



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



Research for better aid: an evaluation of DFAT's investments

Office of Development Effectiveness

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Cover photograph: Scientists work on improving a new cholera vaccine inside a lab at the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh. *Photo: Conor Ashleigh for AusAID*

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Foreword

In announcing the new Australian aid policy in June 2014, the Minister for Foreign Affairs emphasised that *'Innovation will be the watch word; Innovation will drive the way we deliver aid.'* A critical precursor to aid innovation is the availability and use of good-quality research. This ODE evaluation explores how research investment can be best managed to ensure DFAT supports aid innovation and high-quality aid program and policy decision-making.

The evaluation focuses on whether the management of DFAT's considerable development research investment has been appropriate, effective and efficient. Employing a multi-dimensional evaluation method, it draws on the experiences of DFAT staff and stakeholders, as well as the available expenditure data, in arriving at a set of well-supported findings and recommendations.

The report makes several important points about the need for DFAT to have a clear sense about why and how it funds research. The department's managers and officers need especially to be conscious of the effectiveness and efficiency risks implicit in their highly devolved form of research investment management. These risks will be reduced if robust knowledge management systems and a strong culture of research use are embedded in the department. The experience of other aid donors indicates that achieving this will be a significant challenge.

The evaluation also makes a finding with clear implications for the way the department engages with research institutions in partner countries. It shows that, while the department's research funding to Australian institutions increased significantly from 2005 to 2013, the level of direct funding to partner country institutions did not increase to the same extent and was, indeed, flat over the last five years of that period. There are clear benefits to be had in building research capacity in those institutions, either directly or through partnerships with Australian and international researchers. Given Australia's ongoing investment in the Pacific, this may be a region in which future research funding can be focused.

I recommend this report as a clear, thoughtful investigation of an element of DFAT's work that is essential if the department is to achieve the sort of aid innovation and well-targeted aid investment to which it aspires.



Jim Adams

Chair, Independent Evaluation Committee

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Acknowledgments

This evaluation was jointly conducted by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and Thomas Davis from the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE). The ODI team was led by John Young and included Stephen Sherlock, Tiina Pasanen, Louise Shaxson and Harry Jones. Helen Cheney from ODE provided oversight and guidance.

The evaluation was undertaken from August 2013 to April 2014. The data gathering took place over the period of the integration of AusAID with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Any references to AusAID in the report relate to the former agency; to the extent possible, the report has been modified to reflect the new, integrated DFAT.

The evaluation team would like to thank the following for their contributions to the review, production and communication of the evaluation: Ian Bignall, Rebecca Devitt, Hazel Lang, Elise Cole, Andrew Egan and Fleur Davies from DFAT; Dereck Rooker-Smith and David Slattery from ODE; and Meghan Cooper from the ACFID-University Network.

Executive summary

The Australian aid program can build on its history of supporting development research

Research-based evidence contributes to development innovation and high-quality aid policy and programming. The Australian aid program has long recognised the importance of research to its work. Indicative of this is that the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) (and, before that, AusAID) grew its investment in research from \$19 million in 2005–06 to more than \$181 million in 2012–13—a rate of increase significantly higher than that of its programmable aid.

DFAT's research investment is decentralised, with 97 per cent being managed directly by individual country and thematic programs. Around 60 per cent of that investment goes to Australian research institutions and individuals, contributing to their being the fourth-largest deliverers of Australian aid. These relationships are usually multiyear in nature and managed through partnership and grant arrangements.

This Office of Development Effectiveness evaluation assesses the degree to which DFAT's aid investment in research has been appropriate, effective and efficient, and provides recommendations for improving the future management of its research investment. It does not assess aid research conducted by other Australian Government Departments under their own budget appropriations.

The evaluation makes nine key findings and four recommendations.

DFAT's development research investment is largely appropriate ...

Since 2005–06, around 3 per cent of DFAT's administered aid budget has been spent on research, which is in line with other aid donors. DFAT investment in research has been appropriate in that it has correlated with aid priorities, a minor exception being the comparatively low expenditure on education research. DFAT staff generally agree that the research funded by the department is of good quality. The research is considered to have value, even though its full potential, as measured by the degree to which it is used within DFAT, is not always realised.

... but there is a lack of clarity around the department's expectations

The DFAT website contains a general endorsement of the value of research in improving the quality and effectiveness of Australian aid. With the exception of statements on agricultural, fisheries and medical research in the June 2014 aid policy, however, there is currently a lack of clear policy direction around the priorities, preferred management processes and desired quality standards of DFAT's development research investment. DFAT aid staff also expressed uncertainty about senior management support of research.

Recommendation 1

- i DFAT should issue a clear policy on the priorities, preferred management processes and quality standards of the department's investment in development research.
 - ii As part of its policy on development research, DFAT should encourage operational areas to maintain their development research expenditure at recent levels.
-

Applied research that focuses on program and investment-level needs is the most likely to be taken up by DFAT

The degree to which DFAT realises the potential value of its research investment through the uptake of research products is highly variable. A little over half of the surveyed staff saw active take-up (e.g. direct use in policy, program or investment design) of the last piece of research they commissioned. This take-up was not consistent across all research investments. The evaluation found that short-term analysis and applied research directed at specific program or investment-level design and implementation is the research output most likely to be used.

'Global public good' and policy-focused research is the least likely to be taken up

While DFAT funds some good longer-term, 'global public good' and policy-focused research, the evaluation finds that, on the whole, this form of research is not effectively taken up by departmental decision-makers. DFAT staff perceived that there was a low level of demand for this form of research by senior managers. However, the capacity of senior managers to understand and manage future development opportunities and risks is enhanced by close engagement with research on global and regional development issues.

Recommendation 2

DFAT senior executive should require that research-based evidence be used in policy and longer-term planning around global and regional development issues. This evidence should be clearly cited in policy and planning documents.

Developing country researchers receive the least funding of all DFAT research partners

DFAT funding to developing country researchers did not significantly increase between 2007–08 and 2012–13, with the result that Australian, international and multilateral and bilateral research partners all now receive higher levels of investment than developing country partners. While some Australian institutions, such as the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, forward a significant amount of their DFAT funding to developing country institutions, the comparatively low level of DFAT's direct engagement with developing country researchers sits uneasily with aid policy statements on the importance of building partner 'capacity'. It is also at odds with evidence on the benefit of local research to partner government decision-making.

Recommendation 3

- i DFAT should clarify its criteria for directly investing in developing country research institutions, and
 - ii DFAT should commit to increasing its investment in institutions that meet these criteria.
-

DFAT has a low level of research governance and coordination

The benefit of DFAT's decentralised model of research investment is that it places decision-making on funding in the hands of managers most likely to use the research outputs. While DFAT staff are generally satisfied with the cost-efficiency of the research outputs they receive for their individual investments, a lack of effective research governance and coordination creates agency-wide efficiency risks. These include unintended duplication of research; high transaction costs in ensuring research projects set and achieve appropriate goals; user difficulty in locating research outputs; user misinterpretations of research findings; and, ultimately, a reduction in the amount of timely, good-quality evidence available to policy and program decision-makers.

DFAT research managers can go further in analysing the value for money of their investments

The level of DFAT research investment going through competitive grants schemes remained comparatively low between 2007–08 and 2011–12. In contrast to this, DFAT has a significant number of long-term relationships with research institutions and individuals. Open sourcing of researchers can reduce direct costs and create opportunities for new researchers, including developing country researchers, to enter the market. On the other hand, long-term, well-managed relationships improve communication between research users and suppliers, lowering transaction costs and improving research uptake (and hence value). While the evidence was not conclusive, the evaluation found that DFAT managers could do more to balance these two sides of the value-for-money equation when making research investment decisions.

DFAT needs to invest more in knowledge management and knowledge intermediaries

The value obtained from DFAT's research investment is constrained by limited investment in knowledge management systems and knowledge intermediaries, even while the amount of research being funded has increased. Research users and commissioners face significant hurdles in locating research the department has previously funded. This is compounded by the low numbers of DFAT staff who act as knowledge intermediaries capable of promoting communication between the department and researchers around research needs, quality and ethical standards. Such intermediaries can also assist in improving the level and quality of internal departmental communication around research.

DFAT has research management skills deficiencies that require redressing

All the various forms of qualitative evidence collected for this evaluation suggested that there exist among DFAT staff a number of skills gaps in relation to research management. The key deficiencies identified were in knowing what was feasible to ask of researchers and then how to understand and use what researchers produced. Some research management skills can be appropriately regarded as being a subset of the 'generalist' program manager skill set. Others, especially around the assessment of research quality and ethics, are more specialised. Ensuring an appropriate, department-wide balance of specialist and generalist research management skills has implications for workforce planning, career and performance incentives, and staff training.

Recommendation 4

- i DFAT should invest in a research governance and coordination system that lowers the current risk of department-wide inefficiencies in development research investment.
 - ii As part of its research governance and coordination, DFAT should clarify the standards it expects of departmental management of research investments. It should then enforce and support those standards through departmental guidelines, appropriate resourcing, planning (including workforce planning) and staff training. Where possible, this process should link with and support existing departmental activities, such as contracts management, improvements in knowledge management systems and the development of a workforce plan.
-

Management response

DFAT welcomes the findings of this review of the department's investments in development research. The review confirms the value of investing in research to improve the quality and effectiveness of Australia's aid program. Reflecting the government's development policy, *Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability*, DFAT aims to deliver an aid program that is increasingly innovative, promotes learning and influences partners to scale up successful models. This approach depends on our ability to build a strong evidence base through rigorous research methodologies. We need effective approaches to designing, managing and communicating research, particularly research focused on building our knowledge of 'what works' (and what doesn't work). Geographic areas, thematic teams, the innovation hub and the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) will all have important roles to play in strengthening DFAT's approach to development research, evidence-based programming, and knowledge management. DFAT's knowledge management work will support strengthened engagement with research and evidence, including through collaboration and knowledge sharing in the context of thematic communities of practice.

DFAT agrees with recommendations 2 and 4, and agrees in part with recommendations 1 and 3. Recommendations relating to funding levels are not agreed as DFAT's funding for research will continue to be allocated based on specific program needs and context.

Response to evaluation recommendations

Recommendation 1 i DFAT should issue a clear policy on the priorities, preferred management processes and quality standards of the department's investment in development research. ii As part of its policy on development research, DFAT should encourage operational areas to maintain their development research expenditure at recent levels.	Agree in part	Priorities for DFAT's research investments align with the research requirements of our sectoral, thematic, country, regional and global programs in line with <i>Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability</i>. Funding for research will continue to be allocated by geographic and thematic areas in response to specific program needs and opportunities. As an evidence-based organisation, DFAT provides guidance for staff on development research and use of evidence, including in identifying and scaling up successful approaches. We will continue to review and update our advice on planning, procurement, monitoring and evaluation, ethics, standards, effectively using research, partnerships and building capacity. This will reflect the department's work to strengthen knowledge management and foster innovation. DFAT promotes open access to major DFAT-funded research outputs, along with the production of policy-relevant communication materials.
Recommendation 2 DFAT senior executive should require that research-based evidence be used in policy and longer-term planning around global and regional development issues. This evidence should be clearly cited in policy and planning documents.	Agree	DFAT is committed to the use of evidence to support decision-making, including the use of research evidence to inform long-term development policy and planning. For example, Aid Investment Plans being developed for country and regional programs are based on economic, political and social analysis that includes drawing on research findings. The department's efforts to make knowledge management a core part of our organisational culture and systems will also support better engagement with evidence, including research.
Recommendation 3 i DFAT should clarify its criteria for directly investing in developing country research institutions, and ii DFAT should commit to increasing its investment in institutions that meet these criteria.	Agree in part	DFAT invests in developing country research institutions where these investments are in Australia's, our partner countries' and/or regional interests, where they promote growth and reduce poverty, and offer value for money and robust results. The nature of DFAT's investments in such institutions will take various forms, depending on the particular operational context and organisational needs of the research institution in question, and may include financial assistance, technical advice and/or other types of capacity development support.
Recommendation 4 i DFAT should invest in a research governance and coordination system that lowers the current risk of department-wide inefficiencies in development research investment. ii As part of its research governance and coordination, DFAT should clarify the standards it expects of departmental management of research investments. It should then enforce and support those standards through departmental guidelines, appropriate resourcing, planning (including workforce planning) and staff training. Where possible, this process should link with and support existing departmental activities, such as contracts management, improvements in knowledge management systems and the development of a workforce plan.	Agree	DFAT's Development Policy Committee plays an important role in strategic oversight of DFAT's investment in research, and in ensuring our development policies and strategies are based on evidence. DFAT's capability and change management program includes actions to improve strategic planning and prioritisation, workforce planning, strategic thinking, innovation and knowledge management. We are working to enhance our information systems to make research and evidence more accessible, and looking at new ways to support collaboration, knowledge and evidence sharing, including through networks and communities of practice on specific themes. DFAT will leverage its investments in improving the department's knowledge management systems to support better use of evidence, including research. As noted in response to recommendation 1, DFAT continues to review and update guidance for staff on effective management of research.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and context for evaluation

This report evaluates the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) investment in development research, and provides recommendations for improving DFAT's future management of research investment in this area.

Research is critical to facilitating development innovation. The guiding policy of the Australian aid program, *Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability (Australian aid)*, argues that greater innovation is needed in Australian aid. In essence, innovation involves 'creating value from knowledge',¹ and much of that knowledge is drawn from research.

Research also strengthens the evidence available to policy and program decision-makers. This was recognised by both the 2014 Senate Inquiry into Australia's Overseas Aid and Development Assistance Program and the 2011 Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness. The latter saw development-related research as being so important to effective aid that it could potentially be a 'flagship' program.² More broadly, the 2010 *Blueprint for reform of Australian Government administration* recommends that Australian Government agencies should reinvigorate and establish 'new relationships with academia and research institutions' to enhance their policy capability.³

DFAT makes significant financial investment in development research, with \$181.5 million allocated in 2012–13.^a

The current evaluation is justified because of the importance of research to effective, innovative aid, the associated need to maximise the benefit from DFAT's research investment, and the lack of any prior independent evaluation of that investment. Although a number of individual DFAT-funded research projects have been evaluated and the aid program's international research partnerships have been independently reviewed (in an unpublished report),⁴ this ODE evaluation is the first to look at DFAT's approach to research as a whole.

1.2 Overview of research in DFAT

DFAT (previously AusAID) spent more than \$685 million on development-related research investments in the six years from 2007–08 to 2012–13, equating to approximately 3 per cent of the department's administered aid budget over that time. Most of this expenditure was authorised and managed at the specific country or thematic program level rather than through a centralised research unit.

The clearest expression of the rationale for the research investment over that time was found in the 2012–16 aid research strategy. This stated that the core purpose of research was to:

^a 2012–13 research expenditure statistics produced by DFAT's ODA Statistics and Reporting Section.

*... improve the quality and effectiveness of Australian aid in developing countries. Practical research will help inform where and how our own and our partners' resources can most effectively and efficiently be deployed.*⁵

Four more specific goals of development research investment were also identified in the strategy:

- › To help find solutions to global development problems.
- › To predict and respond to development challenges and opportunities of specific interest to the Australian aid program (DFAT policy and strategy).
- › To inform Australian and partner country development decision-making (DFAT programs).
- › To strengthen partner countries' capacity to do and use research.⁶

In the course of this evaluation, two other justifications for research investment were raised by DFAT staff. The first was that research provides a good return on investment. The available literature suggests that this is true if the measures of 'good return' are human development indicators. For example, independent reviews of a range of agriculture research institutes (including the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research) have consistently found strong nutritional and 'human capital' benefits resulting from research investment.⁷ Positive human capital returns have also been found for research investment in health and education.⁸ Whether public research investment ultimately increases the productivity of partner country firms, and hence economic growth, is more difficult to establish. A recent literature review conducted for the United Kingdom's Department for International Development found that, while knowledge acquisition is one factor driving economic growth, 'there is little evidence that publicly-funded research outputs are a major source of this knowledge for low-income countries.'⁹ The same review found, however, that public and private investments in research have been successful in developing products and technologies that positively impact on the lives of the poor.¹⁰ As with development expenditure generally, policy and implementation environments influence the return on research investment.

The second justification is that research investment furthers the national interest by building alliances between a broad array of policy and research stakeholders in Australia and partner countries. The emerging experience of Australia's Knowledge Sector Initiative in Indonesia bolsters this claim. This initiative brings together Indonesian Government agencies, research institutions and think-tanks with international researchers and DFAT personnel. It seeks to improve the evidence on which the Indonesian Government bases policy decisions, and the capacity of Indonesian institutions to help provide that evidence. In doing so, this investment aligns *'both to Indonesia's growing need for analytical capacity to support its aspirations as a lower middle income country and Australia's desire for increased policy dialogue with Indonesia ...'*¹¹

1.3 The current evaluation

The key question this evaluation seeks to answer is: to what extent is DFAT managing its investment in development-related research appropriately, effectively and efficiently?

'Managing' includes planning, commissioning, using, promoting and translating research. 'Research investments' includes the specific commissioning of research, as well as investments of staff time into using and sharing research and managing research relationships.

Three subsidiary questions help answer the core evaluation question:

- › What is the nature of DFAT's investment in development-related research?
- › What is the value of DFAT's investment in development-related research?

› What helps or hinders DFAT's uptake of development-related research?

The evaluation report is constructed around these three subquestions.

On the back of its answer to the evaluation question, this report makes recommendations on how DFAT can optimise the value gained from its research investment.

The evaluation uses the definition of research on which DFAT bases its assessment of annual research spend, which sees 'research' as:

*... the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new way in order to investigate complex issues, emerging challenges or test solutions to problems. The definition excludes data collection and analytical work that is part of routine agency business processes that only has an internal ... audience.*¹²

Excluded from the scope of this evaluation, therefore, are thematic, program and investment-level reporting and evaluation. Also excluded are aid research investments made by DFAT's whole of government partners through their own appropriations.

Finally, the emphasis of the evaluation is on DFAT's own uptake of research rather than the uptake by aid partners. Having said that, some consideration of the interaction between DFAT and aid partners is included within the case study discussions, and issues around the funding of researchers and institutions within developing countries is considered in Chapter 3.

1.4 Method

A mixed method was used to gather and analyse the evaluation data. Seven activities were undertaken, covering a range of qualitative and quantitative approaches, so as to respond appropriately to the various dimensions of the evaluation question (see Appendix 1). Triangulation between data types and sources then took place.

In addition to analysing relevant documentation and expenditure data, the perceptions and experiences of 173 DFAT staff and external stakeholders were obtained either by interviews (52 interviewees), focus groups (20 participants), a targeted survey (91 respondents) or interviews associated with each of the 9 case studies (12). There was only a small overlap (2) between the memberships of these groups. The majority of staff were selected because of previous involvement in commissioning, managing or using research. Input was also sought, primarily via focus groups, from staff with little or no engagement with research. A significant number of those surveyed also had limited involvement with research commissioning and use. The evaluation therefore gathered a rich set of perceptions and experiences and not just the views of research 'champions'.

It should be noted that the evidence gathering for this evaluation coincided with the integration of DFAT and the former AusAID. In their responses, DFAT aid staff were largely reflecting on experiences and perceptions relating to the former AusAID. The findings from that evidence remain, however, highly relevant to the integrated department, especially in light of the 2013 Capability Review finding that the department needs to improve the level and quality of data relating to operational performance and policy development.¹³

A summary of the methods and an assessment of the strength of the evidence they provided is set out in Table 1.

Table 1 Methods used in this evaluation

Method	Data source or participants	Analysis	Strength of evidence
Literature review	DFAT documents, covering agency-level policy, thematic and country program strategies, and individual investments Academic literature Publications from international donors and think-tanks	A review of key literature that established the definition and key drivers of 'research uptake', and major approaches to improving uptake. Donor experience was compared against academic analysis. Citations of key DFAT policy documents were also analysed	Good The literature and document review was proportionally comprehensive for an evaluation of this kind
Analysis of research expenditure database	Database of all identified research-related payments and initiatives from 2007–08 to 2011–12, compiled by the Research Section in DFAT. Expenditure for 2012–13 was compiled by the ODA Statistics and Reporting Section	Quantitative analysis of the expenditure data, based on sector, branch, recipients and procurement modes	Good Data accuracy issues due to the decentralised recording of research expenditure were moderated through checks with country/regional and thematic programs
Thematic analysis of interviews with experts	Interviews with 51 external stakeholders and DFAT SES and non-SES managers who were identified via purposive and snowball sampling, based on their performing roles as research users, suppliers or intermediaries	Identification and basic frequency analysis of themes arising from semistructured interviews; alignment and comparison of themes against interviewee attributes	Good Representative sample of research stakeholders across country, thematic and global programs and suppliers
Thematic analysis of focus group discussions	4 focus groups with 5 participants in each covering an indicative sample of programs and non-SES positions. Included users and non-users (and non-commissioners of research)	Identification and then frequency analysis of themes arising from open questioning; alignment and comparison of themes against discussant attributes	Good Range of discussants, including non-users, broadly representative of the department
Survey of DFAT managers	Population (204) defined by presence on research database as commissioners of research. 91 responses, representing a near 45% response rate	Quantitative and qualitative analysis (NB: free-text answers as well as strength of perceptions and experience questions)	Satisfactory Satisfactory response rate; high rates of responses to free-text questions adds to the depth of evidence
Case study analysis	9 research initiatives, purposively sampled, covering an indicative range of research purposes and levels of investment	Thematic analysis correlated to size and purpose, with a focus on program effects	Good Reasonably indicative coverage, although with an overrepresentation of initiatives generally regarded as successful
DFAT stakeholder consultation	Formal (peer review) and informal consultation and periodic briefings on emerging findings with relevant DFAT branches	Iterative review of draft evaluation report, incorporating clarified factual material and perceptions	Good A proportionally appropriate range of stakeholders consulted

ODA = official development assistance; SES = Senior Executive Service

1.5 Analytical framework and evaluation criteria

The analytical framework used to answer the evaluation question is set out in Table 2. It is based on the analysis of key literature,^b and was iteratively developed as the data from interviews was examined.

The framework focuses on the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of DFAT's management of research investment. Assessable questions relating to each of those criteria are grouped under the key components of research uptake. These are 'demand' (relating to the users and commissioners of research), 'supply' (relating to the producers of research), 'intermediaries' (the people and processes that foster connections and communication between the demand and supply sides of research), and the 'enabling environment' that influences research uptake.

The limitations of this framework are that it aligns more to the priorities of DFAT and its partners than to a 'global public good' interpretation of 'appropriateness'. It also employs a broad interpretation of value rather than a strict, cost-benefit/effectiveness definition. Counterbalancing this, the framework enables an evaluation of DFAT's research investment that is proportional and responsive to the policy and institutional context in which that investment takes place.

Table 2 Analytical framework for the question, to what extent is DFAT managing development-related research investments appropriately, effectively and efficiently?

	Demand	Supply	Intermediaries (processes and people)	Enabling environment
Appropriateness Are the right things being researched?	Is research aligned to DFAT and partner priorities?	Do research suppliers respond to DFAT and partner needs?	Are intermediary people and processes present and working on relevant issues?	Do policies, processes and management encourage appropriate research?
Effectiveness Is the research useful and being used?	Are the findings being used in policy or practice?	Do research suppliers deliver high-quality, useful outputs on time?	Are research findings being communicated effectively to the right audience?	Are the right incentives in place to enable staff to use the results of research?
Efficiency Is the research process managed to maximise value?	Are DFAT and partner research priorities clearly communicated?	Do research suppliers add value to the research process?	Is commissioning fair, equitable and timely?	Do policies, systems and culture minimise research management transaction costs?

^b A separate literature review is available on the ODE website at www.ode.dfat.gov.au.

2 Research strategy and management

This chapter provides background material on DFAT's strategy and management regarding development-related research. This background material helps contextualise the later analysis of DFAT's research investment and the recommendations for improving that investment.

2.1 Policy and strategy

There has been long-running, general policy recognition of the value of research to the broad aid program. The most recent aid policy and Ministerial statements continue this trend, even if specific commitments are limited to investing in agricultural and fisheries research (primarily through the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research) and health research (especially the development of new medical technologies).¹⁴

The policy environment within which the aid program sits also broadly recognises the role of research in the aid program. For example, universities are listed as key stakeholders, research institutions are the fourth-largest recipient partner of aid¹⁵ and research is listed in DFAT's aid web pages as a key activity of the aid program.

Although there is general support for development research, DFAT itself lacks a clear development research strategy. The previous AusAID research strategy, which was to run to 2016, was not carried over into the integrated DFAT. As a result, there is some strategic uncertainty over whether research investment in areas other than agriculture, fisheries and health is supported. There is also no specific guidance on the modes and standards of research that best meet DFAT's aid decision-making and management needs.

On the question of encouraging the use of research, there is a broad commitment to improving knowledge management in the department.¹⁶ While this is important, it lacks the 2012–16 research strategy's specific commitments, such as promoting *'the role of end-users in setting priorities and participating in doing the research'*, supporting efforts to strengthen *'research-to-policy systems'* in selected partner countries, and building communication and engagement strategies into research.¹⁷

2.2 Organisation and management

DFAT has a largely decentralised approach to the organisation and management of research investment, with some formal, centralised governance and management. The department's Development Policy Committee (DPC) is charged with supporting the *'strengthening of development policy knowledge management, research, and capacity building across the Department.'* The committee's role regarding research is not further defined.

Before DFAT and AusAID were integrated, a separate Research Steering Committee sat as a subcommittee of the DPC. The steering committee was formally responsible for overseeing the agency's research funding, providing strategic direction, monitoring effectiveness and advising the

executive on research matters. The frequency of the committee's meetings had diminished by the time the 2012–16 research strategy was endorsed by the AusAID executive in June 2012, and it did not meet following that endorsement. Its functions were subsumed by the DPC in 2013.

A Research Section was established in 2007. The section was tasked with tracking and reporting on commissioned research, setting quality standards and procedures for research funding, assessing research impact, managing partnerships and central competitive funding mechanism (notably the Australian Development Research Awards Scheme), and supporting the uptake of research. On the basis of staffing numbers, and interviews with staff both within and external to the section, it is the conclusion of this evaluation that the capacity of the section to perform all of these tasks satisfactorily was restricted by low resourcing. Decentralised research expenditure, and the separate lines of accountability for that expenditure, also reduced the influence the section could exert. As part of a broader DFAT restructure in February 2014, this section ceased to exist and limited research functions were transferred to a new Development Policy Section.

Research management responsibilities also sit with thematic groups and principal sector specialists in health, education, gender, governance, food security and rural development, and infrastructure. At the country program level, in addition to program and initiative managers, larger programs, such as Indonesia, have had specialist research advisers at various times.

DFAT's recently revised program and investment design guidance recommends that analysis (such as growth, gender, and poverty and social analysis) should be undertaken as part of the design process. While the overarching aid programming guide is not clear on whether such analysis should include, or draw on, research,¹⁸ there are some minor references to research in more detailed good practice notes. For example, the one mention of research in the practice note on analysis for program-level Aid Investment Plans occurs in a statement relating to growth analysis: *'Where the quality of research is sufficient, further independent analysis may not be required, and a synthesis or summary of existing research and the implications for aid programming may be sufficient.'*¹⁹ The good practice note on poverty and social analysis points out that analytical information can be gathered from existing research.²⁰ Investment-level design guidance does not discuss explicitly the use of existing or future research.

3 The nature of DFAT research investments

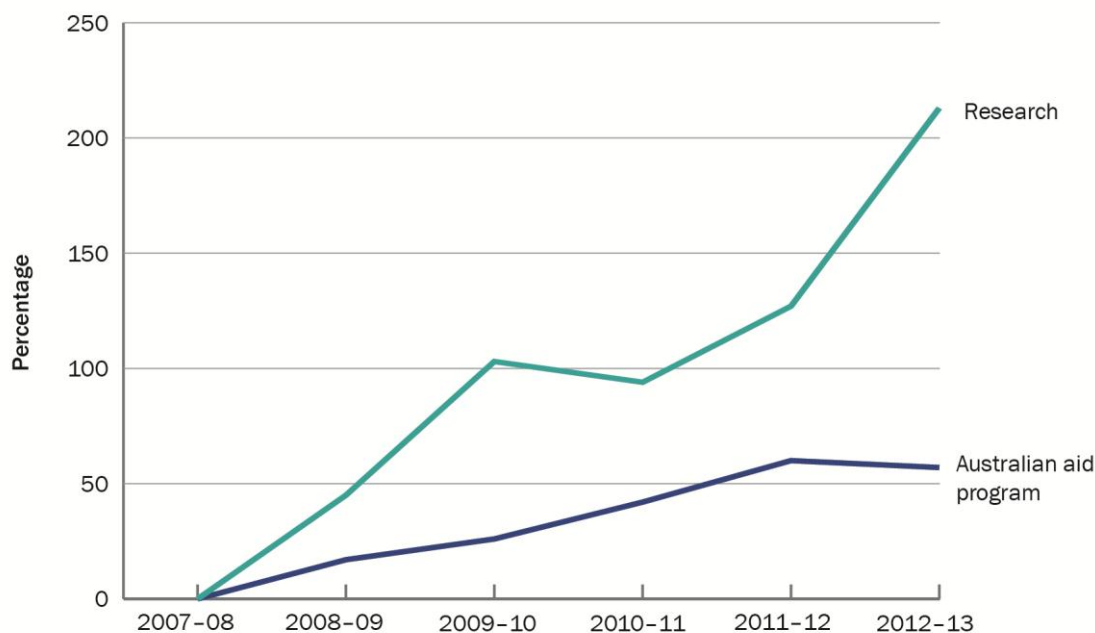
This chapter focuses on the subquestion ‘What is the nature of DFAT’s investment in development-related research?’ Findings are primarily based on the research expenditure data maintained by the Research Section between 2007 and 2012, and the expenditure data for 2012–13, compiled by DFAT’s ODA Statistics and Reporting Section (see Appendix 3).^c Key research strategy and reporting documents have also been reviewed, in some cases providing expenditure data from as early as 2005–06. In addition to providing an overview of general trends in research funding, modality and partners over this period, the chapter assesses the degree to which research investment aligned with research strategies and broader aid program investment up to the end of 2012–13.

3.1 General trends in research funding, 2005–06 to 2012–13

Since 2005–06, total research investment has grown rapidly. From approximately \$19 million in 2005–06 to \$181.5 million in 2012–13, there has been a near 10-fold increase. From 2007–08 to 2012–13 (the period with the most consistent data records) investment more than tripled, with the average spend of those 6 years being around 3 per cent of DFAT’s programmable aid.²¹ Although this period witnessed an overall increase in aid, the increase in research investment was proportionally greater (Figure 1). Even with the caveat that research investment was coming off a relatively low base, this still represents a significant, real increase in funding. While there are many potential reasons for this increase in funding, the fact it took place during a period when aid programmers were preparing for significant expansion suggests at least one driver was that managers were looking for evidence to inform decision-making around the direction of that expansion.

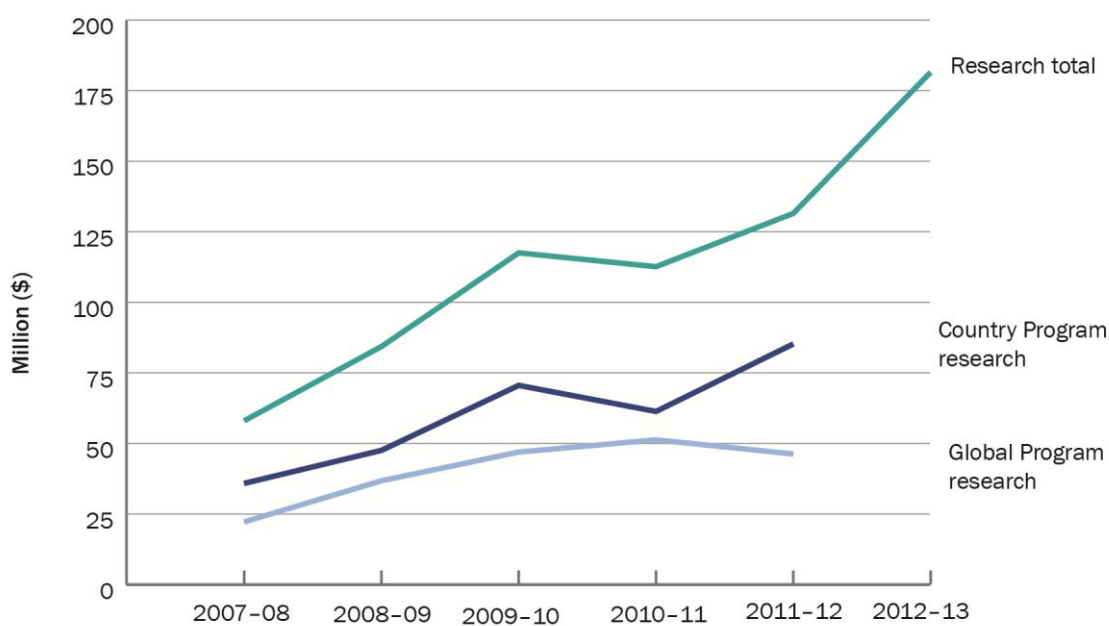
^c While a number of interviewees and focus group discussants expressed scepticism regarding the reliability of the research expenditure figures, the process has been verified twice. DFAT’s ODA Statistics and Reporting Section’s measurement of the 2012–13 expenditure also indicates that calculations for earlier years were accurate. The scepticism of staff is perhaps indicative of the lack of common knowledge in the agency of the annual research spend.

Figure 1 Percentage change in DFAT research and aid program spending against the 2007–08 base year



Country programs increased their research expenditure at a slightly greater rate than global and thematic programs between 2007–08 and 2011–12 (the period for which program comparisons are available) (see Figure 2, where global and thematic spending has been combined into one amount described as ‘Global Program research’). While there was some variation between country programs, most increased their research expenditure as a percentage of their aid budget across that period, with average spend being between 2 and 5 per cent of program aid budgets.

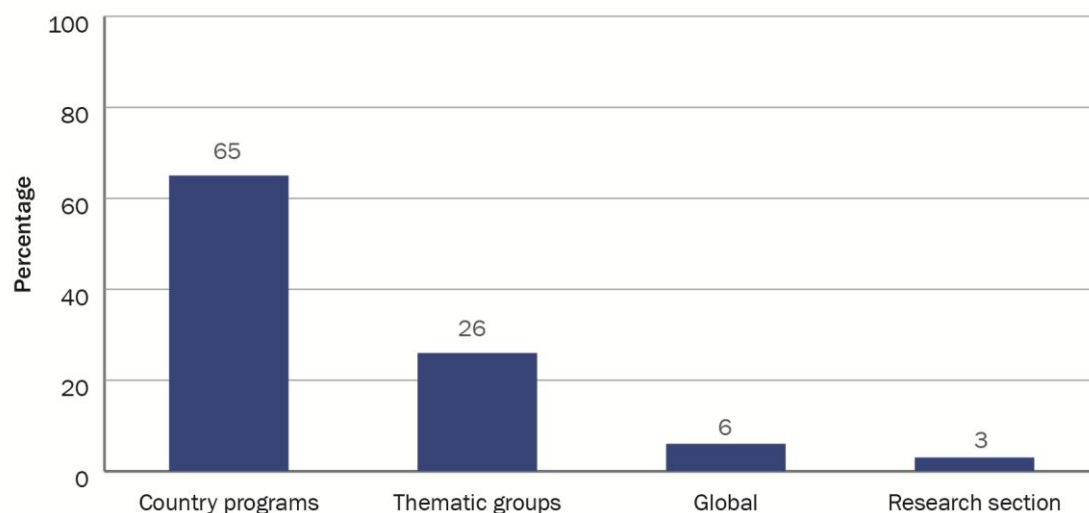
Figure 2 DFAT Research funding, 2005–06 to 2012–13



The decentralised nature of the DFAT research investment becomes obvious when expenditure in a particular year is examined in more detail. Focusing on 2011–12, 65 per cent of overall research

spend was through country programs, followed by 26 per cent by thematic groups, 6 per cent by global programs and 3 per cent by the Research Section (Figure 3). Not only did country programs invest in more research initiatives than other groups, they also invested in larger initiatives, with the average country program research project being \$630 000 compared with \$410 000 per project on the part of thematic programs.

Figure 3 DFAT country, global and thematic research spend as a percentage of total research funding



DFAT funding for research tends to be spread over several years. While 51 per cent of research-related initiatives between 2007–08 and 2011–12 were one-off, single-year investments, 80 per cent of the funding went to multiyear projects.

3.2 Modality and partners

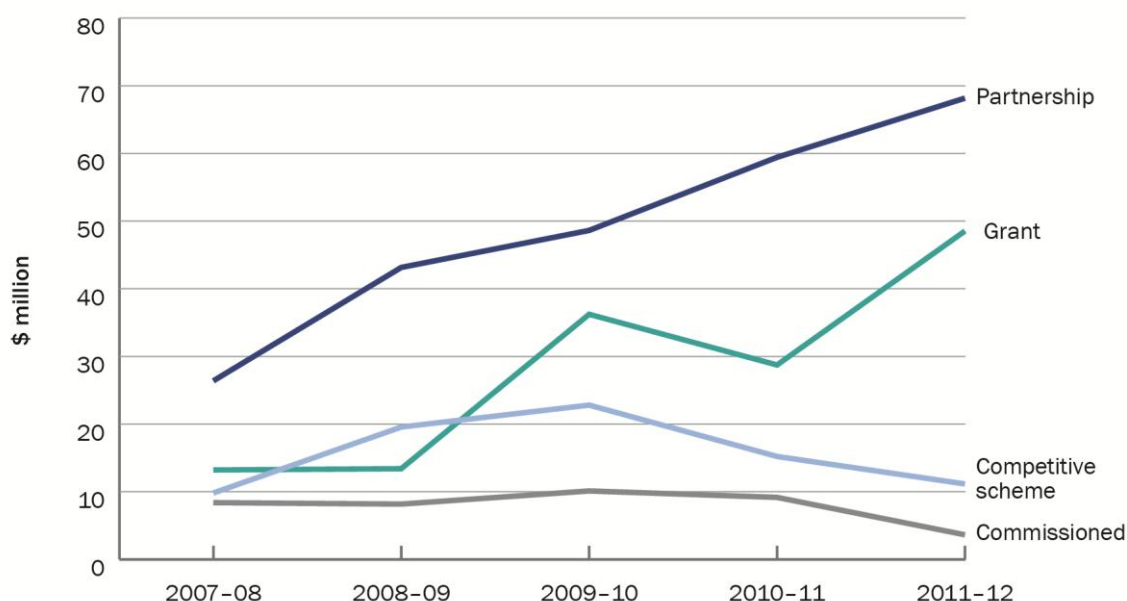
DFAT has research relationships with Australian, international and developing country institutes and researchers. Funding is provided through partnerships, competitive grant schemes, direct grants and commissioning.

Grants were the most used agreement type, with 227 research projects using that mode between 2007–08 and 2011–12. More funding, however, was channelled through partnerships—around 50 per cent (\$245.5 million) of total funding over that period. The average partnership size was \$1.7 million, almost three times higher than for a grant. Direct commissioning was the least used agreement type, covering 122 projects and 8 per cent of the total funding value.

There are some differences between country and thematic programs when it comes to the types of agreements used, although both direct most expenditure through partnerships and grants. Country programs use partnerships more (25 per cent of funded projects) than thematic programs (15 per cent of funded projects), although the average value is lower in country programs (around \$1.5 million) than in thematic programs (around \$2.2 million). Thematic programs, by contrast, use competitive grant schemes (37 per cent of funded projects) to a far greater extent than country programs (19 per cent).

The increased research funding between 2007–08 and 2011–12 was mostly absorbed by partnerships and grants, which both more than doubled over that period. Funding through commissioned research and competitive schemes remained the same or decreased (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Trends in agreement types, 2007–12



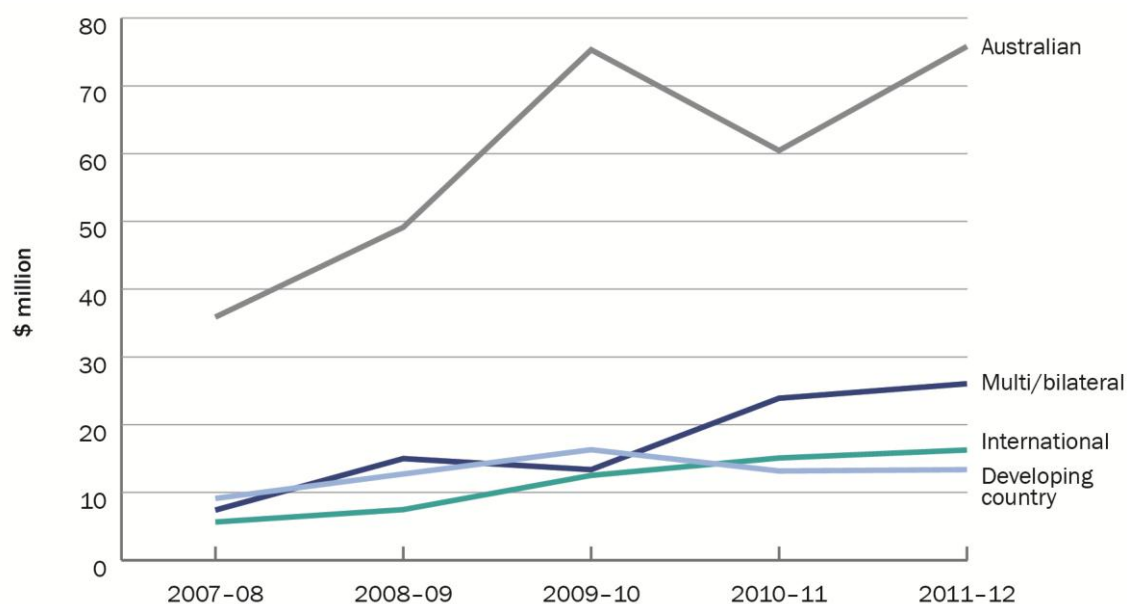
When it comes to who DFAT partners with on development research, Australian organisations and researchers were by some distance the main direct recipients of research investment, receiving around 60 per cent of funding over 2007–08 to 2011–12. By comparison, multiagency and bilateral agency partners received 17 per cent of total research funding, developing country partners received around 13 per cent, and international partners (e.g. research think-tanks such as the Centre for Global Development) received 11 per cent. The expenditure figures on partner type are generally supported by the results of the survey conducted for this evaluation. When asked who they last commissioned research from, 58 per cent of respondents stated it was from either an Australian or international academic or institution, or through one of the Australian-based resource facilities funded by DFAT.

A possible downwards (or at least flat) trend could be seen in funding to developing country research partners (see Figure 5). By 2011–12 they were receiving the least amount of direct funding of any partner type. This figure is a little deceptive, however, as some of DFAT's research investment, especially in organisations such as the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and CSIRO, is passed on through secondary partnerships, grants and commissions to developing country partner institutions. ACIAR, for example, allocates around three-quarters of its research budget to '*collaborative development-related research between Australia and developing countries*'.²²

It is worth noting that, counter to the general trend of aid program research funding, the 2012 round of the centrally managed Australian Development Research Awards Scheme (ADRAS) asked applicants to show how their proposed research projects would involve in-country collaboration and developing country (and/or early career) researchers.²³ The purpose was largely to ensure the ADRAS contributed to improving the capacity of local researchers.

Locally based researchers may also have some advantages to Australian or international researchers when it comes to the depth of ongoing engagement with local policy makers and 'champions' of the research.²⁴ Local researchers, assuming the researchers are of an appropriate standard, can also develop, or contribute to the development of, locally-appropriate and ethical research designs and conduct.

Figure 5 Trends in funding by partner type, 2007–12



DFAT research expenditure is concentrated, with 10 institutions receiving just over half of the total research expenditure in 2012–13. Six out of the top 10 were Australian organisations. These figures, along with those above, do not support the perception, expressed by a number of interviewed researchers, that the aid program favoured international research over Australian research. They do indicate, however, that the majority of funding is going to relatively few recipients.

Table 3 Top 10 recipients of DFAT aid research funding, 2012–13

Recipient	Funding
CSIRO	\$18 030 801
World Bank	\$15 984 138
Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research	\$15 800 591
United Nations organisations	\$13 454 693
The Asia Foundation	\$6 888 196
Australian National University	\$6 535 243
University of the South Pacific	\$6 650 000
University of New England	\$3 738 310
University of Melbourne	\$2 764 690
University of Queensland	\$2 407 666
Total	\$91 769 328

Finally, when looking at the modes by which DFAT engages with its various research partners, an important distinction becomes clear: the majority of Australian research institutions (59 per cent over the period studied) are funded through partnership arrangements; the majority of developing country and international partners are funded through grants. Of the partnerships with Australian researchers, 62 per cent were multiyear. Over the same period, only 33 per cent of all grants lasted longer than a year. In other words, partnership arrangements tend to align with long-running relationships with DFAT, and developing country researchers are less likely than Australian researchers and institutions to be party to such arrangements. Where partnerships were established with developing country or international partners, their average value was lower with those partners (\$0.8 million) than with Australian partners (\$2.7 million)—a finding that holds even when funding to the ACIAR and CSIRO partnerships is excluded.

Although it was beyond the resources of this evaluation to examine in detail the cost-effectiveness of research partners, the *Annual report on research in AusAID 2011–12* argued that developing country research partners displayed some cost advantages over other partners in those areas of research where they had similar capacity. The same report also found that ‘research with international and developing country researchers is ... spread across a wider variety of researchers than for Australian researchers’.²⁵

3.3 Appropriateness—relevance to Australian aid and research strategies

Between 2007–08 and 2011–12, the overarching direction of research investment was, in principle, set by the 2008–10 research strategy, and then informed the 2012–16 strategy. These strategies pegged research priorities to aid policy priorities, but did not prescribe ideal levels of research investment against each of those priorities. The strategies defined the types of research supported—applied research, innovation and synthesis—but this was, once again, descriptive not prescriptive.

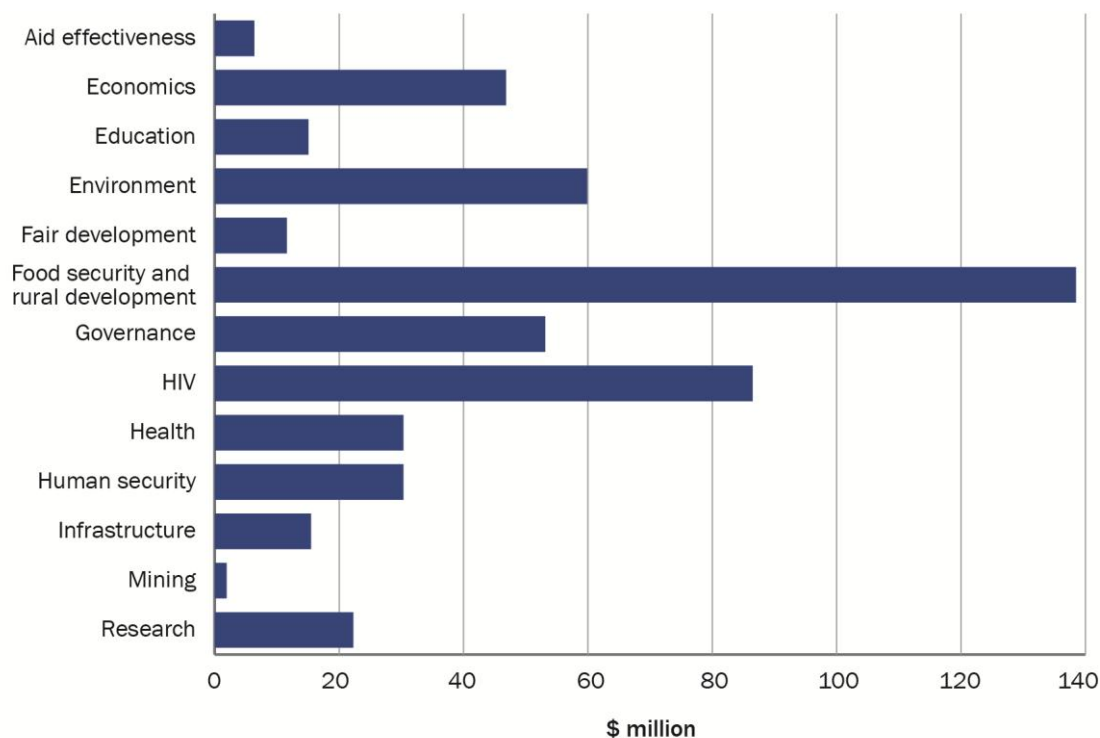
What the 2012–16 research strategy did prescribe were roles for the then Research Section and Research Steering Committee. It also set a goal of increasing the proportion of competitively awarded research expenditure from 14 per cent in 2010–11 to 30 per cent by 2015–16. This increase in competitively awarded funding was to occur across the modes of engagement with researchers and be overseen by the Research Section.

Country and thematic program-level strategies set out more targeted aid objectives than agency-level strategies. However, even though the vast bulk of research expenditure is made through country and thematic programs, their strategies do not, on the whole, provide guidance on the sort of research or researcher that would best respond to program objectives. There are some examples of greater guidance being offered at the level of country programs’ sectoral delivery strategies, although the greater tendency is for delivery strategies to discuss the research that informed delivery design rather than setting any further research goals.²⁶ With the exception of the 2012 medical research strategy, there were no thematic-specific research strategies.²⁷

Given the lack of specificity in DFAT’s strategic direction on development research, only basic observations can be made on the alignment of research expenditure with aid priorities. The overarching finding is that, between 2007–08 and 2011–12, an alignment of research expenditure against the broad priorities of the aid program did exist. The themes that received the most funding and matched the aid priorities of the time were food security and rural development (28 per cent of

total funding); health, not including HIV (17 per cent); environment (12 per cent); and governance (11 per cent) (Figure 6).

Figure 6 Total funding on Australian aid themes, 2007–08 to 2011–12



The alignment between research expenditure and priorities diverged at two key points. The most obvious discrepancy related to the comparatively low research expenditure on education (amounting only to 3 per cent of total research expenditure in 2011–12). This was notable in that education has been a prominent, long-standing theme in Australian aid and research strategies. In 2011–12 alone, \$833.8 million, or around 17 per cent of the aid program, was directed to education. The 2012–13 research expenditure figures suggest that research investment in education has recently begun to grow, reaching \$25 million, the third-largest thematic research spend that year.^d While overall levels of research expenditure in education have not been high, a significant number of small research initiatives have been undertaken.^e It may also be the case that development research in a social science field such as education is on average less expensive than in natural science disciplines such as agriculture and health (something that is supported by university data on research costs).²⁸

The second divergence between expenditure and strategy was the decreased funding of competitive grants schemes from 2007–08. It was also notable that competitive grant schemes were the least mentioned mechanism for commissioning research (6 per cent) in the evaluation survey. Both the 2008–10 and 2012–16 research strategies emphasised the importance of this model in contributing to an increase in competitively funded research across all procurement modes.

The evidence regarding competitive grant schemes is indicative of a deeper tension in DFAT's development-related research investment: how to balance the benefits of open, competitive sourcing against the benefits of stable, long-running relationships with research providers in a way that

^d The latest research expenditure figures indicate that the biggest thematic research spends in 2012–13 were government and civil society (18 per cent), agriculture (14 per cent), education (14 per cent) and health (13 per cent).

^e Internal Education thematic group research initiatives chart.

maximises value for money. DFAT contracts out the implementation of aid activities, including research activities, in accordance with the Commonwealth Government's purchasing policies and guidelines, which seek to ensure value for money in contracting. However, interviewed and surveyed DFAT research managers commented, with a frequency that was worth noting, that they often only contracted known researchers. As one survey respondent, in responding to a question on how to improve the way research is commissioned, stated, [we need a] *more competitive process—often we award research to a group that fails to provide a quality product based on relationships*. (Q19-ID32)

Examples of this tension around value for money could also be seen in the 2012 internal review of AusAID's international research partnerships. None of the three partners studied were chosen through open processes—the justification being that these were well-established organisations with strong track records in their respective fields. The report recommended that any decision to renew a partnership needed to be based on a process that clarified the partnership's purpose and demonstrated its relevance and potential value.²⁹

Finally, the ability to determine the appropriateness of DFAT's investment in development-related research diminished over the period this evaluation was conducted. Although there appears to be broad policy commitment to the department continuing to invest in development research, the absence of specific strategies or policy statements (with the exception of the references to agricultural and fisheries and health-related research in *Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability*) reduces clarity around the desired direction of future investment. Changes to research expenditure in the middle of 2013–14 added to this uncertainty. For example, a number of partnerships with local and international research institutes were either cancelled or reduced, and a decision was made not to undertake a new round of the Australian Development Research Awards Scheme in 2014.

3.4 Conclusion

The overall picture presented by the data on DFAT (previously AusAID) development-related research expenditure (up until 2012–13) is of a fast growing set of investments. These have primarily been managed by country and thematic programs and delivered through partnership and grant arrangements to Australian researchers. While broadly aligning with aid priorities, on the face of it there appears to be some underinvestment in education—although that investment may actually be proportional given different costs of research across disciplines.

More significant questions can be raised about both the level and nature of engagement with developing country researchers. They receive comparatively low levels of direct funding from DFAT, and the arrangements under which that funding is provided tend to be shorter term than those into which Australian researchers enter. Given the potential positive impacts on researcher capacity and generation of local evidence for policy-makers, as well as generally lower research costs, it would appear that a clear rationale for not using such researchers needs to be present before electing to fund other providers.

Another question raised by the research expenditure evidence concerns the openness of the processes through which research funding is disbursed (something that may also have implications for the opportunities available to developing country researchers). This issue has been raised in previous aid program research reports and strategies, suggesting DFAT managers may need to improve their assessment of the value for money of research investments.

These findings need to be read in the context of recent shifts in aid policy and the current absence of a detailed DFAT research strategy. The lack of a stated, comprehensive set of organisational

expectations reduces the ability of the department to set clear directions for future research funding, and reduces the capacity of the department to improve managers' awareness of the issues they need to consider before authorising expenditure.

4 The value of DFAT research investments

This chapter focuses on the subquestion: ‘what is the value of DFAT’s investment in development-related research?’ The primary evidence for this chapter comes from two sources: a survey of 91 DFAT staff and nine case studies of research investments. The survey targeted DFAT staff who were associated with research initiatives in the research expenditure database, and their perceptions of the quality, usefulness and use of the research (see Appendix 2).

The case studies were selected from a large number of examples of good practice that emerged from the expert interviews, based on the degree to which they illustrate how DFAT research investments have:

- › contributed to global discourse about development policy issues
- › contributed to the development of DFAT development policy at global and national levels
- › provided practically useful information for program and investment-level decision-making
- › strengthened capacity to do and use research in partner countries.

These align closely with the four specific goals of DFAT-funded research in the 2012–16 research strategy described in Chapter 1. While many of the case studies contribute to a range of research goals, the analysis in this chapter focuses specifically on how each case contributed to the specific purpose for which it was selected. The survey and case study evidence is supported by evidence from documents, expert interviews, and focus group discussion.

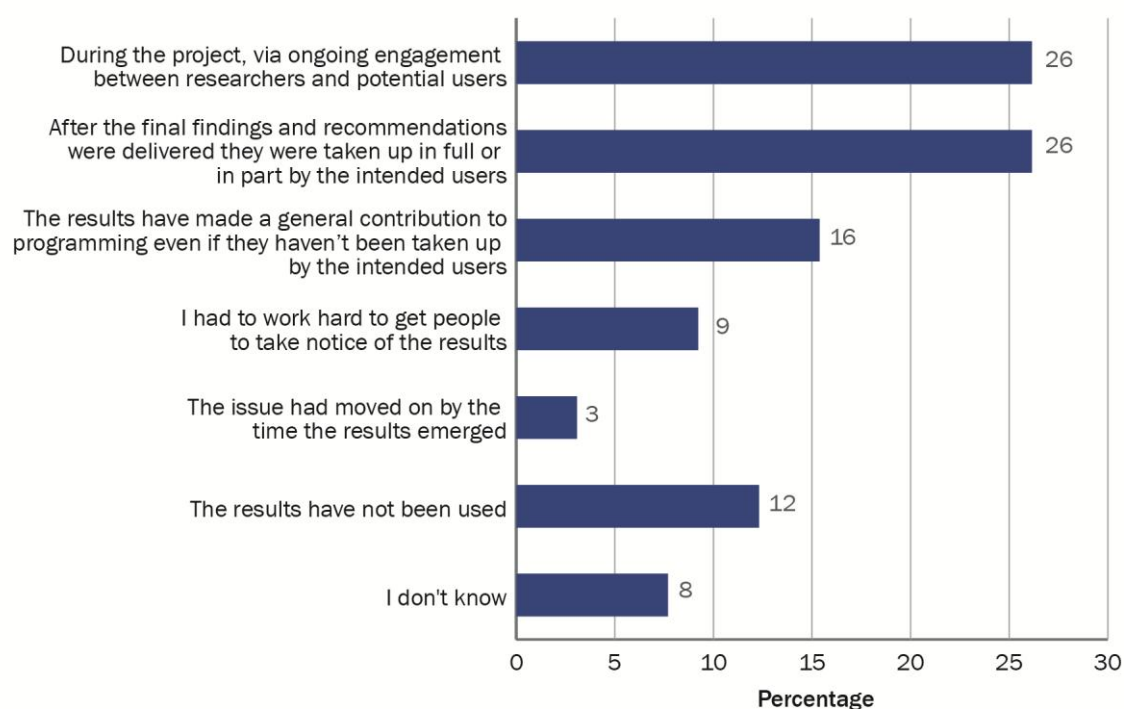
The value of research is assessed through the three dimensions of the analytical framework in Chapter 1: appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency. ‘Effectiveness’ is largely, but not completely, associated with levels of research uptake, which include both immediate use in program design and implementation, recognised contributions to the stock of global public good knowledge, medium-term incorporation into DFAT policies and longer-term embedding in partner country policies and programs. The latter often takes many years, and was not possible to investigate in this study.

4.1 General perceptions on research uptake

The survey asked respondents for their general views about research uptake and also specifically about the purpose of last piece of research they had commissioned and if it had been used (Q12). Of the 91 respondents, 40 per cent said that the intent of the research they commissioned was to address ‘*development policy questions specifically relevant to the Australian aid program*’ and 38 per cent said it was to solve problems or learn lessons at the program level. While 10 per cent said the last piece of research they were involved in commissioning was to answer a global development issue, and 4 per cent said it was to build the research capacity of a developing country institution.

When asked whether the results had been used (Q27), 52 per cent said they had been actively taken up by the expected audience, either during the project (26 per cent) or after completion of the project (26 per cent), while 15 per cent said the results had not been used or the issue had moved on by the time the results came out (Figure 7).

Figure 7 Use of commissioned research



In free-text responses to survey question 28, *'What influenced how the research was used?'*, 29 per cent of the comments focused on the existence, or otherwise, of a clear demand for the research, 14 per cent concerned the engagement between partners and stakeholders, and 12 per cent were about the quality of the findings and experience of the researchers (Figure 8).

Figure 8 Perceptions of reasons for research uptake



Indicative samples of survey respondent statements about the importance of strong demand included:

- › *It was directly relevant and useful to informing our ongoing strategic position and provided a strong and improved knowledge base for us as officials to inform and shape our briefing throughout the agency and internationally. (ID22)*
- › *The research was on a topical policy issue, of which not much is known, thereby filling a gap. (ID95)*

Statements about the importance of good engagement included:

- › *liaison 'early-on' with end users of product to clarify their expectations. (ID27)*
- › *Relationship between researchers and program staff. In some instances, program staff felt the researchers weren't considering their views and hence did not place value in the research outputs. (ID72)*

An example of the statements about the importance of the quality of findings was:

- › *The research, by studying a cross-section of programs brought together the information in a new way, and made new observations and findings. It also made some interim practical recommendations, even for programs not recommended for further research. The research was well written, logical and used evidence well. (ID95)*

Research that focused on program-level issues was slightly more likely to be directly used than that which considered broader Australian development policy questions, but this difference was of low statistical significance. The free-text responses suggested that, in any case, respondents did not always see the two research reasons as being markedly different. The frequency of responses relating to the other two purposes of research—global development issues and building research capacity—were too low to be statistically meaningful.

While there is an indication that there was more uptake of larger (valued over \$500 000) research projects (63 per cent uptake) than smaller projects (50 per cent uptake), the relatively small number of responses meant the survey could not conclusively prove that research investment size had a significant impact.

The interviews provided a more detailed picture of staff experiences of research uptake. Of the 32 examples of good research use mentioned in the interviews, 18 were about research contributing to country program and investment design. Two indicative examples related to the Mekong regional program. One concerned children drowning in the Mekong delta, which advocacy organisations were claiming was the main cause of death in children under 5 years old. A study on disease and death in young children was commissioned and confirmed this claim. The research findings contributed to the design of projects to address the problem. In another case, a major study was commissioned to research the characteristics and impact of disability in the region, after disability had been raised as a priority by the Australian Government. The study confirmed that disability and avoidable blindness were major problems in the region, especially for the poor, and fed into the design of a number of large projects.

Nine of the 32 cited examples identified where research had usefully informed thematic strategies. Four examples were given by interviewees of good research use in informing global development discourse or DFAT development policy at global and national levels. Conversely, there were several examples given of where Australian aid policy-makers had insufficiently sought or used research. For example, concerns were raised about the overall poor use of research in building the aid program's response to the 'post 2015' agenda (post Millennium Development Goals), even though this is a

complex policy challenge facing the department. Finally, one example referred specifically to capacity development at country level.

Thematic strategy and policy documents were also analysed for citations from research funded by the DFAT. These documents covered health, WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene), education, gender, disability, governance, food security, sustainable economic development and child protection. The analysis showed that the key sources of information cited were reports and standards issued by the World Bank and various United Nations (UN) bodies (11 sources per strategy document on average). By comparison, one academic source and one think-tank or non-government organisation (NGO) source was referenced on average per document. None of the sources identified in any of the documents were products of research investments made by DFAT. High-level policies usually did not reference research products of any kind. However, caution should be exercised in interpreting this citation information. As one expert interviewee said:

[DFAT] is not very good at citing sources in its documents. They tend to just incorporate research-based evidence, especially if it has commissioned and paid for the research without citing the source. They tend to feel they own the outputs of research that they fund.

A final, general piece of evidence, indicating that the managers of research investments regard these projects as having value, even if their findings are not always taken up, can be seen in their yearly quality at implementation (QAI) reports of research investments (noting that QAIs only apply to investments greater than \$3 million, which means most research investments are not picked up). DFAT managers overwhelmingly rate the effectiveness of these investments as being satisfactory or better.

4.2 Research investments to inform global discourse on development

Two cases were selected to help explore the value of the aid program's investment in research aimed at informing global development issues:

- › The **Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR)** is an Australian Government scientific research organisation working in international agriculture. In 2012–13, it spent \$93 million in official development assistance. While most of ACIAR's work is funded from its own budget appropriation, it works collaboratively with DFAT as one of the organisations delivering the Australian aid program through the 'whole of government' approach and also received nearly \$16 million in research investment from the then AusAID in 2012–13. It produces a range of research products, of which those informing the 'global discourse on development' are just one part.
- › The **Australian Development Research Awards Scheme (ADRAS)**, established in 2007, was designed to promote the production of primary development-oriented research of relevance to the aid program through the provision of funding for primary, investigator-led research proposals by applicants whose proposals are selected through a competitive process. Total funding for the 2012 ADRAS round was over \$32 million, spread over several years, to 50 research projects.

Appropriateness

The investment in ACIAR aligned with the broad policy objective of prioritising Australian support for agricultural development. An independent review of ACIAR found that it produces a large body of high-quality research and assists capacity development for researchers in partner countries and in Australia.³⁰

ADRAS has been the key central competitive funding element of the aid program's research investment, and aligns with the broad objective of increasing the use of research-based evidence. Recent funding rounds have become more strictly focused on producing material of direct relevance to the aid program, to make the scheme more driven by internal agency demand. ADRAS has supported the production of a substantial body of research into a wide range of development issues. Interviews held with external stakeholders indicated ADRAS was well regarded in the academic and NGO communities. The appearance of a significant number of ADRAS-sourced publications in academic journals, websites and specialist publications indicates it has made a clear contribution to public knowledge.

Effectiveness

The 2013 independent review of ACIAR found that it has a strong international reputation for the results it has achieved, its research partnership model, and its record of evaluation and assessment:

... ACIAR has been instrumental in building research partnerships with a wide range of developing-country collaborators and using Australian agricultural science and related research skills to deliver research for agricultural development and natural resource management.³¹

The review found that the uptake of ACIAR research in partner countries is strong, and a 2013 assessment by the Crawford Fund concluded that the use of ACIAR research by Australian institutions was also substantial.³² ODE's 2012 evaluation of Australia's rural development assistance, however, identified some misalignment between ACIAR's research and the country program priorities of Australian aid. The report recommended that country programs and ACIAR staff should undertake a development logic exercise to ensure that relevant research results are used.³³ Disconnection between the sorts of 'global public good' research that are one part of ACIAR's portfolio and the types of research likely to be used by aid program staff was also raised as an issue in seven interviews with DFAT managers.

Several examples were mentioned by DFAT managers of ADRAS research informing program-level strategies, but few spoke about their value to the global development discourse, and none about their value to aid program policy at the global or national level. While ADRAS-funded research had been widely published and taken up by the broader development community, relatively little had made its way into aid policy and program documents (a notable exception being ADRAS-funded research on economic vulnerability in the Pacific³⁴ that was then incorporated into the Vanuatu program's planning). An internal review of ADRAS recognised this weakness and recommended closer alignment with country and thematic priorities and more attention to communication. From 2012, research projects were selected by thematic selection committees comprised of program managers and independent specialists of particular themes and subjected to independent peer review. In early 2013, a workshop on communication and policy engagement was held for the 2012 ADRAS round.

Efficiency

For 30 years, ACIAR has been a dominant player in Australian aid-funded achievements in agricultural research, but has operated more or less independently of aid program management. A 2009 analysis of ACIAR's returns on investment looked at the question of the efficiency of the agency's research, and noted that there may be some efficiency dividends to be gained from closer coordination with the aid program. It found that average returns on research projects had been increasing over the period examined, while project budgets were comparatively stable, indicating increasing efficiencies. It also highlighted that there should be realistic expectations of future improvement in efficiency. For

example, agriculture research in Pacific states is likely to remain a priority, yet many of those countries have challenging political, economic and institutional environments that restrict returns on investment.³⁵

The internal review of ADRAS recommended the establishment of new procedures to ensure better monitoring and evaluation of the outputs and impact of the program, enabling decisions to be made on improving the program's efficiency. Prior to the disbanding of the Research Section, a more rigorous reporting process was set up for the 2012 ADRAS round. These reporting requirements were set up to aggregate the results for whole of program reporting. The Research Section also set up a comprehensive communication and engagement process; and the Communication and Engagement workshop transformed how ADRAS was run.

4.3 Research to inform DFAT development policy at global and national levels

Two cases were selected to illustrate research investments whose primary purpose was to inform the development of DFAT aid policy relating to both overarching global development questions and specific thematic and geographic areas:

- › The **State, Society and Governance in Melanesia (SSGM)** program is a research unit at the Australian National University (ANU), funded by the aid program since 1995. SSGM provides research and analytical services to policy makers and produces scholarly research. A new 4-year DFAT–SSGM agreement worth \$5 million annually was signed in 2013.
- › The \$350 000 **Strengthening the Evidence on Violence Against Women and Girls in East and Southeast Asia (VAWG)** study, conducted in 2011–12, was designed to develop the evidence base on which strategic approaches could be developed to eliminate gender-based violence in the region, specifically to inform the strategy and programming of UN Women.

Appropriateness

SSGM's stated objective is to provide:

research and analysis to facilitate a thorough understanding of [the] social, cultural and political make-up [of Melanesia, Timor-Leste and the wider Pacific]. This understanding is the key to more effective delivery of aid and to building stronger relationships in the region.³⁶

This objective has a clear supportive role in relation to Australia's aid priority to assist in ensuring the Pacific is a 'safe, secure, and prosperous region' based on sustainable communities.³⁷

VAWG aligned well with the policy priority to develop approaches to dealing with gender-related issues in countries where Australia has a major aid commitment. DFAT managers associated with the project argued that the work informed the wider DFAT policies on violence against women, and responded to gaps in knowledge in the area. The initiative was developed in cooperation with a major multilateral organisation with a strong presence in the region.

Effectiveness

SSGM is widely recognised as the principal centre of research on issues related to governance, politics and state–society relations in Melanesia, the broader Pacific region and Timor-Leste. A 2009 review found that SSGM is:

*making a valuable contribution to strengthening the capacity of Pacific Islands scholars and institutions, engaging in effective research and policy dialogue on contemporary governance issues with Australian and regional academics, whole-of-government, civil society, and government; and supporting informed policy and research engagement on Pacific issues.*³⁸

In interviews, both SSGM and DFAT staff claim that DFAT has been relatively effective at making use of quick-turnaround analytical material and direct advice from SSGM.

Evidence of the uptake of SSGM's primary research output is comparatively patchy. At a high-level meeting between SSGM and the then AusAID, aid managers commented that the aid program had *'not yet made optimal use of SSGM research ... because research is too ad-hoc, reactive to urgent circumstances and shaped by, and dependent on, individual's agendas'*.³⁹ However, there has been good uptake of SSGM research into DFAT policy and strategy in regional gender programs, especially into the Pacific Gender Initiative, the Women's Economic Empowerment in Melanesia and Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development programs.

The VAWG investment, according to interviewed DFAT staff, produced a body of high-quality research findings and empirical data. The research contributed to the stock of evidence on issues in a number of areas: young people's perception of violence against women, estimates of the economic costs of domestic violence against women, and the cost of strategies to respond to the problem and methodologies for stakeholder organisations to develop strategies. This evidence was then made available to key stakeholders in the countries concerned. The results of the research were disseminated through workshops, pamphlets and other publications. Although the results have contributed to other UN Women and DFAT programs in the region, there is little evidence that the research fed into higher-level DFAT policies and strategies.

Efficiency

The most recent funding agreement between DFAT and SSGM has attempted to reduce contract management transaction costs, and improve communication, monitoring and evaluation, by providing a DFAT staff member to manage relations between researchers and the department. A structured series of meetings and other mechanisms seek to ensure that SSGM communicates research results and new ideas and that DFAT makes SSGM aware of its activity pipeline and changing strategic priorities. There is now a more explicit recognition by DFAT of the need for better uptake of SSGM products, including in the development of high-level policy responses. The 2013–16 funding agreement states that:

*SSGM will be required to interact with [the department] at a more strategic and programmatic level than previously, and [the department] will be required to facilitate this 'step up'.*⁴⁰

The VAWG research represented DFAT's contribution to a wider UN Women program. The initiative came from an approach from UN Women for an Australian contribution to the program. DFAT opted to fund the research component of the program because of the need to fill a knowledge gap. The research was conducted and managed by UN Women. For a modest investment in the research

component, and without having to take on management costs, DFAT was able to make a broad impact across the UN Women program. In contrast, there was little indication of significant impact on DFAT's own policy-making.

4.4 Research to inform program and investment-level decision-making

Four cases examine how research investments inform the development and implementation of DFAT programs and investments:

- › **Vanuatu Drivers of Change** was a \$750 000 project in 2006–07, conducted by a mixed Australian and Vanuatu team, that studied the political economy of Vanuatu to provide analytical input into the Vanuatu country program review.
- › **Improving the Effectiveness of Aid in the Pacific** was a \$140 000 'industry partner' contribution to a larger Australian Research Council (ARC) grant to ANU in 2006–08 to examine criticism of Australian aid to the Pacific.
- › **Indonesia Knowledge Sector Initiative** was an Australian aid investment of \$ 2.6 million between 2010 and 2013, which included 11 diagnostic studies to inform the development of a 15-year, \$500-million investment.
- › DFAT's **Education Resource Facility**, at a cost of \$16 million, was established in 2009 to provide rapid technical responses to requests from DFAT staff for advice and analysis and strengthen the evidence base for DFAT programs in education.

Appropriateness

The Vanuatu Drivers of Change project aligned clearly with policy and programming goals, and its objectives were well articulated. In particular, it aimed to broaden the Australian aid-funded governance program from a focus on formal institutions to include traditional sources of authority. A further objective was to build Australia's credibility as an aid and diplomatic partner with a sophisticated understanding of the political economy of Vanuatu. The Vanuatu Government was supportive of the research.

The Effectiveness of Australian Aid in the Pacific proposal came from ANU as part of an ARC application, and was not instigated in response to a particular program initiative. The aid program agreed to second a member of staff to the project with the explicit caveat that they would be released only if there were staff available at the time the project started.

The research commissioned to inform the development of the Knowledge Sector Initiative was overtly shaped by the analytical needs of programming. As a new and unresearched area, it was judged that ensuring the aid investment was effectively targeted required a substantial amount of diagnostic work into the problems and reform possibilities in the sector before the investment design began. The research made use of a number of sources of Indonesian and Australian expertise and was conducted through close coordination with specialist DFAT staff.

The Education Resource Facility responds to a need identified by DFAT for a greater level of specialist on-call expertise than could be provided in-house or obtainable through other mechanisms such as the education period contract. There has been a steady increase in demand for the facility's services (from 59 requests in 2009 to more than 259 requests in 2013).

Effectiveness

Vanuatu Drivers of Change was conceived as part of country program planning and development and was expected to inform approaches to a number of new programs in the governance area. The research directly influenced the development of two programs: Custom Governance Partnership and Vanuatu Churches Partnership. As a result of research findings about the continuing salience of non-state relationships and traditions in Vanuatu politics and justice, DFAT's approach to governance in Vanuatu was broadened from a conventional focus on formal institutions to include traditional practices and networks. Both the findings and subsequent programming provided data and analysis that shaped the design document for the Governance for Growth program in Vanuatu. The research also influenced the Approaches to Building Demand for Better Governance policy statement, which set out a new approach to governance across a range of countries in Australia's aid program. The policy emphasised working directly with local organisations, including traditional ones, to build demand and incentives for good governance practice, alongside the conventional focus of formal institutions. Interviews and documents highlight that the Drivers of Change report has also become useful for DFAT staff in more long-term ways. It has become standard introductory reading for Australian aid staff in the Vanuatu program. The report has become widely read in Vanuatu and has stimulated discussion networks on political change. The publication has been cited in UN, international NGO, European Commission, World Bank and Small Island States reports, academic conference publications, studies by other donors, the Vanuatu diaspora blog and Vanuatu Government planning documents.

The Effectiveness of Pacific Aid project produced a published research report and academic articles. Beyond its value as a contribution to global public knowledge, the direct value of the investment for DFAT, from the perspective of interviewed managers, was limited. There were some flow-on benefits from further developing links with the researchers on the ANU team already engaged in dialogue with DFAT on Pacific economic issues. But there is no evidence that the findings and recommendations of the research were taken up by DFAT programs.

The research for the Knowledge Sector Initiative was conceived as part of program planning and development and was in fact the first stage of a major investment. The diagnostic studies provided a broad understanding of trends and issues in a new area for Australian aid and were cited extensively in the design documents. Because a diverse range of suppliers were commissioned, however, program managers felt the research was not of consistent quality and varied in its usability for program purposes. Some research papers were seen as being overly academic and outside the scope of the framework of the initiative, or produced findings and recommendations that were not practical and/or politically actionable.

The Education Resource Facility (ERF) produces the kind of knowledge that the interviews, focus group discussions and survey indicated is the most readily absorbed by DFAT: short-term, program-relevant analysis and data that can be translated into program documents and/or used for briefings for the executive and parliament. The ERF generally produces short analytical pieces, one-on-one advice or direction to other sources of data. The facility's surveys of its clients consistently show a high level of client satisfaction with its services, with ratings of quality averaging over 90 per cent.⁴¹ Research pieces by facility staff are not published. Although some briefing notes are available on the website, facility staff argued that the research becomes public knowledge in the form of program designs or reviews.

In general, interviewees regarded the technical research on education, health and agriculture being funded by DFAT as being of good quality and useful, with the Knowledge Hubs for Health and the ERF being singled out for praise. Even here, though, there was some dissent around the relevance of all

the research. A 2013 review of the four Health Knowledge Hubs supported by the aid program found that the hubs produced a large number of good quality outputs that varied in their applicability to, and their uptake by, DFAT. The 'management through partnership' of the Hubs, while increasing the potential to resolve the differing perceptions and needs of researchers and users, imposed significant transaction costs on all parties.⁴²

Efficiency

In the Vanuatu Drivers of Change research, good communication between Canberra staff, aid staff at Post and the Head of Mission facilitated the commissioning of research. The research was contracted through competitive tender, opening the initiative up to international expertise in political economy understandings of development. A number of local researchers and respected local figures acted as intermediaries between the research team and DFAT managers, on the one side, and national government agencies and non-official institutions such as churches and traditional leaders, on the other side. Recognised local community figures were also involved in supporting the research. The research was facilitated by the direct involvement of DFAT staff who were Vanuatu nationals. Aid managers commented that communication between DFAT and the research team was close and that this helped to ensure that appropriate research was conducted.

In the case of the Effectiveness of Australian Aid in the Pacific project, DFAT was an 'industry partner' in an ARC project, with the expectation that it would be actively involved in the research, in addition to providing funding. There was, however, a lack of DFAT engagement in the research process. After going through a selection process, a nominated staff member was not allowed to join the project because of resource constraints (exemplifying the difficulty in taking staff 'off-line' from the cycle of programming and briefings and allocating them to research work on a full-time basis). Communication and exchange between the aid program and researchers suffered as a result.

The diagnostic studies for the Knowledge Sector Initiative were produced by a range of different suppliers, including Australian and Indonesian research organisations and individuals. Although the DFAT team managing the research expected this to be more costly, they concluded that the diversity of fields and disciplines involved (economics, politics, sociology, etc.) was best accessed through a range of contracts. In retrospect, the design team considered that they may not have had a sufficiently clear framework to frame the study. Obtaining the right researchers was challenging; managers commented the presence of good research skills does not necessarily equate with the capacity to produce actionable recommendations. The quality of the diagnostic outputs was influenced by several factors relevant to efficient use of resources: the amount of time the design team had to oversee researcher selection; the clarity of the terms of reference; the suitability of the researchers to do the task and whether DFAT personnel were involved in workshopping the findings.

The Education Resource Facility is managed by a consortium of organisations in a five-year contract. Having one facilitating organisation for DFAT staff research request lowers the transaction costs for each individual request. As a result, small requests can be accommodated efficiently, and all responses are turned around quickly because staff-provider relationships are already in place. The facility has a staff member dedicated to quality control of product to ensure consistency of service across the researchers it subcontracts.

4.5 Research to strengthen capacity to do and use research in partner countries

Only one detailed case study specifically explored the value of DFAT research investments to build capacity in a partner country:

- › The **PNG Institute of Medical Research (IMR)** is the leading medical research institution in PNG, providing data for evidence-based intervention and policy formulation. It has received core funding of \$10 million, with a specific emphasis on building institutional capacity.

Appropriateness

The investment in IMR is appropriate in relation to the high priority accorded to PNG in Australia's aid priorities, and because acute respiratory disease is the prime killer of children in PNG. It responds directly to the stated objective of the 2012–16 research strategy to develop national and regional research capacity. The investment was made in the context of an ongoing dialogue and engagement with IMR. Australian assistance provides core institutional funding that contributes to both administration and research activities.

Effectiveness

IMR has operated since 1969, and is one of the more effective research institutes in a country with major capacity problems in its knowledge sector. It undertakes health research activities, provides evidence for local action and policy, and contributes to the regional and global base of knowledge on tropical health problems. The institute conducts research targeted at health problems prevalent in the PNG community, such as pneumonia, meningitis, tuberculosis and malaria, and emerging diseases such as HIV/AIDS and, more recently, pandemic influenza and cholera. IMR investigates the causes of disease, develops new interventions, and evaluates the efficacy of those interventions in the local setting. A 2010 review of IMR noted the institute's impressive publication record and strong relationship with the PNG National Department of Health, which has led to changes in national treatments standards and informed other decisions of the health department.⁴³ The fact that the activities of IMR are now fully managed by its own staff is an important indicator of effectiveness. The challenge lies in retaining high-quality staff, especially when the terms and conditions of employment are not currently comparable with like institutions, such as the University of PNG.

Efficiency

Australian aid, in one form or another, has been supporting the work of IMR for over 40 years. Over this time a relationship has been built that allows for a high degree of practical functionality and flexibility to respond to change. DFAT funding helps to ensure IMR's research agenda can be planned around PNG's national priorities, rather than being diverted by the need to seek other sources of external funding. IMR is also able to leverage DFAT funding to improve its own research and administrative practices, including increasing its competitiveness when applying for external grants. The flexibility of the funding has allowed financial arrangements to be modified to maximise the efficiency and coordination of delivery.

Finally, while only one case study was considered in this section, most of the other case studies already considered in this chapter also have capacity-building elements:

- › A specific objective of ACIAR is to support the development of agricultural research capacity in partner countries and in Australia, and to provide institutional continuity and international linkages

for Australian research. As mentioned previously, the 2013 independent review found strong evidence of both capacity building and uptake.

- › ADRAS applicants are encouraged to include national researchers on their teams and to build partnerships between Australian and partner country institutions. Applications that do not do this are less competitive.
- › SSGM's contract with DFAT states that the program should work with local researchers and organisations and should work to support career opportunities for Pacific researchers in a region where openings are few. The 2009 review found SSGM's engagement in the region contributed to both strengthened capacity in Pacific universities and informed local policy and research.
- › Most of the diagnostic studies of the Knowledge Sector Initiative were conducted either by Indonesian organisations or jointly by Australians and Indonesians, and the main emphasis of the resulting program is to build the capacity of all participants in the Indonesian knowledge sector.
- › The Vanuatu Drivers of Change research involved local researchers and worked with the support of local political figures.
- › All research contracts for the Violence against Women in Asia project had an international and a national researcher on the team and involved work with national research institutes and local government partners.

4.6 Conclusions

DFAT has made significant investments in research that contributes to global knowledge on development issues. The quality of the research has not generally been debated, but the case studies considered in this chapter suggest that aid program staff themselves have made little direct use of the research.

DFAT has also invested substantially in research to inform Australia's development policy at global and national levels. The SSGM and VAWG projects both produced research that had the potential to inform policy on governance in the Pacific region and gender in the Asian region. However, the available evidence indicates that the aid program either found it extremely difficult or unimportant to employ research it had funded at this policy level. Indicative of this was the way the bulk of the SSGM work being taken up by the aid program was narrowly focused applied analysis and direct advice.

When it comes to investment in research that seeks to inform program-level strategies and operations, the case studies suggest that DFAT is generally effective at obtaining good value from this investment. This is especially so where there is a clear connection between the research and specific program needs. In the case of the diagnostic research for the Knowledge Sector Initiative, the research topics were targeted at gaps in knowledge expected to emerge when the program design stage began. The Vanuatu Drivers of Change research was designed with the specific purpose of informing new programs in that country. The Education Resource Facility is used by staff when they need knowledge to develop programs, produce documents such as reviews or respond to demands for briefings. These contrast with the Effectiveness of Aid in the Pacific research, where the aid program responded to a proposal to investigate basic questions of aid effectiveness that were being debated in the public arena, without any clear concept of how the research might be used and with only a conditional commitment to providing staff resources to the project.

The finding that DFAT staff generally make good use of research that is geared toward immediate program strategic and operational demands accords with survey respondents' statements about the importance of research responding to program needs in order to be taken up. It is understandable that, in a devolved research management environment, DFAT managers find it easier to define such

needs at the program and investment level, but are less comfortable with defining research needs in relation to 'global development discourse' and higher-level Australian aid policy.

On the limited evidence available, it appears DFAT's investments in capacity building are gradually improving the effectiveness of partners to conduct their own research and use that produced by others. Evidence also points to the possibility that there are long-term efficiency gains for the aid program in establishing research relationships with partner country institutions, in terms of lowered real costs and transaction costs and improved communication of knowledge to partner government decision-makers.

In the next chapter we will outline some of the factors helping and hindering research uptake by DFAT.

5 Factors helping and hindering research uptake

This chapter seeks to understand why there appears to be inconsistency in the uptake of research by DFAT. It focuses on the subquestion: ‘what helps or hinders DFAT’s uptake of development-related research?’ The findings presented here are based largely on the expert interviews and focus group discussions, and are also informed by the case studies and the survey. Most of the staff who were interviewed or took part in the focus group discussions were DFAT managers at Executive Level 2 and Level 1, but there were also several Senior Executives at First Assistant Secretary and Assistant Secretary level.

The chapter is organised around the analytical framework set out in Chapter 1 and identifies the most influential demand-side factors, supply-side factors, issues around intermediaries and enabling environment factors.

5.1 Demand-side factors

There is reasonable demand for short-term analysis for program use, but ...

There was a clear sentiment among interviewees that DFAT (and previously AusAID) had, over the past decade, and especially since the 2008 Development Assistance Committee peer review, increasingly focused on understanding the drivers of development, something that required research-based evidence. The establishment of the chief economist, and hiring of other economists, along with the establishment of principal sector specialists, were cited as examples of a growing commitment to obtaining and using evidence, including research-based evidence. Several interviewees also noted the presence of a strong desire among new staff to acquire more technical knowledge.

The interview, focus group and survey evidence supports the finding from case studies in Chapter 4 that the bulk of the increase in demand for research has actually been for short-term analysis and research that meets program and investment design needs. The structural imperative to meet the immediate demand to design, quality assure and approve aid program investments was seen as outweighing, although not entirely eclipsing, a desire to engage in more medium to long-term strategic reflection based on research.

... there is only patchy demand for strategic, longer-term research

Very few staff stated the department saw value in longer-term, more ‘academic’ research to inform strategic thinking and global understanding of key development issues. Many interviewees and focus group discussants said that there is very little commissioning or use of longer-term academic research, and only 10 per cent of respondents in the survey had commissioned this type of research. Only low uptake of this sort of research was observed in the case studies. Several interviewees

argued that significant numbers of staff hold ‘anti-intellectual’ attitudes, and regard DFAT as a ‘practical agency which does things’.

Interviewees and focus group discussants pointed out that long-term, more academic research investments are regarded as high risk because the usefulness of the results is uncertain or may take too long to become apparent. There was also a common perception that much commissioned medium to longer-term research is irrelevant to DFAT’s direct needs.

Exemplifying the desire of staff for research relevant to shorter-term programming, many free-text comments (31 of 181 categorised comments) in response to the survey question on what could be done to improve research commissioning emphasised that research should be relevant and clearly address program needs. For example ‘*Ensure that research activities are not ad hoc, and clearly align with a program's objectives*’. (Q19-ID18)

Several interviewees argued that aid program policies were products of a clash between the ‘rational’ desire to use evidence and the ‘political’ desire to accommodate ministerial goals. For example, one manager argued that the risk aversion of senior management meant it was reluctant to publish negative information or open policy-making processes to the complexity that deep engagement with research could engender. Another pointed out the lack of incentives in a bilateral agency, with its requirement to report to a minister and parliament, to build a culture of research-based contestability around policy in a way that might be found in a multilateral agency.

Demand is largely driven by senior manager interest

The importance of the background and interest of DFAT senior managers in the uptake of research was raised by many staff across the various forms of evaluation evidence. It was highlighted as having direct implications for the way more junior managers and officers perceived their own performance requirements.

In the survey, responses relating to senior management influence were consistently present, but were usually ranked around fourth in level of frequency. They were exemplified by the following comments:

The Executive/decision-makers need to change their way of thinking and be prepared to adopt ... evidence to inform programming—rather than decision-making based on personal preference or perceived political wins. (Q19-ID107)

and

Research uptake has to be driven by the SES. If they don’t value it, why would anyone working for them? (Q31-ID14)

Focus group participants described how the approach to the use of research for strategy and planning processes varied widely between different branches, divisions and Posts, and ‘*often depend[s] most on the individual senior managers and the extent to which research is in their background*’.

A common perception of interviewed staff was that when senior managers did demand research it was for analysis that satisfied short-term ‘political’ drivers. ‘Political’ here was interpreted as referring to managers’ desire to respond to Ministerial demands and also ensure relationships with partner governments were untroubled. An indicative example of a focus group comment was:

Internal politics have a large part to play in setting incentives around research. The prevalent incentives for analytical work are to provide things that can be counted such as hospitals or roads, which don’t in themselves require much research.

In response to a question on factors within the organisation that contribute to a research project being used (Q9), 36 per cent (and especially staff at country/regional divisions) chose *'The research can be used to support a policy or program decision that has already been taken'*. The corollary of this, as one respondent noted, is that, *'Churn in policy direction can mean the entire thing [research project] is canned'*. (Q31-ID41)

Canberra versus Posts?

In the survey, a significant component of the numerous responses that emphasised the importance of communication and engagement was the issue of internal communication and working processes within DFAT. There was a consistent presence of comments across the questions that highlighted the importance of Canberra–Post relationship to research commissioning, management and use. An exemplar being:

If being commissioned by Canberra-based sections (thematic groups, desk, research section etc.) ... they consult with Post about the usefulness and applicability of the ToRs [terms of reference], and also the research proposals themselves (if one is received from an applicant). (Q19-ID71)

Also highlighted was the need for *'a stronger link between research commissioned and country program/posted staff to ensure the research is useful and will be directly applied.'* (Q19-ID114)

Several interviewees noted that Canberra would sometimes push Posts to undertake particular research projects. This seems to be largely due to the limited capacity and resources available in smaller Posts to identify research needs, and then commission and use research. This was in line with other comments about the strong research capacity of large Posts such as Indonesia and PNG. Several interviewees noted, by contrast, the difficulties smaller Posts faced in presenting their knowledge needs to Canberra-based managers, and then knowing what to ask of researchers. They argued that it was difficult for smaller Posts to gain access to the expertise of thematic groups and principal sector specialists, because the groups and specialists were responding to large numbers of requests from bigger Posts.

5.2 Supply-side factors

DFAT perceives longer-term research as being supply driven

There was a strong view among interviewees and focus group discussants that much long-term research funded by the department is supply driven and of little interest and use to departmental officers and managers. As one interviewee put it, *'There is a strong relationship between senior academics at the Universities and [the department] and they are good at getting money'*. The Improving the Effectiveness of Aid in the Pacific project is a good example of a supply-side driven research project funded by the aid program that attracted little interest among DFAT managers, regardless of the relevance of its findings.

It may be that the actual incidence of this form of research, and the role of suppliers in promoting its funding by the aid program is low, and is disproportionately significant in the minds of the interviewees. When survey respondents were asked who had the key role in initiating the last piece of research they had commissioned (Q15), only around 5 per cent of respondents answered that research partners had performed that role. The most common answers (29 from 90) were that the respondent had instigated the project either by themselves or in consultation with colleagues.

There is good research going on in Australian universities ...

All elements of the evaluation indicate that there is much useful development-relevant research happening in Australia, and Australian researchers are keen to work more closely with DFAT. Participants in the focus group discussions emphasised that *'domestic development researchers are stronger and are wishing to engage more with DFAT'*; this was echoed in the interviews with Australian researchers themselves. There was also a perception expressed in two focus groups that there is an increasing push from academics and NGOs for DFAT to fund global public good research: *'We funded them [researchers] to be stronger and now we are having to deal with it'*.

Interview and case study evidence identified many examples of where good-quality, relevant research is occurring, such as in the Health Knowledge Hubs based in universities, the ACIAR and SSGM partnerships, and the Education Resource Facility.

... but there are also some issues with quality and appropriateness

Although 80 per cent of survey respondents felt the actual research outputs they received either met or exceeded their expectations, there were consistently a number of comments (usually around 10 per cent) in the free-text answers that indicated at least some managers found it a challenge to get good quality research. Such statements included, *'We often go to standard people of 'good repute' who put junior staff on the project and produce a poor quality results'* (Q19-ID32), and *'The fact [is] that we often don't get what we asked for, yet we are powerless to fix that (we still pay for it)'* (Q31-ID113). One perceived cause was that research suppliers are rather casual about DFAT funding:

A fundamental problem is that research contract and partnership agreements are not taken seriously enough in the research community. They are treated as 'guidelines' by many researchers—serious time overruns and under-delivery are commonplace. (Q19-ID15)

Research quality may not actually drive uptake to the degree survey respondents think—noting that around 73 per cent of respondents perceived quality as being a key factor in influencing research use (Q9). While 80 per cent received research that met or exceeded expectations, only just over half of survey respondents found the research they were involved with was directly used.

A question was also raised by internal interviewees and some external stakeholders about the capacity of DFAT staff to judge research quality. It is difficult to come to a finding on this. While DFAT staff are well qualified—among the staff surveyed for this evaluation, 70 per cent had either a Masters or PhD degree—that doesn't necessarily mean they have extensive knowledge of research methods and standards. In response to the survey question on the quality assurance processes used in research projects (Q25), technical reviews, which usually involve at least one external expert, were cited by 30 per cent of survey respondents. The use of expert advice for reviews in less than one-third of research investments may mean that staff are confident that they can assess research standards without expert assistance, or are not concerned about quality issues to the extent that they seek such expertise.

Taken as a whole, the evidence suggests that DFAT staff concerns are actually about relevance and utility rather than a more abstract notion of research quality. Comments indicating this included, *'The output should provide a more practical evidence, less academic theory, and clear implementation strategy'* (Q19-ID24), and *'[research should] provide ... clear, specific and measurable outputs'*. (Q19-ID15). Another survey respondent summed up the issue in the following way:

It's important to note the difference between good quality research and the ability to provide actionable recommendations for an aid program. If the first is the focus, it is fine to work with academics if the program staff takes charge in leading the process to come up with actionable recommendation. If it's the latter, relying on academics and think tanks won't fit the bill. (Q26-ID25)

Long-term partnerships help align expectations between demanders and suppliers

The 2007–08 annual report of research in AusAID found that research was most useful to program areas when:

- › the agency and the research team shared a clear understanding of the goals of the research from the outset of the funding
- › engagement between the agency and the researchers occurred throughout the program/project
- › priorities for country-based research were set locally in partner countries and buy in was gained through use of local experts
- › short research outputs appropriate for non-academic decision-maker consumption, such as policy briefs, were provided.⁴⁴

Interviewed DFAT staff and researchers agreed with this. Both groups expressed the view that longer-running research programs and relationships improve the mutual understanding of the utility of different forms of research: *'We get to know what they're thinking and vice versa'*. In addition to the case studies already cited, other examples of useful partnerships raised in interviews included the Seeds for Life program, the Young Lives project, the growing DFAT relationship with The Asia Foundation, and the WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) reference group. These examples, along with the SSGM case study, illustrate how well-managed dialogue between DFAT and researchers can help to identify a mix of research activities and outputs, including both long-term, in-depth research and shorter-term more policy-focused analysis that improve the utility and value of a research project.

Establishing and sustaining such partnerships is not easy. There is a need for intermediary knowledge 'brokers', as discussed below. Interviewed researchers also raised the issue of staff turnover creating problems in sustaining effective partnerships. The question of staff turnover was also discussed in the internal review of international research partnerships, and has been investigated in staff satisfaction surveys and aid program reviews.⁴⁵ It is an issue that goes to workforce planning and defining what is an appropriate balance in the Australian aid program between generalist managers and subject specialists. A 2008 survey of aid program staff found that 53 per cent of staff had been in their current job less than one year and 33 per cent had been in their job for 1–3 years.⁴⁶ The research uptake survey population was more stable than this, but still reflected a level of staff movement capable of creating difficulties for DFAT to maintain effective long-term research relationships.

5.3 Intermediary factors

Interaction between DFAT staff and researchers occurs, but in a piecemeal fashion

Participants in the focus group discussions stressed the need for a more dynamic interaction between researchers and policy makers. The importance of engagement and communication between partners and stakeholders was also a clear theme in free-text answers in the survey, and there were many comments about the need to improve engagement between researchers and DFAT staff, between different DFAT divisions, and between end-users and other stakeholders. (Versions of these

sentiments can be found in answers to Q19, Q26, Q28, Q30 and Q31.) Common suggestions were those such as '[DFAT staff should] *work more closely with the researchers—often they have little or no engagement with us while doing the research, resulting in misunderstandings and work that is not directly relevant to us*' (Q19-ID32) and '[DFAT staff should] *be prepared to invest funding AND human resources into research. Your program will use the research more if staff have been involved throughout the process (not just funded and got the end report in 3 years' time).*' (Q19-ID104)

Examples of good communication between researchers and DFAT staff exist. The close relationship between DFAT staff and SSGM, and the relationship that DFAT thematic staff have developed with Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) NGO members, were cited in several of the evidence sources. The survey findings also showed a robust alignment between positive answers to the question on research uptake (Q27) (52 per cent of respondents) and the responses in the associated free-text question (Q28) that mentioned the importance of close engagement between partners (10 of 73 comments). An example comment was: '*The users were consulted sufficiently, including for validation of interim results*' (Q28-ID16).

There is a paucity of groups external to DFAT that are large enough to leverage ongoing interaction around specific development topics. The ANU Crawford School's Development Policy Centre and DevPolicy blog and the ACFID-University Network provide forums for discussion and debate. There is, however, no equivalent of the Development Studies Association in the United Kingdom version, which is influential in bringing research to the attention of the Department for International Development.

Internal communication of research findings can be improved

There was a widely-held perception that research findings are not communicated effectively within DFAT. Interviewees and focus group discussants recounted negative experiences in attempting to communicate knowledge across the agency's structural 'pillars'. Attempts were made to use the intranet, but were hamstrung by lack of budget and access to expertise. There was also considerable uncertainty among the agency's management around where to locate the Library and Knowledge Services section (which was moved four times from 2008 to 2013). Finally, one interviewed senior manager, in a comment that was echoed by several of the survey respondents, highlighted the tension between the ideal of public transparency and the desire to hold policy-related discussions behind closed doors. This interviewee argued that the effect of this restriction could be seen in ODE itself, which, in the opinion of this manager, had appeared to moderate the findings of reports following consultation with internal stakeholders.

This is not to say that there are no examples of good internal communication, but they do not add up to a comprehensive approach. One interviewed researcher mentioned receiving very good support from DFAT communications staff to help communicate the results of an ADRAS project on disability. Participants in a focus group also mentioned how a communications officer in the Research Section, for the period that position existed, '*acted as a classic knowledge broker rather than just a communications officer*' and made a significant difference to the communication of research evidence in the department. There are also some positive examples of knowledge brokering activities mentioned by respondents in the survey, including '*having brown bag events*' (Q30-ID116), and '*[previously] having a research strategy that includes dissemination of research*' (Q30-ID16). Finally, a research database was established on the intranet to record, and link to, the outputs of DFAT-funded research. This was not, however, well linked to other elements in the knowledge management system, such as the Library and Knowledge Services home page, nor was it easily accessible from the agency's intranet home page.

DFAT needs more knowledge brokers

The use of intermediation to maximise the use of research-based evidence, either through staff and researchers simply getting together more frequently, or through specialised intermediary staff, was perceived as being weak across DFAT.

One of the clearest responses in the survey related to the level of effort aid managers put into ‘actively sharing research results and ‘brokering’ them to people who might not otherwise hear about them’ (Q29)—80 per cent of respondents answered ‘Not enough’. Indicative of the majority of comments in the relevant free-text section were the following: ‘Research results are hardly ever shared more widely than between Post and Managing Contractors and partner governments’ (Q30-ID9); ‘I feel that we discover what research and analysis has been done often by accident, in that we just happen to speak to the right people. There isn’t a systematic dissemination or awareness of research and results’ (Q30-ID53).

Existing systems and structures were one reason raised in interviews for inhibiting the availability and performance of knowledge brokers. For example, a significant minority of interviewees argued that sector specialists did not play the knowledge broker role around research that the interviewees had anticipated. This was largely felt to be a question of incentives and time, and also a lack of supported processes for knowledge exchange. Examples mentioned included low DFAT engagement with specialist and general development conferences, and the poor attendance of DFAT staff at meetings to discuss the results of ADRAS projects. This view was strongly reinforced in the focus groups, exemplified by one participant’s statement that:

there is little emphasis by senior management on knowledge sharing by junior staff across DFAT. People do not have the time, and generalists and specialist staff are in different units, and there is a fear that this will be worse in [post-integration] DFAT.

Across the survey’s free-text answers, a view that the organisational culture of the department does not support knowledge sharing also emerges. Exemplifying this were the comments:

I feel there must be a lot of research going on in other parts of the program that is not regularly disseminated or broken down in any way (Q30-ID86)

and

Not enough value is placed on the value of research and using it to make well-informed policy or program decisions. The generalist culture of the agency combined with political imperatives means that research is not considered a core part of the policy/program development process. (Q30-ID31)

Although the general perception is that knowledge brokering is a problem in the department, good examples were located by the evaluators. For example, some senior managers encouraged better exchange of knowledge between specialists and program staff, though they appear to be in the minority. Some thematic groups and other branches established mechanisms to promote knowledge sharing and use. Examples mentioned included communities of practice, ‘focal points’, the Gender network, the Education Research Facility, the Research Section’s efforts to institutionalise the interaction between researchers and staff in ADRAS, and the economists’ discussion groups. Survey respondents also described some positive, even if temporary, examples, such as:

There used to be yearly ‘conferences’ at the sectoral level involving sectoral specialists, program staff and researchers. These were suspended, but were very valuable in ensuing people knew what was going on in a field. (Q30-ID1)

Research commissioning can be improved

Weak procurement and management of research was one of the issues most frequently mentioned by interviewees. Comments made about this included that staff tend to commission research that was too broad, and not sufficiently targeted on policy or program needs, with the result that the research outputs did not usefully contribute to decision-making. It was also argued in the interviews, and by a large number of survey respondents, that the terms of reference for research projects were often either unclear or failed to describe adequately what the department required. Survey respondents were asked to list the top three things DFAT could do to improve the way research is commissioned (Q19). Ensuring that terms of reference were of good quality was the third-most common response, behind communication with stakeholders and ensuring the relevance of research to aid program and partner priorities. Other responses consistent with this theme included 'ensuring the quality of research/researchers' and 'improving funding and sourcing mechanisms'.

Although there was a common concern around research commissioning, there was little agreement between stakeholders on which procurement modality would best add value. Australian researchers felt that that access to funding was increasingly, and unproductively, occurring through competitive schemes; the research expenditure figures showed, however, that competitive schemes were declining as a proportion of overall research spend. DFAT staff exhibited no clear preference for a particular procurement approach. For example, several survey respondents made comments similar to, *'Often we award research to a group that fails to provide a quality product based on [existing] relationships'*, and stated that they would prefer a competitive process (Q19-ID32). In contrast, others felt that the *'Flexibility to directly source good researchers'* was a better way to approach procurement (Q19-ID1) rather than through prescribed schemes.

5.4 Enabling environment

DFAT's organisational incentives

Participants in the focus groups felt that senior managers tend to focus on short-term issues, such as demonstrating the quality and impact of program activities and managing risk. More formally, the initiative and program design processes ask for relevant analysis, but do not specify that this needs to take the form of research. In any case, as several interviewees noted, the level of design information demanded can vary widely across units and is highly influenced by individual managers.

A theme that emerged in the focus group discussions was that, when it came to substantive development issues, managers tended to want briefings and did not encourage staff to spend time on detailed analysis (and did not always help build staff capacity to do this). Managers were felt to be much more interested in project-cycle management information, with analysis focused on minimising fiduciary and political risk. Focus group participants felt that the whole system created incentives that *'drive decision-makers to expert opinion and trusted advisers who can provide answers straight away'* rather than to research-based evidence.

Although the judicious use of research has very clear risk management benefits, especially in relation to assisting appropriate program resource allocation, it was not framed that way in internal departmental discussion. A perception that emerged in the focus group discussions was that senior managers tended not to express a strong belief in the developmental benefit of research, especially when it came to research focused on longer-term issues and risks. The outcome of this was that they do not *'value the analytical time it takes to develop corporate knowledge on a topic: there is no space to increase the absorption and uptake of research that is commissioned'*. Senior management is

'weak at building the capacity of staff to provide the sorts of advice that the organisation needs—whether that comes from primary research or secondary analysis'.

The role of senior management was also mentioned, with moderate frequency, across a number of the free-text questions in the survey. The clearest statements emerged in relation to the question about what could be done to improve the way research is used (Q19). For example, one respondent argued that there was a need for a *'more contestable evidence based analytic strategic culture within aid program senior management'* (Q19-ID5). Another respondent stated that there need to be a *'better understanding by senior managers of what research involves'* (Q19-ID1).

A significant number of survey respondents and interviewees spoke of the need for an improved research culture in the department. One respondent argued that the department needed to *'develop a culture that appreciates research beginning with senior management having higher standards of evidence'* (Q19-ID27), while another stated that *'[we need to] foster a culture that rewards people that keep up with new thinking in their respective fields'* (Q31-ID104). An exemplar comment on the issue of departmental culture and research was the following:

The aid program has a fragile, cautious and secretive culture, and does not welcome open debate and engagement with stakeholders. Aid effectiveness would be enhanced by a more robust approach to contestability. Contrary to the prevailing view, the risks of debate are low, whereas the risks [associated with] suppressing debate are high. (Q30-ID5)

Policies and strategies to improve research use have not been fully implemented

Significant elements of the 2012–16 research strategy had not been implemented by the time the Research Section was disbanded in early 2014. In part, this was because the Research Steering Committee had not met since the formal approval of the strategy in 2012. There were also several other policies, strategies and procedures that had the potential to support greater use of research, many of which, at the time of integration, had not been fully implemented or were still being bedded down. These included a knowledge management initiative in the then Policy Sector Division, the second phase of the AusAID Workforce Strategy and Plan, the review of high-value high-risk investment concepts by the Strategic Planning Committee, and ODE's *Lessons from Australian Aid* report.⁴⁷

A counter view was expressed by a number of interviewees, namely, that, in the absence of senior management 'messaging' and support, the impact of policies, strategies and formalised processes on organisational behaviour around research was minimal.

Human resource management needs to support research management

For several years before 2013–14, the aid program grew rapidly. This growth resulted in a large influx of officers and managers into the then AusAID, and rapid staff 'churning' as organisational restructuring associated with expansion occurred. The AusAID Workforce Plan (phase one in 2011 and phase two in 2012) recognised the need for the agency to ensure it had an appropriate balance of generalists and specialists. It also sought to establish career paths that gave staff opportunities to progress both within and across three streams: policy and programs, sector/discipline, and corporate and operations.⁴⁸

A common view expressed across the evidence was that good research findings are ignored because aid program staff lack the training to grasp the full implications of that research. One reason for this

emerged in the survey where 60 per cent of respondents said they only manage research 'on [an] ad hoc basis', and thus lacked practical opportunities to develop skills in research management and use. Survey respondents also consistently saw capacity issues among staff as being an important, even if not the most important, factor in preventing research uptake. An exemplar of the sorts of comments received was *'Aid staff need to better understand what constitutes quality research and then be able to press for better quality from researchers/consultants'*.

There are, therefore, a range of questions around workforce composition, and career and performance incentives that impact on the incentives and capacity of staff to commission and use research. It is important, however, to place this discussion in context. The issue of skills shortages in the areas of knowledge management and research has been a long-running one in the Australian public sector. As reported in the 2010 *Blueprint for reform of Australian Government administration*, *'In 2008–09 ... 29 per cent of agencies reported a shortage of high level policy and research skills. ... These figures have remained relatively constant over the last five years.'*⁴⁹

DFAT's decentralised research management lacks appropriate support

There was a general agreement among the interviewed and surveyed staff that research management, coherence and procurement had, over the period studied, gradually improved. These improvements, however, were felt to be inconsistent. The case studies revealed both good and poor examples of management and engagement. In the cases of SSGM and the Knowledge Sector Initiative, a dedicated staff member was assigned to manage a substantial program of research to inform the development of the project. In the Improving the effectiveness of Aid in the Pacific case, the staff member nominated to support the project was never seconded to the task.

A significant number of interviewees argued that the decentralised nature of research commissioning and management in DFAT meant that only large programs had the capacity to invest appropriately in research management and assemble a critical mass of staff with necessary research comprehension and management skills. The key examples here were the Pacific Division in Canberra and the Indonesian and PNG posts. Many interviewees mentioned that, outside of these major programs, once strategic decisions about investments are made at country level, quite junior and inexperienced staff were expected to develop research programs with inadequate support.

Survey respondents expressed the need for greater support with research management and quality assurance. Free-text answers on how to improve research management and quality assurance highlighted the need to strengthen internal systems and processes—for example, by improving internal communication, using sectoral specialists or having a clear, quality, review framework to support the process (Q26). Answers also reflected a notion that there is some confusion as to what the formal quality assurance process is within the organisation. For example:

I'm sorry, but I just don't know enough about this to give an informed view. However, that in itself might tell you something. It strikes me that there is no structured way in which this happens. If there is, then it is not well-communicated. (Q26-ID105)

A Research Section was established in 2007 to improve the use of research in AusAID, and which took the lead in developing the two research strategies. The section ran the ADRAS and systematic reviews, maintained a central database, and provided advice, support and guidelines to staff. It was never fully staffed, so struggled to provide the level of coordination and central support envisaged in the 2012–16 research strategy, and lacked the governance support that the Research Steering Committee was expected to provide. The absence of central support and coordination was noted by participants in the focus groups, with an indicative comment being:

[the aid program] has grown organically, but we don't have a research governing body that oversees the research, checks it's relevant, high quality etc. Anything that's systematised has a better chance of getting traction. But the current slimming down process is focusing on functions at Post and Desk. We have bits and pieces of everything everywhere. There's a critical need to work out what's rational.

DFAT's knowledge management systems are limited

Another common view expressed across the evidence was of the very limited resources for systematic research and knowledge management. The only agency-wide system used for storing and accessing information about investments in the agency is AidWorks, which was not designed as a knowledge system. There is a research database but it is not easily searchable or well linked with broader knowledge management systems, and is not widely used by DFAT staff. One interviewee said that if he wants to find a research document he looks in AidWorks, he asks program staff, and he asks the relevant sections (and there may be several) because they have their own, quite good, electronic files. None of these systems connect with each other. Another interviewee cited a 2011 internal study that found that people spend on average four to six hours a week looking for documents. There were many comments from staff about the need for improved knowledge management systems, an indicative example from the survey being:

There is a long term and desperate need for better knowledge management in this agency. There is lots of surely great research about—but a single and easy repository for this information is severely lacking. (Q31-ID22)

5.5 Conclusions

DFAT's (and previously AusAID's) demand for research-based evidence has clearly grown since the mid-2000s, but the main demand and uptake, even from multiyear programs and partnerships, has been skewed toward short-term, program-focused analysis rather than longer-term, policy-related research. This was partly driven by the pressing demands of program and project management in an expanding aid program. It is also influenced by senior managers' perceptions of research value, the 'political' need to meet immediate executive and ministerial demands, and the imperative to ensure timely expenditure of aid program budgets.

On the 'supply side', there is common agreement that DFAT has access to good researchers and research output. While there was some perception among DFAT staff that research investment is supply driven, the experiences recorded in the survey suggest otherwise. There is more substantial evidence, however, of a divide between DFAT staff and researchers when it comes to perceptions of research relevance and utility. Many staff argue that the research that DFAT funds does not respond sufficiently to their operational needs; researchers feel that DFAT does not sufficiently value primary research.

There is a clear recognition by all stakeholders that long-term, communicative research relationships improve the likelihood of researchers producing program-relevant research, and of DFAT staff using primary research. Establishing and maintaining these relationships is hampered by DFAT's lack of a well-established knowledge-brokering 'cadre' that can facilitate both external and internal research communication. Likewise, the relatively small and unorganised development research sector in Australia is not strongly pushing for, or contributing to, such knowledge brokering.

The environment in which research uptake occurs in DFAT has a number of conflicting elements. On the one hand, there is, overall, good demand for research and the existence of key specialists and thematic groups with disciplinary expertise. On the other hand, there are strong organisational incentives around program budget expenditure that push staff to focus on shorter-term, program-focused analysis. These incentives are reinforced by a senior management sensitive to short-term risk. The existing knowledge management systems are limited and workforce planning initiatives have not yet overcome staff capacity weaknesses relating to research management. Taken together, these environmental factors influence the direction, quality and level of DFAT's research commissioning and use. These factors also hinder the department's ability to develop an appropriate range of longer-term, value-adding relationships with research organisations.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter pulls together the findings from the previous three chapters to answer the evaluation's key question: 'To what extent is DFAT managing its investment in development-related research appropriately, effectively and efficiently?' It then considers DFAT's experience against that of other aid donors before arriving at recommendations for improving the value that the department gets from its investment in research.

6.1 Is DFAT managing research investments appropriately, effectively and efficiently?

Appropriateness

DFAT investments in research generally correlate with aid priorities and the direction of overall program spend. A minor exception to this finding is the comparatively low level of research expenditure on education, although this may not be as disproportionate as it initially seems.

The majority of DFAT research partnerships (as opposed to other delivery modalities) are with Australian and international research institutions rather than with institutions in developing countries. Research relationships with partner country institutions tend to be through grants, which are, on average, shorter than partnerships. This situation is somewhat out of line with policy statements on improving partner capacity and the benefits of local research to partner government decision-making.

Another divergence between expenditure and strategy was the decreased funding of competitive grants schemes from 2007–08. Competitive grant schemes were also the least mentioned mechanism for commissioning research (6 per cent) in the evaluation survey. Both the 2008–10 and 2012–16 aid research strategies emphasised the importance of this model, with the latter also promoting an increase in competitively funded research across all procurement modes.

Finally, the absence of a research strategy or statement on research priorities reduces the future ability of the department to determine whether or not research expenditure is appropriately directed.

Effectiveness

The ODE evaluation found that DFAT-funded research generally produces good-quality outputs that have considerable potential value for users. DFAT is not, however, always effective in its use of this research. Among surveyed staff, around 52 per cent had seen active take-up by the department of the last piece of research they had been involved in managing.

There is good uptake of short-term analysis and applied research at the country program and initiative level, but less use of longer-term primary research at this or other levels. Research is most likely to be used by DFAT when it is either targeted directly for programming purposes or there is a long-running research partnership that fosters communication between DFAT and researchers.

There is little evidence that much DFAT-funded research is explicitly informing higher-level policies or strategies. In the case of thematic strategies, external research, especially from international institutions such as the World Bank, is used. There appears to be only a low level of internal use of research aimed at furthering global discourse on development issues.

Investment in research capacity building, while comparatively low, does appear to be generally effective.

The evaluation concluded that DFAT could more effectively use the aid-related research it funds if it raised the level of its investment in departmental knowledge management systems and knowledge 'brokers' or intermediaries. The evaluation found that research findings from DFAT-funded researchers and other sources were not being well communicated internally or externally, with the lack of connection between intranet-based knowledge systems a commonly raised point.

Finally, while staff appeared to have an appetite for research-based evidence, they also raised queries about the degree to which senior managers create a supportive operating environment for research management and use.

Overall, the uptake, and hence effectiveness, of DFAT's research investment is mixed, and consideration needs to be given to how to improve staff understanding and use of research that is focused on issues broader than immediate programming needs.

Efficiency

The evidence regarding competitive grant schemes noted in the 'appropriateness' section above shows a tension in DFAT's development-related research investment: how to balance the benefits of open, competitive sourcing against the benefits of stable, long-running relationships with research providers in a way that maximises value for money. This is compounded by what appears to be an issue around DFAT staff knowing what to ask of researchers when 'procuring' and managing research (something that was frequently raised by DFAT staff and stakeholders). On the whole, there is sufficient evidence to at least mark this value-for-money issue as one of potential concern to senior managers.

DFAT's highly devolved research investment, while enabling a significant amount of useful, program-focused research, needs to be balanced by increased investment in departmental quality assurance, management and knowledge systems. Without staff and processes promoting internal and external communication around research needs and outputs, and informing users about appropriate research quality standards, fully devolved research investment has the potential to generate significant inefficiencies. These accrue in the following ways:

- › increased potential for duplication of research
- › high transaction costs in ensuring research projects set and achieve an appropriate balance of goals
- › increased difficulty in locating research outputs through the department's knowledge management systems
- › user misinterpretations of research findings
- › a reduction in the amount of timely, good-quality evidence that can inform policy and program decision-makers.

Overall, the evaluation finds that DFAT has been gaining reasonable value from its research investment, but, in order to maximise that value, needs to direct and manage its investment with a clearer appreciation of the costs and benefits of employing a decentralised research model.

6.2 How DFAT compares with other research funding aid donors

An overview of other development agencies' research expenditure and management reveals a number of similarities, and several differences, with DFAT (see Table 4). A key message that emerges is that, given the complex institutional nature of official aid agencies,⁵⁰ getting and using research appropriately, effectively and efficiently is not straightforward. While DFAT has yet to maximise the value from the research it funds, it is clear that other agencies also struggle to do the same. From the evidence presented, however, there are some positive experiences from which DFAT can learn.

Appropriateness

A notable commonality among the agencies is the level of research expenditure. All of the agencies spend between 2 and 4 per cent of their program budget on research, with 3 per cent, the DFAT spend, being the median. A number of agencies also spend approximately 10 per cent of their departmental budgets on staffing and management activities relating to research. The lack of reporting on this makes it almost impossible to ascertain DFAT's expenditure on these activities.

The general goals of research are broadly similar across the agencies. As a summarising example, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) argues that it is worth investing in research 'not only to improve the knowledge and choices available to our partners across the world, but also to strengthen our own decisions and to make sure they are based on sound evidence'.⁵¹

In their formal policy directives, the agencies exhibit differences in who they nominate as the intended users of funded research. While all agencies considered here promote a combination of internal and external uptake, most emphasise the external, 'public good' outcomes of their investment. The World Bank tilts the balance a little more toward internal and partner uptake, and DFID has also begun to investigate the degree to which the research it supports is used by its country offices, even though much of the impetus behind research remains that of 'global public good'. Although it is difficult in the absence of a concrete research strategy to be categorical, it appears that DFAT's operational emphasis is largely on the need for research outputs to be useful to its own staff.

Compared with other donors, DFAT is currently exhibiting some uncertainty around where should direct its development research investment, how it should manage that investment and what constitutes good quality research for DFAT's purposes. It is also clear, though, that, while the current policy and strategic uncertainty should be rectified, DFAT's investment in research since 2005, in addition to being in line with other donors, is an appropriate level of expenditure for an agency that seeks to be innovative and evidence-driven.

Effectiveness

The DFAT general experience on research uptake by staff and, where appropriate, partners, is in line with that of other donors. All donors that have been evaluated have displayed at least some inconsistency in their use, commissioning, management or communication of that research.

Absolute rates of research uptake by donor staff and partners are difficult to measure. Defining and then tracking research uptake is problematic, and it is notable that survey-based evaluations, such as the World Bank's, have focused on the value staff place on research, not what they have actually

done with that research.⁵² Broadly speaking, though, there are a group of agencies that are regarded by external analysts as being successful in supporting good-quality, sometimes innovative, research and its uptake by staff and partners; into this group can be placed organisations such as the World Bank, the DFID, the Swedish International Development Cooperation (Sida), and the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC).⁵³ Those agencies that, based on available evaluations, have had less success in inculcating research uptake include the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

Even among those seen to be ‘good’ users of research, there are a number of caveats. For example, the UK’s Independent Commission for Aid Impact found that the DFID encounters considerable problems in learning from the significant amount of evidence (research and evaluation) that it generates. Importantly, it found that *‘DFID does not clearly identify how its investment in learning links to its performance and delivering better impact’*. It is also found that, like DFAT, while there are many individual examples of good use of evidence, *‘DFID is not yet, however, managing all the elements that contribute to how it learns as a single, integrated system. DFID does not review the costs, benefits and impact of learning’*.⁵⁴

A set of potential drivers of research uptake emerge from the evaluations of international donors, and largely correspond with those identified in the academic literature. Foremost among these is the need for strong interaction between the users and suppliers of research. As the 2011 *Evaluation of research on Norwegian development assistance* highlights, such interaction may have to overcome a number of obstacles. The report found notably different perceptions between practitioner and researcher communities concerning what research can offer by way of decision-making advice. It concluded that:

*Policy-makers and aid managers tend to be instrumental, forward-looking and operate within the short cycles created by the political and budget processes. In contrast, researchers’ work cycles are longer term and more reflective, analyzing what has happened to draw lessons from it for the future.*⁵⁵

An evaluation of SDC’s research activities similarly found low levels of interaction between the users and suppliers of research, and noted that the key reason cited by donor practitioners was that much of the research was not directly related to their programs’ operational needs.⁵⁶ A 2010 review of DFID’s research uptake concluded that a central driver behind the use of evidence in making policy and program decisions was interpersonal relationships—not only between researchers and intended users, but also within and between policy makers and practitioners.⁵⁷

Several of the evaluations uncovered differences in the nature of research demand and use *within* their agencies. For example, in its 2011 review, the World Bank found there were significant differences between the perceptions of the value of research held by staff in ‘hard infrastructure’ units and those in poverty and economic policy units, with the latter being far more ‘functionally well-informed’ than the former. These differences correlated with the incidence of PhDs and economists within units, pointing to issues of absorptive capacity, but there was also a query regarding the nature of the research being produced and its perceived relevance to infrastructure units.⁵⁸ The failure of infrastructure units to demand more relevant research correlated with the presence of an assumption that their work had a positive development impact. In contrast, according to Ravallion, the poverty and economic policy units *‘have had to work hard to justify themselves, and have drawn more heavily on research to do that’*.⁵⁹ He concluded that:

*... if the presumption of 'impact' is routinely challenged by donors, aid organizations and citizens then project staff will face strong incentives for learning about impact. ... strong incentives for learning yield greater familiarity and use of research.*⁶⁰

A 2010 study of the DFID also highlighted differences in demand and use between policy and programming levels. Unlike Ravallion's focus on institutional culture, it found that differences between the formal structures and requirements of decision processes seemed to drive differences in research use, not just with specific requirements for assessing the evidence base behind an intervention, but also with the broader pressure to enhance credibility by referencing research.⁶¹

Efficiency

There are key differences in research governance and coordination structures between DFAT and a number of other agencies. The DFID, World Bank, Sida and IDRC (established as a separate research body to help inform Canadian development policy and programming) have clear research policies or strategies, central committees and, in some cases, advisory boards that guide the direction of research investment and research quality standards. There are usually central units that act as secretariats to these bodies and manage research policy. DFAT is closer to the Swiss SDC and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which have almost completely decentralised research management. Norad directs all support for research projects through programs administered by the independent Research Council of Norway.

Research intermediaries, or 'knowledge brokers', are increasingly seen by a range of donors as critical for both research communication and facilitating user-supplier relationships. In many cases, though they are still being established, the importance of their role is only just being recognised, and they face significant challenges, especially with regards to working with poor knowledge management infrastructure.⁶² Across those agencies that considered this issue, there was still some distance to go in defining the role of intermediaries and the means by which their work should be measured.

Finally, the need for effective knowledge management systems, bolstered by clear messaging from senior managers on the importance of sharing and using research-derived knowledge, is a challenge for all donors. For example, the SDC lacked a searchable database of research outputs and other relevant IT systems—an issue that was compounded because the central research desk and the knowledge management unit were located in separate divisions. The significant under-resourcing of research management and the inconsistency of senior executive commitment to research-based evidence intensified the problem.⁶³

In a 2003 assessment, Sida was found to have strong policy and strategic incentives for knowledge management and sharing, but weak internal capacity.⁶⁴ Through the parliamentary amendment of Sweden's Policy for Global Development and the establishment of a research cooperation unit, the gap between intent and capacity was then narrowed, if not completely bridged.

Perhaps the most indicative expression of the tensions around these issues came from the 2010 evaluation of the DFID, which found that program staff saw the formal knowledge management systems (usually intranet based) to be unwieldy and of inconsistent quality. A common program staff comment was *'you generally only get information from them if you already know what you are looking for.'* Central knowledge management staff, conversely, saw the problem as being slow adoption by program staff of useful tools. Both groups agreed, though, that senior managers displayed only variable commitment to ensuring knowledge systems were used, and that this adversely affected the incentives for staff to demand good-quality, research-based knowledge as part of their daily practice.⁶⁵

Table 4 Comparing donors' research investment and management approaches

	DFID (UK)	Sida (Sweden)	SDC (Switzerland)	IDRC (Canada)	USAID (USA)	DFAT (Australia)
Overall annual and proportional investment in research	\$370 million or approximately 3–4% of DFID program spend (2013 figures)	\$170 million (2009 figures) or approximately 2% of Sida program spend (2013 figures)	\$61 million or approximately 3% of the SDC program spend (2012 figures)	\$203 million or 3% of Canada's international assistance	No data available	\$133 million (2012) or approximately 3% of program aid
Internal investment on human resources	Approximately 9% of budget	Approximately 11% of budget.	No data available	Approximately 10% of budget	No data available	No data available
Direction of research investment	› Reproductive maternal and newborn health (35% of research funding) › Wealth creation (25% of research funding) › Climate change (17% of research funding)	› Health (25%) › Natural science and technology (25%) › Social sciences and humanities (22%) › Natural resources and the environment (12%)	Research focus is not on SDC operational needs. Priorities of commissioned research are, in decreasing order: › agricultural research (approx. 40% in 2005) › health research (7% in 2005) › governance and conflict prevention	› Agriculture and the environment (28%) › Social and economic policy (23%) › Science, technology and innovation (22%) › Health and health systems (10%)	› Agriculture › Maternal and child health › Access to water › Poverty › Government accountability	› Food security and rural development (33%) › Health and HIV (19%) › Human security and stability (13%) › Environment and natural resource management (9%)
Governance structures (especially noting quality oversight processes)	Research Committee oversees quality of research Independent Research Advisory Board supports commissioning of new research	Research council, appointed by government, guides the focus of Sida's research support	No overarching governance structure. Research projects are largely subject to external evaluation. Large research partnership has an international review panel	A 14-member international board of governors. The chairperson reports to Parliament through the Minister of Foreign Affairs. IDRC's president, also on the board, oversees day-to-day operations	No central oversight or quality function	2013–14 has seen reduced central oversight with Research Committee role subsumed into Development Policy Committee and disbandment of the central Research Section
Nature of research use	Internal through Policy Division and country offices, evidence brokers, South Asia Research hub, and country outreach analysts. External through research communication, R4D database, funding for	Research use and capacity building is supported at the level of: › individual researcher › faculty › institution › regional network › innovation system	Focus of research use is on external uptake. Responsibility for communicating research results is the responsibility of the recipient of the SDC grant. 2010 evaluation findings show a low level of awareness and use of research results within SDC	Provide financial support to researchers in developing countries. Engage with researchers throughout the research process. Act as a research broker to further networking and research reach. Facilitate access to research materials and services	Partnerships between research institutions in the US and developing countries Scholarships for developing country scholars Scalable solutions to development	Research is being used in three main ways: › During the project, via ongoing engagement between researchers and potential users › Intended user take up after the final research results are

Table 4 Comparing donors' research investment and management approaches

	DFID (UK)	Sida (Sweden)	SDC (Switzerland)	IDRC (Canada)	USAID (USA)	DFAT (Australia)
	evidence-informed policy-making process in developing countries. Training to academic researchers and parliamentarians				problems	delivered > General contribution to programming even if the results have not been taken up by the intended users

6.3 Recommendations

Four recommendations are presented below to help DFAT optimise the value it receives from its investment in development research.

Recommendation 1

- i DFAT should issue a clear policy on the priorities, preferred management processes and quality standards of the department's investment in development research.
- ii As part of its policy on development research, DFAT should encourage operational areas to maintain their development research expenditure at recent levels.

This evaluation suggests the department consider basing its development research policy on the current statements on the DFAT website concerning research, but then also include the following:

- › Clear statements on the value of research to DFAT as an evidence-based organisation; the relationship between research, the government's aid policy and DFAT's Capability Review Action Plan; the sorts of development research DFAT will support and the ethical research principles it will require its staff and researchers to follow.
- › A clear statement of the key priority areas for the department's development research investment.
- › A set of goals, and the processes whereby these goals will be achieved, around the commissioning, management, communication and use of research.
- › A statement on the need for DFAT's aid program and investment design guidance and processes to be explicit on how and when program and investment-level designers should use research.

This evaluation suggests the department issue either separately, or as part of its Performance of Australian Aid annual report, a brief annual report on the degree to which the principles and goals in the development research policy are being followed and attained.

This evaluation suggests the department look to maintain overall research expenditure at approximately 3 per cent of the administered aid budget, which would ensure it remains in line with its average research investment from 2005–06 to 2012–13 and with the investment of other donors.

Recommendation 2

DFAT senior executive should require that research-based evidence be used in policy and longer-term planning around global and regional development issues. This evidence should be clearly cited in policy and planning documents.

This evaluation suggests the department consider undertaking the following to help assist the achievement of this recommendation:

- › Relevant departmental capability and accountability frameworks are worded to require the department's senior executive service to use, and promote the use of, research-based evidence in policy and program formation and decision-making.
- › A strategically appropriate amount of research funding is directed each year to the investigation of longer-term development questions that, while they may not have immediate program relevance, present possible future opportunities, and anticipate future risks, for the aid program.

Recommendation 3

- i DFAT should clarify its criteria for directly investing in developing country research institutions, and
 - ii DFAT should commit to increasing its investment in institutions that meet these criteria.
-

This evaluation suggests the department consider outlining the criteria for directly investing in developing country research institutions, and issuing a statement of its commit to apply those criteria, in its development research policy.

Recommendation 4

- i DFAT should invest in a research governance and coordination system that lowers the current risk of department-wide inefficiencies in development research investment.
 - ii As part of its research governance and coordination, DFAT should clarify the standards it expects of departmental management of research investments. It should then enforce and support those standards through departmental guidelines, appropriate resourcing, planning (including workforce planning) and staff training. Where possible, this process should link with and support existing departmental activities, such as contracts management, improvements in knowledge management systems and the development of a workforce plan.
-

To assist the achievement of these recommendations, this evaluation suggests the department consider undertaking the following actions:

- › Establish a central research governance committee, either separate from or reporting to the Development Policy Committee (DPC), with a clear mandate for regular review of departmental research expenditure, oversight of a departmental research ethics process, oversight of a research records and related research communication process, and oversight of a research quality assurance process. The committee's membership should be drawn from thematic, global and geographic branches, and also include an external researcher representative. It should regularly report to the departmental executive (possibly through the DPC) and publicly report on its work through a brief annual report.
- › Establish and appropriately resource a research coordination and management unit that serves as a secretariat to the research governance committee, oversees central research investments, works with the department's budget statistics section to produce and update reports on research expenditure, and provides guidance and practical support to program staff to ensure high-quality research is commissioned and well managed.
- › Work with the Australian and regional development research sector (possibly through representative groups such as the ACFID-University Network) to improve mutual knowledge of the 'market' of potential researchers.
- › Clarify how DFAT and Australian Public Service standards for value for money can be appropriately applied in circumstances where there is a limited market of researchers and significant value in maintaining long-term relationships with research partners.
- › Increase investment in effective knowledge management systems within the department, focusing, in the first instance, on facilitating better intranet access to all DFAT-funded research. Where possible, this should build on existing systems and initiatives, such as electronic files management systems.
- › Increase provision for DFAT staff to have time to engage with less formal mechanisms for knowledge sharing, such as communities of practice, reading groups, and relationship building with research organisations.

- › Emphasise the knowledge broker role of aid sector specialists, ensuring that this is embedded in their job descriptions and performance appraisals.
- › Build knowledge broker skill sets for general staff in relevant positions at Posts and in Canberra, and reference these skills in their job descriptions and performance appraisals.
- › Build key elements of research management skills into the required skills sets of DFAT staff, as to be defined in the forthcoming Workforce Plan.
- › Invest in staff skills and capacity, including staff training in research commissioning and management, especially at program level and with special attention to providing support for smaller Posts, and continue the production of standards, guidelines and practical support materials started by the Research Section.
- › Encourage and support appropriate secondments of DFAT aid program staff to academic organisations.
- › Ensure all significant DFAT-funded research outputs are published either by DFAT itself or through other means such as open-access journals.

Appendix 1 Methodology

A1.1 Introduction

Background

The purpose, background, scope and initial questions for this evaluation were initially described in the document *ODE evaluation of research uptake in AusAID*.⁶⁶ The proposed methodology included quantitative analysis of the data on evaluations held in the Research Section database, a survey of DFAT staff, interviews with DFAT staff involved in commissioning, producing and using research, and the collection of case studies. The detailed methods described below were developed through discussions between the evaluation team and ODE staff during the inception phase of the evaluation which included a small number of interviews with key DFAT staff, and following the first round of expert interviews. Detailed aspects of the selection and process for the case studies were developed iteratively as the cases were identified and it became clearer what information about them was easily accessible. Most of the approach and methods described below were included in an evaluation plan which was approved by the International Evaluation Committee. Further details which were developed subsequent to this approval are clearly identified.

Evaluation questions and scope

Evaluation questions

The key question this evaluation seeks to answer is: ‘to what extent is the Australian aid program managing its investment in research appropriately, effectively and efficiently?’

‘Managing’ includes planning, commissioning, using, promoting, and translating research. ‘Research investments’ includes the specific commissioning of research, as well as investments of staff time into using and sharing research and managing research relationships.

Three subquestions help answer the core evaluation question:

- › What is the nature of DFAT’s investment in development-related research?
- › What is the value of DFAT’s investment in development-related research?
- › What helps or hinders the uptake of research in the Australian aid program?

Scope

To be manageable within the resources and time available the scope of the evaluation was limited in three ways: its definition of ‘research’; its focus on uptake rather than impact, and its focus on DFAT users.

- › The evaluation used the definition of ‘research’ provided by AusAID’s Research Strategy, which is: *‘... the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new way in order to investigate complex issues, emerging challenges or test solutions to problems. This excludes data collection and analytical work that is part of routine agency business processes that only has an internal DFAT audience’.*

- › The evaluation focused primarily on the uptake of research by DFAT managers in Canberra and at Post, noting the results of that uptake in terms of altered policy and program design, and partner government awareness of the research, but given the time and resource constraints of this evaluation not seeking to establish the contribution of research to the long-term impact of those policies and programs.
- › The evaluation focused on the use of evidence in policy making and programming by DFAT staff and, due to resource and time constraints was not able to directly explore use by partner governments.

Research framework

The evaluation plan proposed using a framework for understanding and improving research production and use developed by DFAT's Knowledge Sector Initiative in Indonesia in Indonesia which recognises 4 distinct, but interconnected dimensions:

- › **Supply:** People, organisations and institutions that produce research-based evidence.
- › **Demand:** People, organisations and institutions who commission and/or use research-based evidence for decision-making.
- › **Intermediaries:** People, organisations and institutions that help to translate and communicate research-based evidence, and the demand for it, between the supply and demand side.
- › **The enabling environment:** Those policies, institutions and processes which affect how research-based evidence is produced, used and translated.

Further work was done following the expert interviews to develop an analytical framework, that could be used to explore the extent to which the aid program was managing research investments appropriately, effectively and efficiently in each of these dimensions. A summary table identifying the main dimensions of this framework is included in Chapter 1. A more detailed table showing the Analytical framework and evaluation criteria is provided in Table A1.

Table A1 Analytical framework and evaluation criteria

Demand		Supply		Intermediaries (processes and people)		Enabling environment		
Core question: To what extent is the Australian Government’s aid program managing research investments appropriately and effectively? (‘Managing’ includes consideration of planning, commissioning, using, promoting, and translating research. ‘Research investments’ includes direct funding as well as investments in staff time into using and conducting research.)								
Appropriateness Meaning? The right things are being researched?	›	Research is aligned to partner government priorities	›	Research is responsive to the needs of the commissioner, whether that is DFAT staff implementing programs, developing responses to policy problems, contributing to global responses to problems, or building capacity of partner organisations	›	Intermediary processes or people are put in place to ensure research based evidence is available to the right people at the right time	›	Policies, incentives and procedures in DFAT encourage staff to commission appropriate research
	›	Research balances the priorities of developmental impact, fiduciary risk and political risk			›	Relationships and communication between DFAT and providers ensure that the appropriate research is commissioned and that DFAT needs are well understood by providers	›	Management values research and communicates this to staff
	›	The profile of research commissioned reflects the profile of policy and program priorities. The research program reflects DFAT’s priorities and balance viz: building development research capacity in Australian and the region; balance between ‘big questions’ as well as immediate, program-relevant problems	›	Research findings are rigorous, valid, useful, user-friendly and timely				
Effectiveness	›	Findings and recommendations are drawn on by intended users	›	Research providers deliver expected outputs to a high quality, on time and within budget	›	Research findings are communicated effectively to appropriate audiences	›	Incentives and procedures in DFAT enable staff to manage research effectively
	›	Findings and recommendations are incorporated into policy and/or programs where relevant			›	The research process builds a good working relationship between commissioner and supplier (overcoming the ‘two communities’ problem)		
	›	Research findings and recommendations influence unintended users						
	›	Research contributes to the stock of ‘public goods’ knowledge on development						
Efficiency	›	The priorities of DFAT and partner countries are communicated rapidly and the implications for research are identified early on	›	Providers produce a good research return on DFAT’s investment of time and funding in them	›	Commissioning process ensures a broad, fair and equitable approach to sourcing research	›	Incentives and procedures in DFAT enable staff to manage research efficiently
					›	Commissioning process ensures that demand for research can be met in the time available	›	The organisation promotes a culture of reflective practice

Methods

The evaluation process can broadly be divided into four parts:

- › framing the evaluation and developing the approach (completed)
- › establishing the nature and extent of DFAT's use and commissioning of research (subquestion 1)
- › establishing what helps or hinders the uptake of research (subquestion 2)
- › producing lessons on how DFAT can optimise its broad range of investments to better facilitate research uptake by the agency (subquestion 3).

Framing the evaluation

Review of DFAT research policy documents and initial interviews

Preparatory work for the evaluation included:

- › a brief review of some of the key documentation including the 2012–16 Research Strategy, draft and final Annual Reports on Research in DFAT, DFAT's research homepage, and program and initiative design policies, guidelines and templates
- › a brief review of the completeness and quality of data in databases prepared by the research section for 2009–2011 and 2011–2012, and summary data extracted from AidWorks to date using research-related codes under 'payment events'
- › a small number of interviews with key DFAT staff
- › a review and comparison of the methods used for the World Bank and DFID studies to assess the viability of gathering comparable data for this study
- › several teleconferences between the ODI and ODE evaluation team members.

Literature review

A literature review to establish the current 'state of the art' of analysis on the usage of research in policy-making and programming. It will focus on academic and think-tank literature and analyses produced by official aid donors.

Establishing the nature and extent of research use and uptake

Analysis of DFAT data held in the Research Section database

Due to the incompleteness of the data, this was limited to descriptive (first-level analysis) of DFAT Research Section data sheets to identify broad trends in DFAT commissioned research since 2007.

Web-based survey of DFAT personnel

A web-based survey of DFAT personnel identified through the research section database and AidWorks as having been involved in commissioning research. This survey is described in detail in Appendix 2.

Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of DFAT's approach

Interviews

Fifty-two staff representing different levels of decision-making were interviewed using a semi-structured interview. Most of these were EL2s and EL1s, but a small number of senior executives at FAS and AS level were also interviewed. Nine additional interviews were undertaken with people for the case studies, as described below.

Focus-group discussions

Four focus-group discussions were held with staff who had not been involved in the expert or case study interviews and deliberately chosen to represent staff who had not been actively involved in research activities. They included staff at multiple levels and from different divisions and branches. The key focus of these groups was around four issues: incentive structures, relationships with suppliers and the commissioning process, how knowledge is moved around the organisation; and working arrangements.

Research providers

A small number of interviews and a group discussion were undertaken with key external research providers at and around the ACFID annual conference on Development Futures in Sydney in November 2014 in order to gather evidence about the supply-side viewpoint on both the challenges for DFAT in using research and how successful DFAT has been in integrating research-based evidence into its policies and programs.

Case studies

Nine case studies were selected for further research from examples of good practice that emerged during the expert interviews and focus group discussions. The cases were selected to include examples which were felt by the evaluation team, ODE and Research Section staff to be broadly representative across two main dimensions:

- › The four main purposes of research as described above: i) to answer common/global development policy questions; ii) to answer DFAT development policy problems; iii) to provide information to support the immediate development of programs and policies/strategies; and iv) to build capacity among (mainly) partner country research organisations.
- › Value: small (less than \$500 000); medium (\$500 000–\$10 million) large (over \$10 million).

A further selection criteria was the availability of documents, and of personnel who could be interviewed to provide more information.

The approach used for the case studies included the synthesis of information gathered through initial interviews, a review of key documentation, which included at the very least a contract and a final report, but for larger projects will include the design document, annual reports, final project completion report and an assessment of research outputs, face-to face, telephone or skype interviews, or e-mail exchange with one key stakeholder involved in each cases.

This information was extracted into a template with the standard questions shown below in Table A2. This information was then used for the analysis in Chapter 4.

Table A2 Standard question template for the case studies

Background › Initiative name, Timing of the initiative, Goal, Objectives, Cost, Aid modality & implementing partner arrangements, Description, Where does the initiative sit in the wider country portfolio?
Demand: Appropriateness › Did the research respond to Australian & partner government priorities? › Did the research balance priorities (developmental impact, political risk, fiduciary risk and immediate program-relevant problems vs 'big questions')? Effectiveness and efficiency › Were the findings drawn upon by intended & unintended users and/or incorporated into policy and/or programs? Value added › Did DFAT identify gaps, investigate new methodologies and/or use the research to contribute to quality and innovation in policy and/or programs? › Has the research contributed to the stock of 'public goods' knowledge?
Supply Appropriateness › Was the research provider responsive to the needs of DFAT? › How was the research capacity identified and brought to bear on the problem? › Did the research provide a good return on DFAT's investment of time and funding? Effectiveness and efficiency › Did the providers deliver expected outputs to a high quality, on time and within budget? Value added › Did the providers produce research that contributes to new knowledge, approaches and/or methodologies for DFAT, for partner countries and/or as public goods?
Intermediaries Appropriateness › Did relationships and communication between DFAT and providers ensure that the appropriate research was commissioned and that DFAT needs were well understood by providers? Effectiveness and efficiency › What intermediary processes or people ensured that research based evidence was available to the right people at the right time? › Did the commissioning and research process build a good working relationship between commissioner and supplier? Value added › Did the research contribute to the strengthening of a development research sector in Australia or in the partner country?
Enabling environment Appropriateness › What DFAT policies, incentives and procedures encouraged staff to commission research in this instance? Effectiveness › What DFAT policies, incentives and procedures enabled staff to manage research effectively and efficiently? Value added › Did management encourage new inquiries, answers and approaches to problems in this instance?
Documents reviewed / people consulted

Verification and producing lessons on how to improve research uptake

The results of the research was verified towards the end of the main research through the circulation and discussion of a document outlining the key emerging findings to selected key stakeholders in what had then become Policy Division, and through feedback of a very early draft report from a small number of peer-reviewers.

Summary of data sources and methods of analysis

The main data sources, and primary method of analysis for each of the research questions is shown in Table A3.

Table A3 Main data sources and method of analysis

Question	Main data sources	Primary method and analysis
What is the nature and value of DFAT's research investments?	› DFAT databases › DFAT documents › DFAT Staff › External literature	› Descriptive and (limited) statistical analysis of research section database to identify broad trends in commissioned research, construct a typology of DFAT-funded research and identify thematic and program areas where research is commissioned and where it is not › Web-based survey of DFAT staff to identify what research is being commissioned in different sections, in Canberra vs Post and for different purposes, etc
What helps or hinders the uptake of research in DFAT?	› DFAT Staff › Researchers and intermediaries › DFAT documents › Web analysis.	› Web-based survey of DFAT staff to identify factors that help or hinder research uptake › 1:1 interviews and focus group discussions with DFAT staff and researchers and intermediaries to elicit more complete picture of types of research being commissioned and factors that help or hinder its uptake › Analytical case studies explored through document review, interviews and web-based analysis of uptake › Group discussions with researchers and other intermediaries to identify institutional incentives and other factors driving research use and non-use
How can DFAT's research usage and communication be improved?	› DFAT Staff › Researchers and intermediaries › External literature	› 1:1 interviews and group discussions with DFAT staff and researchers and intermediaries to explore how research use can be improved › Literature review › Telephone interviews to validate results › Final workshop to validate results and discuss options for improving research use

Appendix 2 Survey

This appendix provides an overview of the results of a survey of the perceptions and experiences of Australian aid program staff in relation to research commissioning, management and use.

The online survey (using the Survey Gizmo program) consisted of four sections: Background information, Perceptions of research uptake, Research commissioning and Research use—these last two sections containing questions that asked for respondents to consider their experience as opposed to their perceptions.

It was decided that, instead of targeting the whole DFAT population and potentially getting a low response rate due to machinery of government changes occurring at the time, the survey would target those members of the staff who have been involved in commissioning and managing research in the organisation, on the basis that this group was more likely than the population as a whole to have . Thus, the sampling strategy was a combination of purposive and snowball sampling utilising the research database and other means.

The survey was sent to 206 DFAT staff working on the aid program. The total number of responses was 91 (90 responses by online, 1 response sent by PDF), indicating that a response rate of 44.2 per cent. This gave a confidence interval of 7.7 percentage points at 95 per cent confidence. Whether the response rates reflected the country and thematic program division in the whole sample was checked, and as it was almost one-to-one, no weighting was applied on that basis.

Several of the questions were analysed by key background variables to check whether statistically significant differences existed between subgroups. There was, however, little variation between subgroups and no statistically significant differences of relevance. In some cases, the large number of options resulted in categories with only a few observations, which inhibited making meaningful interpretations across subgroups. Thus, the responses below reflect the general perceptions across the survey population.

The open text answers are analysed by using MAXQDA programme and categorised into main themes. One response usually contains several key themes.

Background characteristics

Q1. Your branch. From the list below, select your branch as at 31 October 2013.

Table A4 Original divisions

Division	Frequency	%
Pacific Division	12	13.19
East Asia Division	44	48.35
Africa and Community Programs Division	4	4.40
South and West Asia Division	6	6.59
Humanitarian and Stabilisation Division	4	4.40
International Policy and Partnerships Division	3	3.30
Policy and Sector Division	13	14.29
Executive Division	2	2.20
Program Effectiveness and Performance Division	3	3.30
<i>Total</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>100</i>

Table A5 Country/ regional versus thematic/central divisions (re-categorised from the original division categories)

	Frequency	%
Country and Regional Divisions	66	72.53
Thematic and central Divisions	25	27.47
<i>Total</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>100.00</i>

Q2. What is your role? From the list below select your current role

Table A6 Original categories

	Frequency	%
Canberra and A-based: SES	0	0
Canberra and A-based: Director/Counsellor	5	5.49
Canberra and A-based: Manager/1st Secretary	29	31.87
Canberra and A-based: Officer/2nd Secretary	16	17.58
Canberra and A-based: Administrator	4	4.40
Canberra and A-based: Specialist	5	5.49
O-based staff: SES	0	0
O-based staff: Program Director/ OB 8	1	1.10
O-based staff: Program Manager/ OB 7	9	9.89
O-based staff: Program Officer/ OB 5–6	18	19.78
O-based staff: Administrator/ OB 1–5	4	4.40
O-based staff: Specialist	0	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>100</i>

Table A7 Roles re-categorised, 5 categories

	Frequency	%
Canberra and A-based: Director/Counsellor and Manager/1st Secretary	34	37.36
Canberra and A-based: Officer/2nd Secretary and Administrator	20	21.98
Canberra and A-based: Specialist	5	5.49
O-based staff: Program Director and Program Manager (OB 7–8)	10	10.99
O-based staff: Program Officer and Administrator (OB 1–6)	22	24.18
<i>Total</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>100</i>

Table A8 Roles re-categorised, Canberra based vs Post based

	Frequency	%
Canberra based	59	64.84
Post based	32	35.16
<i>Total</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>100.00</i>

Q3. Which thematic area do you mainly work on?

(NB Respondents could indicate a thematic area outside of their formal position, and this option appears to have been used in many cases. There is also a very high 'others' category.)

Table A9 Thematic areas

	Frequency	%
Disability	6	6.6
Economics and Economic Governance	7	7.8
Education	18	20
Environment and Climate Change	10	11
Food Security and Rural Development	9	10
Gender	8	8.9
Governance	17	18.9
Health	15	16.7
Humanitarian and DRR	4	4.4
Infrastructure	2	2.2
Law and Justice	5	5.6
Social Development	8	8.9
Water and Sanitation	3	3.3
Others	18	20

Respondents: 91

Q4. As at 31 October 2013, how many years had you worked in your branch?

Table A10 Years in current branch

	Frequency	%	Cumulative
Under 2 years	33	36.67	36.67
2–5 years	38	42.22	78.89
5–10 years	16	17.78	96.67
Over 10 years	3	3.33	100.00
<i>Total</i>	90	100.00	

Q5. As at 31 October 2013, how many years had you worked in DFAT altogether?

Table A11 Total years in Australian aid program

	Frequency	%	Cumulative
Under 2 years	5	5.49	5.49
2–5 years	31	34.07	39.56
5–10 years	42	46.15	85.71
Over 10 years	13	14.29	100.00
<i>Total</i>	91	100.00	

Q6A12 What is the highest academic qualification you have obtained?

(NB In the analysis, this category is re-categorised into 2 categories: PhD and Master's degree, and Diploma and bachelor's degree (which includes the one high school certificate)).

Table A12 Highest academic qualification

	Frequency	%	Cumulative
PhD	6	6.59	6.59
Master's degree or postgraduate diploma	58	63.74	70.33
Diploma or bachelor's degree	26	28.57	98.90
High school leaving certificate (or equivalent)	1	1.10	100.00
<i>Total</i>	91	100.00	

Q7. Gender

Table A13 Gender

	Frequency	%	Cumulative
Female	58	63.74	63.74
Male	33	36.26	100.00
<i>Total</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>100.00</i>	

Q8. In the position you held at 31 October 2013, how frequently did you participate in commissioning research?

Table A14 Frequency of commissioning research

	Frequency	%	Cumulative
It was a core part of my job	7	7.69	7.69
Regularly and frequently (more than twice a year)	15	16.48	24.18
Regularly but infrequently (less than twice a year)	16	17.58	41.76
On an ad-hoc basis	53	58.24	100.00
Total	91	100.00	

Perceptions of research uptake

The responses regarding perceptions of research uptake are reported on as %ages of the total sample population. For the sake deeper of analysis, statistically significant relationships^f were sought between perceptions and key background variables (1. Division: Country/Regional vs. Thematic Division, 2. Roles: Canberra-based vs Post-based roles, 3. Total years in AAP. 4. Education and 5. Gender), but none were found.

Q9. What are the most important elements of a research project that will lead to it being used? Tick top 3.

Table A15 Perceptions of the most important research elements which will lead to its use

	Frequency	%
The quality and credibility of the evidence and findings	66	72.53
The research responds to a relevant program need	64	70.33
The research commissioner(s) and other potential users are involved to some degree in the research process	29	31.87
The research provides good background evidence for a policy or program	32	35.16
The research clearly adds to the general store of knowledge on an issue	10	10.99
The clarity with which the research is communicated	39	42.86
The availability and accessibility of the research products	10	10.99
The researcher's influencing skills	9	9.89
Other	8	8.79

Respondents: 91

Q10. Thinking about the context within which research projects are conducted, what are the most important factors within the Australian aid program that contribute to a research project being used?

Table A16 Perceptions on most important factors within the AAP that contribute to a research project being used

	Frequency	%
The research can be used to support a policy or program decision that has already been taken	31	34.07
The research happens to meet a newly emerging program need	60	65.93
The research has been initiated by a Post	22	24.18
The actions of people or sections whose role is to communicate knowledge	27	29.67
The capacity of potential users (individuals and organisational units) to make use of the research	55	60.44
Organisational culture and incentives	27	29.67
Direct senior management encouragement to use the research	31	34.07
Other	11	12.09

Respondents: 91

^f First crosstabs with Pearson's chi squared test was applied and in cases where there were less than five observations in one of the cross tab cell, the Fisher's exact test was applied.

Q11. What would improve the likelihood of commissioned research being used in the Australian aid program?

Table A17 Perceptions on what would improve the likelihood of commissioned research being used in the APP

	Frequency	%
Improved the quality and credibility of research evidence and findings	28	30.77
Research responding better to a clearly identified program need	62	68.13
Increased involvement of research commissioner(s) and other potential users in the research process	28	30.77
Increased availability and accessibility of the research products	14	15.38
Clearer communication of research	28	30.77
Strengthened capacity of people or sections whose role is to communicate knowledge	8	8.79
Strengthened capacity of potential users (individuals and organisational units) to make use of the research	27	29.67
An organisational culture that encourages research use	38	41.76
Direct senior management encouragement	19	20.88
Explicit recognition, within job descriptions, of the time needed to actively use research	12	13.19
Other	6	6.59

Respondents: 91

Commissioning research

This section focuses on respondents' experiences in commissioning research. Respondents were asked to think about the last time they commissioned and managed a piece of research.

Q12. Thinking about the last time you were involved with commissioning a piece of research, what were you seeking to achieve with that research? Select only one answer.

Table A18 Purpose of the research

	Frequency	%	Cumulative
Answer common/global development policy	9	9.89	9.89
Address development policy questions specifically relevant to the Australian aid program	36	39.56	49.45
To solve a particular problem related to a program or initiative design	11	12.09	61.54
To solve a particular problem related to program or initiative implementation	13	14.29	75.82
To learn lessons from a specific policy	7	7.69	83.52
To learn lessons from a program, initiatives	4	4.40	87.91
To build the research capacity of a developing country institution	4	4.40	92.31
Other	7	7.69	100.00
Total	91	100.00	

Table A19 Purpose of research re-categorised

		Frequency	%	Cumulative
Answer common/global development policy	Conceptual	46	51.11	51.11
Address development policy questions specifically relevant to the Australian aid program				
To solve a particular problem related to a program or initiative design	Instrumental	38	42.22	93.33
To solve a particular problem related to program or initiative implementation				
To learn lessons from a specific policy				
To learn lessons from a program, initiatives				
To build the research capacity of a developing country institution	Capacity building	4	4.44	97.78
Other	Other (symbolic and legitimising purpose)	2	2.22	100.00
	Total	90	100.00	

'Others' has been recoded to match with new categories and one reply ('not commissioned research') has been excluded from the new category

Q13. Which thematic area did the research relate to? (Tick all that apply)

Table A20 Thematic area

	Frequency	%
Disability	4	4.40
Economics and Economic Governance	12	13.19
Education	17	18.68
Environment and Climate Change	12	13.19
Food Security and Rural Development	11	12.09
Gender	12	13.19
Governance	19	20.88
Health	17	18.68
Humanitarian and DRR	3	3.30
Infrastructure	2	2.20
Law and Justice	5	5.49
Social Development	11	12.09
Water and Sanitation	6	6.59
Other	14	15.38

Respondents: 91

Q14. Value of the research activity

Table A21 Value of the research activity, original division

Value	Frequency	%
<\$500k	64	71.11
\$500k–\$1 million	8	8.89
\$1–2 million	8	8.89
\$2–5 million	4	4.44
>\$5 million	6	6.67
<i>Total</i>	90	100.00

Table A22 Value of research activity, recoded

Value	Frequency	%
<\$500k	64	71.11
>\$500k	26	28.89
<i>Total</i>	90	100.00

Q15. The last time you were involved in commissioning research, who had the key role in initiating the process?

Table A21 Key role in initiating the research

	Frequency	%
I did	15	16.67
Partner government	5	5.56
My manager (Canberra)—non-SES	6	6.67
My manager (Post)—non-SES	6	6.67
My manager (Canberra)—SES	1	1.11
My manager (Post)—SES	2	2.22
It emerged from group discussions with colleagues	14	15.56
The project rolled over from a previous research project or program	8	8.89
Sector/thematic specialist (Canberra)	9	10.00
Sector/thematic specialist (Post)	2	2.22
Research partner	4	4.44
Other*	18	20
<i>Total</i>	90	100

**Most of 'other' responses reflected the collaborative process of initiating research.*

Q16. Who did you engage with in preparing the research proposal/Terms of reference. Tick all that apply

Table A22 Engaging with in the preparation of the research proposal/ToR

	Frequency	%
Country or regional program managers and staff	56	63.64
Thematic/specialist groups	47	53.41
Principal sector specialists	23	26.14
Research section	11	12.50
External specialists who were contracted	31	35.23
External specialists who provided informal feedback	16	18.18
Specialists in country and regional programs	22	25.00
Partner government officials	20	22.73
Other partners (e.g. other Australian Government departments, the World Bank etc)	23	26.14
NGOs	8	9.09
None	1	1.14
Other	10	11.36

Respondents: 88

Q17. Who did you commission? If the research was done via a consortium, please indicate where the lead researcher / institution came from.

Table A23 Commissioned partners

	Frequency	%	Cumulative
Australian academic researcher / institution	24	26.67	26.67
International academic researcher / institution	17	18.89	45.56
Developing country academic researcher	5	5.56	51.11
International think-tank	7	7.78	58.89
Multilateral partner (e.g. WB)	4	4.44	63.33
Civil society organisation or NGO	7	7.78	71.11
Consultancy or private company	17	18.89	90.00
Other	9	10.00	100
<i>Total</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>100</i>	

Q18. How did you commission the research? (choose from the list):

Table A24 Commission modality

	Frequency	%
Direct grant	28	31.11
Partnership	17	18.89
Competitive scheme	5	5.56
Contracted	31	34.44
Other	9	10
<i>Total</i>	90	100

Q19. Thinking about all the times you have commissioned research for the Australian aid program, what are the top three things that could be done to improve the way research is commissioned?

Table A25 Categorised open text replies

Theme	Frequency	%
Improving communication and engagement	35	19.34
Relevance and priorities	21	11.60
Clear/strong ToRs	14	7.73
Dissemination of results	13	7.18
Ensuring quality of research/researchers	11	6.08
Senior management buy-in and commitment	11	6.08
Improving funding and sourcing mechanisms	11	6.08
Program needs vs long-term research	10	5.52
Clarity of the purpose and objectives	8	4.42
More guidance and support for staff	7	3.87
Time needs	7	3.87
Partners capacity building	6	3.31
Practical/technical recommendations	5	2.76
Organisational culture	5	2.76
Others	17	9.39
<i>Total</i>	181	100.00

**Total refers here to the total number of categorised comments. One open text reply can contain several themes.*

Table A26 Main themes in Q19 with examples

Theme	No. of comments	What does this theme refer to? Typical answer/exemplary quotes
1. Improving engagement	35	These replies highlight the need for improving and strengthening the communication channels and the engagement between partners and stakeholders (whether they are researchers, commissioners or end users) <i>'Increased consultation process with local partners and beneficiaries' (ID23)</i> <i>'Work more closely with the researchers—often they have little or no engagement with us while doing the research, resulting in misunderstandings and work that is not directly relevant to us.'</i> (ID32) <i>Be prepared to invest funding AND human resources into research. Your program will use the research more if staff have been involved throughout the process (not just funded and got the end report in 3 yrs time). (ID104)</i> <i>'A stronger link between research commissioned and country program/posted staff to ensure the research is useful and will be directly applied. Greater emphasis on participatory research to involve the intended beneficiaries in the research process rather than relying on communication of research outcomes after they have been finalised.'</i> (ID114)
2. Relevance and priorities	21	These replies refer to the need for research being relevant and meeting Australian Aid Program's/DFAT's and/or partner governments priorities <i>The research question should be locally/regionally relevant, and help address a theoretical or practical problem in relation to the aid program (i.e. practicality and demand-driven, as opposed to being supply-driven and only contribute to a general pool (ID26)</i> <i>Alignment with partner government & AAP information needs and challenges (ID78)</i> <i>Research address information needs of partner government as well and or just only Australian Aid initiative / program or policy objectives (ID89)</i>
3. Clear/strong ToRs	14	These replies highlight the need for clear ToR (and guidance how to do it) <i>Invest heavily in well-defined Terms of Reference and Research Plan. (ID21)</i> <i>If being commissioned by Canberra-based sections (thematic groups, desk, research section etc.) that they consult with Post about the usefulness and applicability of the ToRs, and also the research proposals themselves (if one is received from an applicant). (ID71)</i> <i>TOR could be reviewed independently by someone in Canberra or elsewhere, particularly when dealing with in-country research institutions, to determine whether what we are asking for is reasonable or realistic given capacity of organisation. (ID86)</i>
4. Dissemination of results	13	These replies refer to the importance of having clear dissemination plan and strategy <i>We could do better in communicating the research results. In addition to the product, we could have other communication materials packaged according to target audience. This is also related to 'effective dissemination' of the product. (ID69)</i> <i>Dissemination plan should be developed at early stage to reach wider and appropriate audiences for better utilisation of the results. (ID85)</i>
5. Ensuring quality of research and researchers	11	This refers to answers which highlight the need for ensuring the quality of research and researchers <i>Need to have researcher(s) who have deep understanding of the local/regional context—otherwise the recommendations would be something that fit with other countries/region rather than the real intention of the research (ID54)</i> <i>Better communication internally of quality of output—again, we often go to standard people of 'good repute' who put junior staff on the project and produce a poor quality result. (ID32)</i> <i>The research output should provide a more practical evidence, less academical theory, and clear implementation strategy (ID24)</i> <i>Choose researchers who are not just technically proficient, but have some emotional intelligence and the ability to communicate their work to non-experts.(ID105)</i>

Theme	No. of comments	What does this theme refer to? Typical answer/exemplary quotes
6. Senior management buy-in and commitment	11	This theme refers to answers which are highlighting the importance of senior management buy-in, interest and better understanding of what research involves <i>Better understandnig by senior managers of what research involves (ID1)</i> <i>More contestable evidence based analytic strategic culture within aid program senior management. (ID5)</i> <i>better senior level buy-in for importance of research (ID63)</i> <i>The Executive/decision-makers need to change their way of thinking and be prepared to adopt an evidence to inform programming, rather than decision-making based on personal preference or perceived political wins. There is alot of use of the phrase 'evidence'based' or 'evidence-informed' but my experience is that it is only true if it suits other purposes, and that evidence comes a distant second to alot of other priorities.(ID107)</i>
7. Improving funding and sourcing mechanisms	11	This refers answers that are calling for either more competitive or more flexible funding mechanisms <i>A more competitive process—often we award research to a group that fails to provide a quality product based on relationships (ID32)</i> <i>Flexibility to directly source good researchers (ID1)</i>

Results and use

This section focuses on research results and findings

Q20. What outputs did (or do) you expect to see from the research? Tick all that apply.

Table A27 Research outputs

	Frequency	%
A single research report	50	56.18
A series of reports on different aspects of the research	37	41.57
Academic articles	15	16.85
Policy briefs	42	47.19
Tools or a toolkit	18	20.22
Improved policy dialogue with partners	43	48.31
Seminars or workshops	43	48.31
Media articles or radio spots	13	14.61
Internet products (e.g blogs, tweets)	14	15.73
Others	4	4.49

Respondents: 89

Q21. Who were the main target audiences for the research results? Tick up to five. If the research is ongoing, indicate the intended audiences.

Table A28 Main audiences

	Frequency	%
Local communities	23	25.56
Extension workers	8	8.89
NGOs or civil society organisations	28	31.11
Local media	2	2.22
Private sector	5	5.56
Australian Government policy-makers in general	39	43.33
Partner country policy-makers / government department staff	59	65.56
Private company	2	2.22
Australian aid program staff at Post	67	74.44
Australian aid program staff in Canberra	54	60.00
Australian academics / think-tanks	10	11.11
Academics / think-tanks in other countries	12	13.33
Others	9	0.010

Respondents: 90

Q22. Has the research reached the stage of producing outputs?

Table A29 Outputs produced

	Frequency	%
No (skip to Q31)	26	29.55
Yes (go to next question)	62	70.45
<i>Total</i>	88	100

Q23. How well did the outputs from the research meet your expectations?

Table A30 Output expectations

	Frequency	%	Cumulative
Well-above expectations	0	0	0
Above expectations	13	20.31	20.31
They were what I expected	38	59.38	79.69
Disappointing	12	18.75	98.44
Very disappointing	1	1.56	100.00
<i>Total</i>	64	100.00	

Q24. What were the main reasons for this? Tick all that apply.

Table A31 Reasons for Q23

	Frequency	%
The technical quality of the work	46	70.77
The scope of the work	29	44.62
The quality of the writing	37	56.92
The timeliness with which results were delivered	22	33.85
The range of communication products	11	16.92
The communication process (eg seminars, workshops)	16	24.62
Other (please specify)	11	16.92

Respondents: 65

Q25. What was the main kind of formal quality assurance process used for the outputs? Tick up to two.

Table A32 Quality assurance process

	Frequency	%
None	8	12.50
Technical review (involving at least one external expert)	20	31.25
Peer review (primarily involving internal and other stakeholders)	31	48.44
Steering group / advisory group throughout the project lifecycle	23	35.94
Other	6	9.38

Respondents: 64

Q26. How would you improve the way research is managed and quality assured in the Australian aid program?

Table A33 Categorised open text replies to Q26

Themes	Frequency	%
Improving internal systems and processes	16	21.92
Ensuring quality or research and researchers	10	13.70
Strengthening communication between stakeholders	8	10.96
Strengthening peer review process	7	9.59
Practical recommendations	6	8.22
More guidance and support	5	6.85
Ensuring senior management commitment	5	6.85
Clear ToRs	4	5.48
Others	12	16.44
<i>Total*</i>	73	100.00

**Total refers here to the total number of categorised comments. One open text reply can contain several themes.*

Table A34 Main themes in Q26 with examples

Theme	No. of comments	What does this theme refer to? Typical/exemplary quotes
1. Improving internal systems and processes	16	Broad category which includes answers which refer to improving communication between AAP staff, utilising sectoral specialists or having 'clear quality review framework to support quality assurance process' <i>Constant engagement of sector specialists in the whole research process. Program Managers can manage the quality of research products to a certain extent but sector/technical knowledge will be required to ensure a high quality report.(ID52)</i> <i>I believe that more large or exploratory Australian aid projects should include a research component, ie that is be modelled on an operational research or research and design approach, with ongoing cost effective research through out the life of the project, which should be a realistic timeframe, i.e. 8–10 years timeframe. It would probably be more cost effective to commission research and design in country over a longer period rather than relatively short term design missions often involving people not intimately engaged in the context. Research should be iterative over life of programs/projects and invest in continuity of expertise involved & include a focus on building local capacity for research. (ID95)</i>
2. Ensuring quality of research and expertise of researchers	10	These replies refer to the importance of ensuring that researchers have necessary (local and/or thematic) expertise and that good quality work is produced <i>A fundamental problem is that research contract and partnerships agreements are not taken seriously enough in the research community. They are treated as 'guidelines' by many researchers—serious time overruns and underdelivery are commonplace. (ID15)</i> <i>It's important to note the difference between good quality research and the ability to provide actionable recommendations for an aid program. If the first is the focus, it is fine to work with academics if the program staff takes charge in leading the process to come up with actionable recommendation. If it's the latter, relying on academics / think tanks won't fit the bill. (ID25)</i> <i>Aid staff need to better understand what constitutes quality research, and then be able to press for better quality from researchers/consultants. (ID71)</i>
3. Strengthening communication and engagement	8	These replies refer to the importance of regular communication and ensuring good quality contact with staff and partners. <i>More engaged discussion between the researchers and the Post staff about the likely outputs and impacts (ID114)</i> <i>Regular communication to ensure the research is on track and responds to any emerging requirements (ID72)</i>
4. Ensuring strong peer review process	7	These replies refer to ensuring strong peer review process. <i>Ensure strong peer review process—so need to know who in aid program is qualified to sit on a review (ID1)</i> <i>Ensure large-value research is peer reviewed or appraised by technical experts however with specific knowledge of country operating context and program objectives. (ID21)</i>

Q27. How has the research been used? Tick the answer that most closely approximates your experience.

Table A35 Use of research

	Frequency	%	Cumulative
During the project, via ongoing engagement between researchers and potential users	17	26.15	26.15
After the final findings and recommendations were delivered they were taken up in full or in part by the intended users	17	26.15	52.31
The results have made a general contribution to programming even if they haven't been taken up by the intended users	10	15.38	67.69
I had to work hard to get people to take notice of the results	6	9.23	76.92
The issue had moved on by the time the results emerged	2	3.08	80.00
The results have not been used	8	12.31	92.31
I don't know	5	7.69	100.00
<i>Total</i>	65	100.00	

Table A36 Use of research, categorised by value of research

	<\$500k %	>\$500k %	Total
During the project, via ongoing engagement between researchers and potential users	24.49	31.25	26.15
After the final findings and recommendations were delivered they were taken up in full or in part by the intended users	24.49	31.25	26.15
The results have made a general contribution to programming even if they haven't been taken up by the intended users	18.37	6.25	15.38
I had to work hard to get people to take notice of the results	8.16	12.50	9.23
The issue had moved on by the time the results emerged	2.04	6.25	3.08
The results have not been used	14.29	6.25	12.31
I don't know	8.16	6.25	7.69
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100

Table A37 Use of research, recategorised

	Frequency	%	Cumulative
Active use	34	52.31	52.31
Indirect use	10	15.38	67.69
Potential use	6	9.23	76.92
Not used	10	15.38	92.31
Don't know	5	7.69	100.00
<i>Total</i>	65	100.00	

Table A38 Categorised use of research and categorised purpose of research

Purpose		Active use	Indirect use	Potential use	Not used	Don't know	Total
Conceptual	No	13	4	3	8	4	32
	%	40.63	12.50	9.38	25.00	12.50	100
Instrumental	No	19	6	3	1	0	29
	%	65.52	20.69	10.34	3.45	0.00	100
Capacity building	No	2	0	0	1	0	3
	%	66.67	0.00	0.00	33.33	0.00	100
Other (legitimising)	No	0	0	0	0	1	1
	%	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00	100
<i>Total</i>	No	34	10	6	10	5	65
	%	52.31	15.38	9.23	15.38	7.69	100

Q28. What influenced how the research was used—were there any specific factors that helped or hindered this?

Table A39 Categorised open text replies to Q28

Theme	Frequency	%
Demand for research	21	28.77
Engagement with partners and stakeholders	10	13.70
Quality findings and expertise of researchers	9	12.33
Communications of results	7	9.59
Senior management interest and uptake	7	9.59
Others	19	26.03
<i>Total</i>	73	100.00

**Total refers here to the total number of categorised comments. One open text reply can contain several themes.*

Table A40 Main themes in Q28 with examples

Theme	No. of comments	What does this theme refer to? Typical/exemplary quotes
1. Demand for research	21	These replies highlight the importance of having a clear demand for research. In positive examples there has been a clear need for research and in negatives there hasn't been. <i>It was directly relevant and useful to informing our ongoing strategic position and provided a strong and improved knowledge base for us as officials to inform and shape our briefing throughout the agency and internationally. (ID22)</i> <i>The research was on a topical policy issue, of which not much is known about, thereby filling a gap (ID95)</i>
2. Engagement between partners and stakeholders	10	These replies refer to the importance of engagement of partners and stakeholders, including end-users <i>liaison 'early-on' with end users of product to clarify their expectations (ID27)</i> <i>The users were consulted sufficiently, including validation of interim results. (ID16)</i> <i>Relationship between researchers and program staff. In some instances, program staff felt the researchers weren't considering their views and hence did not place value in the research outputs. (ID72)</i>
3. Quality of findings and recommendations	9	These replies refer to the quality of the research and findings <i>The research, by studying a cross-section of programs brought together the information in a new way, and made new observations and findings. It also made some interim practical recommendations even for programs, not recommended for further research. The research was well written, logical and used evidence well. (ID95)</i>

Q29. In general, within the Australian aid program, how much effort is put into actively sharing research results and 'brokering' them to people who might not otherwise hear about them?

Table A41 Brokering efforts

	Frequency	%
Too much	0	0
About right	13	19.70
Not enough	53	80.30
Total	66	100

Q30. Please explain your answer to Q29 (In general, within the Australian aid program, how much effort is put into actively sharing research results and ‘brokering’ them to people who might not otherwise hear about them?)

Table A42 Categorised open text replies to Q30

Theme	Frequency	%
'Not enough' / institutional culture	34	54.84
Positive examples	10	16.13
Information overload and time restraints	6	9.68
Better targeting	5	8.06
Demand for research	4	6.45
Other	3	4.84
<i>Total</i>	62	100.00

**Total refers here to the total number of categorised comments. One open text reply can contain several themes.*

Table A43 Main themes in Q30 with examples

Theme	No. of comments	What does this theme refer to? Typical/exemplary quotes
1. 'Not enough' / Institutional culture	34	These answers reflect 'not enough' option in Q27. They are examples how and why brokering and dissemination is not happening and how institutional culture is not supporting this process. <i>I feel that we discover what research and analysis has been done often by accident, in that we just happen to speak to the right people. There isn't a systematic dissemination or awareness of research and results (ID53)</i> <i>Research results are hardly ever shared more widely than between Post and Managing Contractors and partner governments' (ID9)</i> <i>The aid program has a fragile, cautious and secretive culture, and does not welcome open debate and engagement with stakeholders. Aid effectiveness would be enhanced by a more robust approach to contestability. Contrary to the prevailing view, the risks of debate are low, whereas the risks of suppressing debate are high. (ID5)</i> <i>The most valuable research we have are a couple of sectoral political economy analysis that are not allowed to be published because some of the findings are deemed too controversial! (They are not controversial, it's the agency being conservative) (ID25)</i> <i>I feel there must be a lot of research going on in other parts of the program that is not regularly disseminated or broken down in any way. (ID86)</i> <i>I think a lot of research happens (even research commissioned by my own team in the past) that totally passes us by. Unfortunately everyone knows this already—my team have talked a lot about 'yeah we should really use/ read/ circulate/ publicise this research' but it is never urgent enough (or demanded by SES) to make it get to the top of the to do list. (ID36)</i> <i>Not enough value is placed on the value of research and using it to make well-informed policy or program decisions. The generalist culture of the agency combined with political imperatives means that research is not considered a core part of the policy/program development process. (ID31)</i>
2. Positive examples	10	These replies reflect 'About right' category in Q27. They are positive examples when brokering and dissemination is successfully happening. <i>In my post, we invite all post at staff to attend presentations on the result of the research prior to finalising the report to get feedback. Final report are then shared with all staff. (ID6)</i> <i>This is based on my experience at Post, which is why recently, we have come up with a Research Strategy which includes dissemination of research , including to those outside the target audience, is a target approach to maximise the benefits of the research. (ID16)</i> <i>There used to be yearly 'conferences' at the sectoral level involving sectoral specialists, program staff and researchers. These were suspended, but were very valuable in ensuing people knew what was going on in a field. (ID1)</i> <i>We have quite frequent brown bag events where people get the opportunity to disseminate research results. (ID116)</i>

Q31. Are there any other issues you think contribute to improving the uptake and impact of research commissioned by the Australian aid program?

Table A44 Categorised open text replies to Q31

Theme	Frequency	%
Dissemination of results	12	16.22
Institutional culture	10	13.51
Demand for and relevance of research	9	12.16
Senior management	8	10.81
Engagement between stakeholders	7	9.46
Knowledge management	7	9.46
Time constraints	3	4.05
Others	18	24.32
<i>Total</i>	74	100.00

**Total refers here to the total number of categorised comments. One open text reply can contain several themes.*

Table A45 Main themes in Q31 with examples

Theme	No. of comments	What does this theme refer to? Typical/exemplary quotes
1. Dissemination of results	12	These replies highlight the importance of communicating and disseminating results. <i>Media for distribution—there are far greater and more effective means available to researchers to discuss and publish their work other than as a textually based piece of work. Thinking through different approaches to communicating the work will be important in future. (ID42)</i> <i>Not all products should be written. We need to think creatively in how to convey research. Perhaps have a 'new ideas' person in each branch to monitor breaking ideas that people should be aware of (this happens a bit with networks, library thematic updates but could be done more).(ID104)</i>
2. Institutional culture	10	These replies refer to the existing institutional culture. <i>Taking a stance and learning how to deal with the 'shocking' or 'controversial' but important research findings that require response or action for them to be any useful (ID25)</i> <i>Foster a culture that rewards people that keep up with new thinking in their respective fields. (ID104)</i>
3. Demand for and relevance of research	9	These replies highlight the demand for the research and that research need to be relevant to the AAP. <i>Planning for research relevant to program implementation. If you don't prioritise it, it won't happen. (ID30)</i> <i>Research needs to be timely and fit for purpose when initiated by country program teams, but broader research tasks which have clear, practical recommendations that can be drawn on by country programs are also extremely useful. (ID63)</i>
4. Role of senior management	8	This answers refer to the importance of the role of senior management <i>Research uptake has to be driven by the SES. If they don't value it, why would anyone working for them? (ID14)</i> <i>Senior managers need to push an evidence-based decision-making culture. (ID1)</i> <i>I think the question of organisational culture and senior leadership is absolutely critical though. (ID8)</i> <i>Ensure SES pass down the message that every officer should be prioritising time to undertake and digest research relevant to their work (ID70)</i>

Appendix 3 DFAT's top 50 research investments, 2012–13

No.	Investment	Partner	AUD
1	Africa Food Security Initiative Phase 2 (Africa)	CSIRO	\$13 194 981.00
2	Partnership with the Centre for International Forestry Research	AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURE RESEARCH T/A ACIAR	\$ 6 000 000.00
3	Education Sector Analytical and Capacity Development Partnership 2010–15 (Indonesia)	ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK	\$ 4 500 000.00
4	Funding for Disease Research 2010–11 to 2013–14 (Bangladesh)	INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR DIARRHOEAL DISEASE RESEARCH, BANGLADESH	\$ 3 950 000.00
5	PSLP Establishment of an Applied Research and Development Partnership between UNE and PNU	THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND	\$ 3 714 660.00
6	Pakistan Partnership for Improved Nutrition Multi-Donor Trust Fund (TF No. TF071900)	WORLD BANK, THE	\$ 2 700 000.00
7	Management of 2nd Phase of Agriculture Sector Linkages Program (Pakistan)	AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURE RESEARCH T/A ACIAR	\$ 2 581 733.34
8	Product Development for Malaria Drugs	MEDICINES FOR MALARIA VENTURE	\$ 2 500 000.00
9	Product Development for Tuberculosis Drug Regimens	GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR TB DRUG DEVELOPMENT, INC.	\$ 2 500 000.00
10	Product Development for Tuberculosis Vaccines	AERAS	\$ 2 500 000.00
11	Product Development for Malaria and Tuberculosis Diagnostics	FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATIVE DIAGNOSTICS	\$ 2 500 000.00
12	Establishing A Joint Assessment, Curriculum and Technology Research Centre (For PSLP Round 2011/12)	UOM COMMERCIAL LTD	\$ 2 470 020.00
13	Afghanistan Agricultural Research Portfolio	AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURE RESEARCH T/A ACIAR	\$ 2 419 618.50
14	Identification of Poor Households Programme (Cambodia)	DEUTSCHE GESELLSCHAFT FÜR INTERNATIONALE ZUSAMMENARBEIT (GIZ) GMBH	\$ 2 200 000.00
15	Asia Foundation Partnership in the Philippines	THE ASIA FOUNDATION—AFGHANISTAN	\$ 2 087 209.36
16	Partnership for Knowledge-Based Poverty Reduction (Indonesia)	WORLD BANK, THE	\$ 2 000 000.00
17	Commercialising Agricultural Research into Business to Benefit Rural People in Africa	ALLIANCE FOR A GREEN REVOLUTION IN AFRICA (AGRA)	\$ 2 000 000.00
18	ACIAR Regional Agriculture Research Partnership	AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURE RESEARCH T/A ACIAR	\$ 1 800 000.00
19	The Centre for Democratic Institutions—supporting Parliamentary and Political party reform (Indonesia)	AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY	\$ 1 641 000.00
20	Institutional Design Research and Capacity Building	MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY (MIT)	\$ 1 619 156.21

No.	Investment	Partner	AUD
21	Coordination and Planning Support for Clinical Service Delivery in the Pacific	FIJI SCHOOL OF MEDICINE	\$ 1 592 000.00
22	Access to Quality Education Program Fiji	GRM INTERNATIONAL PTY LTD	\$ 1 472 544.00
23	Asia Foundation Partnership in the Philippines	THE ASIA FOUNDATION—AFGHANISTAN	\$ 1 429 227.64
24	Financing TVET in the Pacific Research	THE AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH LTD (ACER)	\$ 1 219 965.66
25	Advancing Integration: Climate Change Adaptation, Disaster Risk Reduction and the Environment	OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE	\$ 1 130 486.00
26	Revitalising Indonesia's Knowledge Sector for Development Policy—Management of Program Learnings (Indonesia)	THE ASIA FOUNDATION (JAKARTA)	\$ 1 050 000.00
27	CSIRO Alliance ROU 2008–09—research for Development Horizons Two and Three Research	COMMONWEALTH SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH ORGANISATION	\$ 1 027 012.00
28	Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP)	INTERNATIONAL BANK FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT	\$ 1 000 000.00
29	Exchange of Letters PMNCH Funding	WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION (WHO)	\$ 1 000 000.00
30	Non-Government Organisation funding to support good public policy in public administration and public financial management in Timor-Leste	THE ASIA FOUNDATION—AFGHANISTAN	\$ 1 000 000.00
31	International Crisis Group Interim Partnership Framework	INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP	\$ 1 000 000.00
32	Contribution Agreement to support UNICEF Pacific Multi-country Program, Jan 2013 – June 2014	UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND (UNICEF) NY	\$ 986 761.00
33	AusAID-Global Development Network collaboration on research capacity building (Global) 2013–15	GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK	\$ 977 371.00
34	Education Sector Analytical and Policy Advisory Work in Timor-Leste	INTERNATIONAL BANK FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT	\$ 954 540.22
35	Improving farmer livelihoods in East India Plateau Phase 2	AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURE RESEARCH T/A ACIAR	\$ 952 844.62
36	Small ruminant productivity in Iraq	AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURE RESEARCH T/A ACIAR	\$ 950 000.00
37	Asia Pacific Malaria Elimination Network—Establishment Support Program	UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND	\$ 926 069.00
38	USP Partnership Framework (funding)	UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC	\$ 921 483.86
39	Support to the Development and Utilization of Indonesia Democracy Index (IDI)	UNDP	\$ 910 000.00
40	Integrated Bio Behavioural Survey Multi Donor Trust Fund (to World Bank)	WORLD BANK, THE	\$ 900 000.00
41	The Indonesia Project—Phase III	THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY	\$ 886 593.00
42	Mama Graon Program	GOVERNMENT OF VANUATU	\$ 880 000.00
43	Implementation of Seeds of Life 3 (Timor-Leste)	AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURE RESEARCH T/A ACIAR	\$ 835 200.00
44	Justice for the Poor (East Asia)	WORLD BANK, THE	\$ 824 097.12

No.	Investment	Partner	AUD
45	Core Funding Support for the Research Institute (Indonesia)	SOCIAL MONITORING & EARLY RESPONSE UNIT	\$ 800 000.00
46	Myanmar Public Expenditure Review Phase 1	INTERNATIONAL BANK FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT	\$ 800 000.00
47	Indonesia Governance Index (Indonesia)	KEMITRAAN-PARTNERSHIP FOR GOVERNANCE REFORM	\$ 740 000.00
48	HIV Cooperation Program for Indonesia	GRM INTERNATIONAL PTY LTD	\$ 715 105.18
49	Support for Enhanced Macroeconomic and Fiscal Policy Analysis (SEMEFPA)	INTERNATIONAL BANK FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT	\$ 700 000.00
50	Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Pro-Poor Policy—The Knowledge Sector initiative	RESEARCH TRIANGLE INSTITUTE	\$ 676 500.00

Abbreviations

ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
ADRAS	Australian Development Research Awards Scheme
ANU	Australian National University
ARC	Australian Research Council
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DFID	Department for International Development
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IMR	Institute of Medical Research (Papua New Guinea)
NGO	nongovernment organisation
Norad	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
ODE	Office of Development Effectiveness
PNG	Papua New Guinea
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
Sida	International Development Cooperation
SSGM	State, Society and Governance in Melanesia
UN	United Nations
VAWG	Strengthening the Evidence on Violence Against Women and Girls

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