

Management Response & Recommendations Action Plan

Evaluation Report Title: Mid-Term Evaluation of DFID's Health Research Programme Consortia

Response to Evaluation Report (overarching narrative)

This report relates to the synthesis of findings from a mid-term evaluation of the nine DFID funded health Research Programme Consortia (RPCs). Drawing on findings from individual programmes, the Mott MacDonald team showed a good understanding of the RPC funding modality and its additional value to development research.

In particular, the report usefully highlights the practical challenges faced by RPCs collectively and identifies opportunities for the modality to deliver at a more strategic level through: increased coherence/collaboration within and across programmes; improved engagement with DFID globally; increased focus on measuring impact; clarification on scope of capacity building initiatives; and a more standardised value for money framework. A number of the recommendations are more pertinent to any future rounds of RPC funding than existing programmes.

The evaluation team were professional and responsive, and engaged well with both DFID and programme staff. Their efforts to adhere to set (and very tight) timescales were particularly appreciated. There was a high level of relevant academic, research and evaluation experience within the team although the group might have benefitted from increased development expertise.

The lessons from this evaluation are of relevance not only to the Health Research Team but also to other research teams working with RPCs and, indeed, to other parts of DFID engaged in the development of evidence and capacity building to improve policy and practice.

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Recommendations	Accepted or Rejected	If “Accepted”, Action plan for Implementation or if “Rejected”, Reason for Rejection
1. DFID should consider developing clearer guidance as to the extent to which the work of RPCs should focus on DFID priority countries	Accept	To be taken forward in the context of any future RPC funding rounds
2. Each RPC should develop and implement a clear gender and equity strategy	Partially Accept	To be taken forward in context of any future RPC funding rounds – likely to be more appropriate to some RPCs than others
3. In order to ensure the relevance of second phase RPCs, the focus should shift from innovation to adding value	Reject	Recommendation rejected on the basis that each RPC funding round is subject to an open tendering exercise against fresh Terms of Reference – second phase RPCs don’t exist.
4. Cross-RPC collaborations on matters of common interest should be strongly encouraged (and even occasionally organised) by DFID.	Accept	DFID already encourages cross-RPC working and will seek to further strengthen this as appropriate.
5. DFID and RPCs should discuss ways in which engagement with DFID technical staff could be improved, drawing on and analysing experiences of where this has worked well	Accept	The DFID Health Research Team will seek appropriate opportunities to encourage discussion /engagement on this issue with both RPCs and relevant DFID staff.

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Recommendations	Accepted or Rejected	If “Accepted”, Action plan for Implementation or if “Rejected”, Reason for Rejection
6. RPC programmes should aim to achieve both intellectual coherence (including interdisciplinary) and local relevance (through responsiveness to local problems)	Accept	This recommendation has been reflected by Mott in individual RPC programme reports, and annual reviews as appropriate. It will be considered further in the context of the evaluation criteria for any future RPC funding round
7. DFID should consider ways of encouraging RPCs to take a more Knowledge, Translation, Exchange (KTE) informed approach to knowledge translation	Partially Accept	To inform ongoing discussions with existing RPCs as appropriate, and be considered more fully in the context of any future RPC funding rounds –likely to be more appropriate to some RPCs than others
8. More explicit expectations of RPCs in terms of capacity building should be set out by DFID, as it has done in other areas such as research uptake	Partially Accept	DFID will seek appropriate opportunities to encourage existing RPCs to share ideas and experience. DFID will consider further in the context of any RPC future funding rounds
9. Greater use of theories of change and qualitative measures might be considered to measure programme effectiveness	Accept	DFID will encourage RPCs to reflect on their Theories of Change in Annual Reports, and to consider the inclusion of qualitative milestones (and how to measure these) in any logframe amendments
10. Rather than specifying how RPCs are to be managed, the specific and required management tasks expected should be made clear, with flexibility as to how they are organised	Reject	The current structure has been developed in light of experience and recommendations from a previous review. DFID allows for some flexibility within the current framework, but to remove this completely would risk a re-emergence of previous issues.

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Recommendations	Accepted or Rejected	If "Accepted", Action plan for Implementation or if "Rejected", Reason for Rejection
11. The issue of financial underspends needs to be addressed	Accept	Budgeting issues have been reflected by Mott in individual RPC programme reports, and annual reviews as appropriate. DFID will consider issuing guidance on budget setting in the context of any future RPC funding rounds
12. RPCs need to have measures in place to ensure good performance of partners, including addressing poor performance where this occurs	Accept	DFID routinely assesses RPC's management of poor partner performance in annual reviews. DFID to consider further in the context of any future funding rounds
13. DFID and the RPCs might consider ways of ensuring that Consortium Advisory Groups work well and add value	Accept	DFID will continue to address through ongoing management of existing RPCs; and by encouraging RPCs to share ideas and experience. DFID to consider further in the context of any future funding rounds
14. DFID should consider working with RPCs to develop more structured guidance on assessing RPC Value for Money	Partially Accept	The Health Research Team will circulate DFID's approach to Value for Money to RPCs, and seek opportunities to encourage RPCs to share ideas and experience
15. Exchange rates should be included in the annual project budget for each partner to facilitate accurate forecasting and identify where significant movement is impacting on the actual budget received	Reject	RPCs are free to include exchange rate data in partner budget information, but rates cannot be fixed. The risks associated with exchange rate fluctuations rests with programmes, as per the terms of contracts. If exchange rate fluctuations are severely impacting on programme delivery, RPCs should discuss with DFID on an exceptions basis

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16. DFID may want to allow lead organisations to advance funds to smaller partners (subject to a good financial reporting track record) up to a set limit to relieve cash flow constraints on implementation	Partially Accept	Subject to approval by DFID on a case by case basis and on the basis of demonstrated need. A change in DFID policy now allows for this on an exceptions basis
17. RPCs should aim to report more explicitly against DFID's Value for Money criteria	Accept	Links to recommendation 14 above. DFID's Value for Money approach is likely to be a useful framework for RPC reporting
18. RPCs should be asked to report explicitly on additional funding they have leveraged	Reject	Experience indicates that this particular recommendation is difficult to implement in practice. The underlying issues related to RPC leveraging of funds will be considered further in the context of any future RPC funding rounds.
19. To ensure best value, the RPC should be encouraged to verify partner salary rates are in line with the partner institutions' own pay scales and that recruitment follows competitive processes	Accept	To be taken forward in the context of any RPC funding rounds
20. RPCs should be encouraged to adopt an inclusive and considered approach to choice of journal outlet when publishing research	Accept	The DFID Health Research Team will seek appropriate opportunities to further encourage discussion /engagement on this issue with RPCs

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21. RPCs should be encouraged to continue to think of impacts beyond those on academia	Accept	This represents a strengthening/evolution of DFID's current approach. The DFID Health Research Team will seek appropriate opportunities to further encourage discussion /engagement on this issue with RPCs
22. DFID might consider streamlining renewals and starting the process earlier	Reject	DFID procurement policy prohibits an assumption of renewal. DFID will begin any future tendering exercise for RPC funding as early as possible once the decision is made to proceed on that basis
23. DFID should consider whether further action is needed to strengthen research leadership from LMICs	Accept	To be considered in the context of any future RPC funding rounds. DFID is welcoming of Southern leads.
24. Any final evaluation of the current round of RPCs should focus on lessons learned concerning impact and sustainability	Accept in principle	At this juncture, DFID has no plans to undertake a further evaluation of all nine health RPCs
25. DFID should ensure that expectations of future evaluations are matched with sufficient time and resources	Partially Accept	It is incumbent upon bidders as well DFID to ensure that the scope of work is fully understood and resources allocated accordingly
26. DFID should consider including, in future evaluations, the need for impact-focused case studies	Accept	DFID will continue to encourage RPCs to produce impact focussed case studies in the remainder of their funding period.