Group B programmes can have the benefit of greater openness to new ideas, however. As the outputs of Group B are still largely in progress, it is difficult to draw conclusions on this point, yet we will return to it briefly below.

### 3.2.2 Selection of the research teams

The process by which research teams are selected is one of the most obvious differences between Group A and B. Whereas the Group A programmes allocate funding internally, the Group B programmes run open calls for proposals followed by structured selection processes. In theory, the institutionalised practices of

Group B should make the selection of successful ideas and research teams more open.<sup>34</sup> In the particular case of DFID-ESRC and GLM-LIC, however, there have been some concerns expressed over openness and perceived fairness. Still, the steps by which projects are funded in Group B are clearer and better documented than the steps by which Group A programmes arrive at funding decisions.

### *3.2.3 Grants/funding disbursed*

Once decisions on funding are made, the funding for research will be disbursed, in the case of the Group B programmes through grants. As both the decisions on funding and their disbursement are internal for Group A programmes, it seems these programmes experience fewer delays in getting research started. In the case of Group A, a funder ‘buys into’ an existing research infrastructure which is ready to conduct work. This process is almost inevitably quicker than running calls for proposals in which the various steps of the process can cause delays. Issues around the timeliness of the Group B programmes have been voiced in the interviews and observed in the Annual Reviews.

The upside of the more elaborate call for proposals does appear to be a wider reach. Through the open call, researchers can be pulled into new directions. Economists and other academics who previously did not work on developing countries can be persuaded to take an interest in developing problems through the availability of substantial and prestigious grants. As such, field-building,<sup>35</sup> as it is known in philanthropy, is an important strength of the Group B programmes. On the basis of the available data, two main observations can be made on the work of Group B so far:

1. The three programmes have been successful in mobilising some of the world’s most renowned research institutions in the area of economic growth research. A substantial number of researchers are very dependent on these programmes and are concerned their projects would have been abandoned without it.
2. However, the pool of researchers funded is relatively small. A small number of institutions (and to some extent individuals) accounts for a large share of projects and the share of LMIC-based researchers is very limited. An exception might be the PEDL programme, which has been able to reach a large number of early career researchers, yet most of these are also at the established institutions.

These two contrasting observations are not uncommon and point towards a funding conundrum that other research initiatives in international development have also experienced, and which can be referred to as the merit–equity trade-off. It is the tension that can exist between expanding the pool of researchers and funding the highest quality proposals.

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<sup>34</sup> In the particular case of DFID-ESRC and GLM-LIC, however, there have been some concerns over communication and perceived fairness.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Petrovich (2013).



## 3.3 Conducting research

### 3.3.1 *Funding and team*

The nature of the Group A programmes, as institutions, means that the funding situation of their resident researchers is more stable than that of the researchers funded through the Group B programmes. This stability and continuity seems to have provided research teams of Group A programmes with the time needed to develop genuine research partnerships with researchers and institutions from LMICs.

### 3.3.2 *Conducting research and fieldwork*

Once research has started and is ongoing, the processes by which progress is measured are generally more comprehensive among the Group B programmes. To ensure accountability and demonstrate Value for Money, the Group B programmes have all adopted regular monitoring and progress reviews of all projects. Such processes to ensure projects are on track, and to identify projects that are delayed, are less explicitly present among the Group A programmes, although this does not necessarily mean that monitoring arrangements are absent.

### 3.3.3 *The outputs from research*

The more recent establishment of the Group B programmes means that the data on outputs and impacts is incomplete. Comparisons are therefore more difficult, but on the basis of the interviews, in particular, a few observations can be made. First, several interviewees noted that in the case of Group B programmes, the short-term nature of research grants and the pressure to demonstrate impact may lead to an almost exclusive focus on micro-economic research. Macro-economic research, investigating how, for example, entire economies, countries or institutions develop, might not be funded through these vehicles as it may not be possible to readily adopt the outputs into policy or practice. The stability of a research institution might be needed to allow researchers to explore the macro environment of economic growth.

Second, as mentioned above, the portfolio of research funded through Group B programmes has the potential to be more fragmented than the work conducted by Group A programmes. The leadership of Group B programmes will need to constantly ensure that the different projects commissioned are in line with the topics identified at the start of the project. It will be important to find a balance between novel ideas of individual projects and overall coherence in the portfolio.

### 3.3.4 *The outcomes and impacts of research*

At the moment it is difficult to compare the programmes on outputs for two reasons. First, it is too soon for the Group B programmes to collect data on impacts. The projects commissioned in the first round are only just producing outputs, which means that wider outcomes and impacts will follow in the future. Second, the data currently available from the programmes on impact is very heterogeneous and cannot be compared directly. Still, a number of interesting insights have been gathered, over the course of the project, on the potential for impact arising from growth research, which we will discuss below.

One observation to conclude with is that some impact evidenced by Group A programmes can be considered a result of their long-term work and engagement with, and presence in, LMICs. This longevity

is an advantage over Group B programmes, which were established only recently and, due to the nature of their modus operandi, would not necessarily be expected to develop networks and connections of similar depth. This difference may be to some extent compensated for by personal networks of individual researchers funded by Group B; however, the lack of Group B impact data does not allow an assessment of this possibility.

## 4 Conclusion and recommendations

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**First, the pool of researchers funded through the programmes is relatively narrow.** Especially in the case of Group B programmes, there appear to be a small number of Northern institutions that account for a large number of projects. This may not necessarily be the result of a conscious choice, but rather may flow from a combination of the ambition to fund the ‘highest quality’ of research and the relative newness of the field. The supply of high-quality researchers may be limited and researchers at renowned institutions generally score well on the quality criteria used for the selection of projects. An expansion of the pool of researchers might mean funding research teams who do not necessarily score as well on the quality criteria. This conundrum can be referred to as ‘merit versus equity’ and is unlikely to simply be solved by the programmes themselves. The research that will eventually be funded will depend on the incentives the programmes receive, for example, from donors. If donors demand the highest quality of research, there is a risk that the pool of researchers funded will be small, and consequently the maintenance of a long-term platform to deliver high-quality research may be weakened. Different incentives may be required if a different outcome is desired.

**Second, communication and openness on existing processes is a concern for both types of programme, albeit in different ways.** Processes to ensure Value for Money and quality assurance are less explicit among the Group A programmes. This does not mean that quality is not reviewed or monitored, it simply means that more explicit procedures of review could enhance the clarity of the programmes. While a risk exists that new procedures are overly burdensome, improvements for Group A programmes could be as simple as making the quality criteria by which projects are selected explicit.

With regard to the Group B programmes, potential problems around communication and perceived fairness have been discussed. While some of the complaints about the programmes can be seen as a result of disappointment, the consistency of the comments by a number of unsuccessful applicants to DFID-ESRC suggests the need for additional attention to the peer-review process in the next calls.

**Third, despite a widespread view that there has been improvement in recent years, the element of gender is still not systematically incorporated in the work of the programmes and it appears there is scope for improvement.** It is clear that not all growth research undertaken by the programmes lends itself to a thorough investigation of gender, which means that there is not a singular and simple way to incorporate the gender component. Still, while it may not be applicable to all work, gender considerations can helpfully be built into more research projects from the start. The Group B programmes are more explicit in this respect, but that is a likely reflection of the explicit attention that DFID paid to gender in the design of the programmes.

**Fourth, there is evidence from the Group B programmes that their setup allows for the research themes to adapt to new topics.** This is important in an environment where there are both changes in developing countries and changes in the state of knowledge. A new call provides the flexibility to align the topics of interest with current interests. The programmes within Group A often define work plans for a longer period of time. While there is also flexibility within these programmes to shift attention to new topics, this might not allow the same flexibility to shift to new topics in the way the Group B programmes do.

**Fifth, the Group B programmes appear to have developed processes around the selection of research topics that take both the academic as well as the policy interest into account.** Ideally, these interests overlap, but in practice they do not always coincide. Through consultation with DFID and academic stakeholders at the start of the call, as well as through the freedom that remains for researchers to submit new ideas in proposals, a balance seems to have been found in the processes of theme selection in Group B.

**Sixth, there are trade-offs around the ability to synthesise the research conducted through the different programmes.** In the Group A programmes, the incentives to focus on research synthesis are not always present, even if the body of work might lend itself to it. By contrast, the setup of the Group B programmes has incorporated the incentive to synthesise, yet the underlying work is likely to be more diffuse. One recommendation around the ability to synthesise the research commissioned through Group B is to consider this in the design of a call. Calls need to find a balance between being narrow enough to allow for synthesis and wide enough to include new ideas. Focusing calls on particular topic areas or around specific policy questions, can increase the possibility of synthesising the research arising from the Group B programmes. This is an approach also used by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), for example. Important is that, when appropriate, the call should be partly designed from the perspective of synthesis. In addition, good practice includes convening the researchers of a call halfway through, and at the end of a grant cycle, which may encourage thinking about the common lessons arising from the research funded. At conferences the researchers from a single call could exchange ideas with each other and with policymakers to create an understanding of where the need and potential for synthesis lies.

**Seventh, as the six programmes are generally embedded within existing institutions with governance requirements, we identified no real concerns around governance.** The only elements of governance that appear to warrant further attention are quality assurance processes and the representation of LMIC stakeholders on the boards of the programmes.

**Finally, a lot of programmes have developed interesting and useful processes or practices around the measurement of impact, the development of a Theory of Change and Value for Money. Mutual learning could improve the practices at the programmes, both Group A and B, and this might be an area in which DFID could take initiative.** As the (sole) funder of these programmes DFID could coordinate cross-programme learning, which could benefit all programmes.

## 4.1 Securing impact

Over the coming years the research funded will need to yield results in terms of policy impacts. To support the programmes in achieving impact, and to ensure that the research is used effectively, a number of suggestions around ‘impact’ have been made over the course of the project:

1. It will be important to focus not just on the impact of individual studies, but on the contributions made by a body of work. Several interviewees commented on the importance of the lessons that can be learned from multiple studies. The role of research synthesis will therefore be increasingly important to ensure that the wider lessons and policy implications of research are captured. Evaluation methods that focus on the impacts of individual studies may

miss important 'meta-contributions'. With regard to the Group B programmes, this further necessitates the need to monitor and manage the body of work they have commissioned. The added value of Group B programmes lies in their capacity to gather a wide group of researchers around certain topics. Once the research has been conducted however, the programme can continue to add value by ensuring that the implications of the body of work commissioned are studied and communicated to policymakers.

2. Once policy lessons and recommendations emerge from research it is crucial that these are 'translated' and communicated to policymakers. The data collected shows that Southern policymakers and NGOs active in the Global South are important audiences for growth research. To ensure they are engaged, it will be important to include local stakeholders, and ideally local researchers, early on in the project. Inclusion of local stakeholders should therefore be part of research design and cannot simply be added on once the research is finished. This may be more challenging for the Group B programmes. Modifications to how grants are designed might be needed to ensure that research translation actually occurs.
3. Impact takes time, however, and time-lags need to be taken into account. While some impact evaluations have the capacity to directly change programmes, other growth research can take longer to result in changes in policy and practice.
4. Still, despite the time-lags and the inherent difficulties, it would be useful for the programmes to (continue to) systematically collect data on the outcomes of research. Many researchers already complete surveys on outputs and impacts for their grants, especially in the UK and for Group B, which means that new streams of data collection may not be required, as existing data is available.
5. Many stakeholders agree that policy impact takes time to arise and time-lags exist between research being conducted and the impacts that result from it. The Group A programmes, by their institutional nature, seem to have an infrastructure in place to ensure that links and connections with key policy stakeholders are maintained, even after individual pieces of research are completed. There is a risk that this infrastructure cannot be maintained for the Group B programmes once all the grants have been disbursed. If the programmes are closed at the end of the grant cycles, then the interactions of researchers with policymakers can no longer be monitored and maintained, which might mean opportunities for (and evidence of) impact are lost.

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