

Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI)

How DFID Learns

Inception Report

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) is the independent body responsible for scrutinising UK aid. We focus on maximising the effectiveness of the UK aid budget for intended beneficiaries and on delivering value for money for UK taxpayers. We carry out independent reviews of aid programmes and of issues affecting the delivery of UK aid. We publish transparent, impartial and objective reports to provide evidence and clear recommendations to support UK Government decision-making and to strengthen the accountability of the aid programme. Our reports are written to be accessible to a general readership and we use a simple 'traffic light' system to report our judgement on each programme or topic we review.

1.2 Our reports on DFID's programmes typically focus on four areas of assessment: objectives, delivery, impact and learning. By learning, we mean the extent to which DFID gains and uses the knowledge it garners in the course of its work (and the work of others in related areas) to influence its actions and strategies.

1.3 From the 27 ICAI studies published to date,¹ we have seen that DFID staff do not always fully use available knowledge when making decisions. We want to understand why this happens, as we have seen how learning can enhance the impact and effectiveness of aid. We have also seen how failure to use learning can inhibit the effectiveness and impact of UK aid. We noted in our 2011-12 Annual Report that, 'with DFID's technical expertise and standing, we would expect to see better sharing and lesson learning about what is both good and poor practice'.² The International Development Committee (IDC) is also interested in learning and has requested that we look into how DFID's staff learn and how the organisation enables them to do so.

1.4 This inception report sets out the assessment questions, methodology and a work plan for the delivery of the review. It is, however, intended that the methodology and work plan are flexible enough to allow for new issues and questions that emerge over the course of the review.

2. Background

2.1 Please see Terms of Reference for background.³

3. Purpose of this review

3.1 To assess how effectively DFID and its staff learn in order to improve the value for money and impact of aid programmes, taking account of DFID's increasing focus on fragile states.

Approach

3.2 Our review will examine what difference learning makes to DFID's work in reducing poverty. The focus will be on DFID's staff and their experience and practice. At the same time, we will look at the corporate enabling environment for individuals' learning.

3.3 We will focus our analysis on four key activities that DFID undertakes. These are:

- making programme choices;
- creating theories of change;
- choosing delivery mechanisms; and
- adapting and improving implementation of its activities.

3.4 We will investigate how DFID is using learning to carry out these activities.

¹ The team will update their analysis in the drafting phase to include newly published reports.

² *Independent Commission for Aid Impact: Annual Report to the House of Commons International Development Committee 2011-2012*, ICAI, June 2012, Paragraph 54, <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/ICAI-Annual-Report-2011-12-FINAL.pdf>.

³ *Terms of Reference: How DFID Learns*, ICAI, <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/>.





4. Relationship to other reviews

4.1 Considerable data exists relating to how DFID learns; this has been collected by ICAI, by DFID itself and by third parties. Our approach will be, in the first instance, to draw upon this material (primarily that created since 2010). We will augment this by collecting our own primary data only where there is insufficient evidence from the existing material to answer our questions or where we have concerns about the quality of that data.

ICAI's own reports

4.2 We will draw upon the evidence of ICAI's 27 studies. These have considered 120 DFID programmes across 38 countries/territories, including undertaking visits to 24 DFID country offices. Our approach will be first to distil learning-related lessons from all the reports. We will also draw upon the lessons learned from ICAI's process of follow-up with DFID that takes place after our reports have been published. See Figure 1 for an overview of reports published to date.

Figure 1: ICAI Ratings for learning in reports published to date

Ratings	ICAI study
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> DFID's Climate Change Programming in Bangladesh DFID's Support to the Health Sector in Zimbabwe Evaluation of DFID's Support for Health and Education in India DFID's Humanitarian Emergency Response in the Horn of Africa DFID's Livelihoods Work in Western Odisha
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> DFID's Approach to Anti-Corruption DFID's Programme Controls and Assurance in Afghanistan The Effectiveness of DFID's Engagement with the World Bank The Effectiveness of DFID's Engagement with the Asian Development Bank Evaluation of DFID's Bilateral Aid to Pakistan DFID's Oversight of the EU's Aid to Low-Income Countries DFID's Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Programming in Sudan DFID's work through UNICEF DFID's Health Programmes in Burma DFID's Support to Capital Projects in Montserrat DFID's Support for Palestine Refugees through UNRWA DFID's Empowerment and Accountability Programming in Ghana and Malawi
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Girl Hub: a DFID and Nike Foundation Initiative Evaluation of DFID's Electoral Support through UNDP The Management of UK Budget Support Operations DFID's Education Programmes in Three East African Countries Evaluation of the Inter-Departmental Conflict Pool DFID's Education Programmes in Nigeria DFID's Use of Contractors DFID's Support for Civil Society Organisations through Programme Partnership Arrangements FCO and British Council Aid Response to the Arab Spring
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> DFID's Peace and Security Programme in Nepal

4.3 Our initial analysis of the 27 reports indicates a consistent set of very broad findings that relate to learning. See Figure 2 for a brief summary.⁴

⁴ These should not be taken as ICAI's conclusions but emerging findings that will be tested.

Figure 2: Some emerging issues from ICAI's reports to date

1. There is a lack of clarity within DFID around how knowledge and learning should be collected, shared and utilised.
2. There is potential for DFID to draw together more systematically its wealth of knowledge to increase opportunities for learning, strengthen decision-making processes and prevent the duplication of mistakes.
3. There is a lack of consistency around how knowledge is shared, particularly between different offices and sectors.
4. Sharing of knowledge and learning between staff and offices in conflict states and complex humanitarian situations appears to be stronger than in other DFID programmes.
5. DFID could do more to support data collection systems in countries where relevant and adequate information is not always available to inform decision-making and programme implementation.
6. There is potential for better sharing of knowledge and best practice between DFID and delivery partners, building on some best practice examples that are already taking place.
7. DFID does not always take wider learning and knowledge into account for its programme design and decision-making processes, including research and briefings from outside of DFID.
8. DFID overall has shown a willingness to learn from the ICAI reports although there is still scope within some programmes/departments for a fuller response to ICAI recommendations. Implementation of some recommendations remains on going and should be followed up.

Case studies derived from ICAI's reports

4.4 Building on ICAI's analysis to date, we will specifically identify 12 areas of interest from our previous reports as case studies. These will be selected to provide insights into the activities set out in section 4.2 above. Our decision on these case studies is informed by the findings of each report. We will gather information on each case study in order to help answer our evaluation questions. See Figure 3 for a provisional list of these case studies.

Figure 3: Provisional case studies

	Case Study	Areas of interest drawn from our findings to date	Alignment with ICAI approach⁵
1.	DFID's Livelihoods Work in Western Odisha, India http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/ICAI-Report-DFIDs-Livelihoods-Work-in-Western-Odisha.pdf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How analysis and learning was used in the design of the Western Orissa Rural Livelihoods Programme (WORLP) • How knowledge and learning from WORLP has influenced other programmes across India • How well DFID is sharing lessons from WORLP across the organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making programme choices • Choosing delivery mechanisms
2.	DFID's Education Programmes in Nigeria http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/ICAI-Nigeria-Education-report.pdf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How DFID is using learning to support ongoing education programmes in Nigeria and across country offices • The use of learning in the design of new education programmes • How effectively DFID is following up on ICAI's learning related recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapting and improving implementation of its activities • Creating Theories of Change

⁵ See paragraph 4.2 above.

Case Study		Areas of interest drawn from our findings to date	Alignment with ICAI approach ⁵
3.	DFID's Health Programmes in Burma http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/16-July-2014-ICAI-Burma-Health-Report-FINAL.pdf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How lesson learning from previous health programmes in Burma influenced design of the 3MDG Fund • Whether lessons from other DFID offices have influenced the Burma health programme, for example, on maternal health and vice versa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating theories of change • Making programme choices
4.	UK Humanitarian Emergency Response in the Horn of Africa http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/ICAI-report-FINAL-DFIDs-humanitarian-emergency-response-in-the-Horn-of-Africa11.pdf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How learning is being identified, captured and shared within the region and more widely • How learning from DFID's drought response in the Horn of Africa has been applied to the recent Sahel drought 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapting and improving implementation of its activities
5.	DFID: Programme Controls and Assurance in Afghanistan http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/ICAI-Afghanistan-Final-Report_P1.pdf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How learning is being captured and shared between fragile and conflict-affected states • How the ICAI process has built upon and supported additional learning for DFID Afghanistan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choosing delivery mechanisms • Adapting and improving implementation of its activities
6.	DFID's Peace and Security Programme in Nepal http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/ICAI-report-DFIDs-Peace-and-Security-programme-in-Nepal.pdf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How limited use of learning has impacted DFID's programming and effectiveness • How information is being generated and what is happening to it afterwards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapting and improving implementation of its activities • Making programme choices
7.	Girl Hub: a DFID and Nike Foundation Initiative http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/ICAI-Girl-Hub-Final-Report_P1-5.pdf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the Girl Hub programme has learned and applied lessons from pilot programmes/ countries. • The value of challenge (through the ICAI process) to support learning for DFID 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating theories of change • Adapting and improving implementation of its activities
8.	DFID's Approach to Anti-Corruption http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/DFIDs-Approach-to-Anti-Corruption.pdf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The value of challenge (through the ICAI process) to support learning for DFID • What has made DFID's response to this ICAI report stronger than its response to some others? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapting and improving implementation of its activities • Choosing delivery mechanisms

Case Study		Areas of interest drawn from our findings to date	Alignment with ICAI approach ⁵
9.	DFID's Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Programming in Sudan http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/CAI-Report-DFIDs-Water-Sanitation-and-Hygiene-Programming-in-Sudan.pdf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether failure to incorporate lessons learned from earlier programmes is leading to failures being repeated • How well DFID Sudan and DFID as a whole is learning from failure across the organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making programme choices • Choosing delivery mechanisms
10.	Management of UK Budget Support Operations http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/CAI-Budget-Support-Final-Report-3.pdf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How a lack of learning on real impact for intended beneficiaries is impacting theories of change for budget support • How this may be preventing DFID from making appropriate programme choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating theories of change • Making programme choices
11.	DFID's Oversight of the EU's Aid to Low Income Countries http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/CAI-EU-report-061212-FINAL.pdf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How DFID is learning from its work with multilaterals • How DFID is applying this learning to its work with the EU • Is learning from the EU influencing the way DFID works with other multilaterals? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating theories of change • Adapting and improving implementation of its activities
12.	DFID's Use of Contractors to Deliver Aid Programmes http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/CAI-REPORT-DFIDs-Use-of-Contractors-to-Deliver-Aid-Programmes.pdf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How DFID is collecting and utilising learning from this delivery mechanism, particularly in fragile/ conflict- affected states • How this learning is influencing programme choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choosing delivery mechanisms • Making programme choices

DFID's own survey data

4.5 In addition to our existing information, we will draw upon data from DFID's internal staff surveys undertaken between 2010 and 2013. With varying coverage and depth, these provide considerable insight into how DFID learns. Figure 4 summarises the surveys of which we are currently aware.⁶

⁶ The number, range and detail of internal surveys during the last three years imply that we have access to sufficient primary data from DFID to mean we will not have to conduct our own survey. This clearly also reduces the burden on DFID for their participation in this ICAI study.

Figure 4: DFID survey data

1.	Name	DFID Evidence Survey, 2013
	Sponsor	Research and Evidence Division (RED) in May 2013.
	Purpose	To examine how evidence is used across DFID and to provide in-depth insight into 'How DFID Learns'.
	Respondents	There were 461 head office and in-country respondents.
2.	Name	DFID Learning and Development Survey
	Sponsor	Learning and Talent Management, May 2013.
	Purpose	To introduce the Civil Service's 70:20:10 approach and explore the range of different learning options used by DFID staff, for example on the job learning vis-a-vis more formal training opportunities. ⁷
	Respondents	There were 130 Head Office and in-country respondents.
3.	Name	Government People Survey, Autumn 2012
	Sponsor	Civil Service with specific results for DFID.
	Purpose	Fourth annual Civil Service-wide survey to capture staff's attitudes and experiences of work.
	Respondents	There were 2,285 DFID respondents, giving a response rate of 89%.
4.	Name	DFID Use on 10% of Cadre Time Survey
	Sponsor	Heads of Profession. This has taken place in Autumn 2011, Spring 2012 and a new survey is scheduled for Sept 2013.
	Purpose	This survey is a stock-take to assess how individuals' time is allocated for professional development through their professional cadre. It seeks to document some examples of good practice and to collect advice on how to maximise the benefit of professional cadres to DFID and the individuals involved.
	Respondents	There were 150 respondents in 2011 and 422 respondents in 2012. In the 2012 survey, 82.3% of respondents were Home Civil Service (HCS) and 17.7% Staff Appointed in Country (SAIC).
5.	Name	DFID Advisory Induction Programmes Survey
	Sponsor	Advisory Induction Programme
	Purpose	To ask advisers for their views on how DFID can best provide them with the knowledge and skills they need to get up to speed quickly with their new jobs. The survey is sent several months after their 5 day Induction session. It has taken place from September 2011 to January 2012 and also from February 2012 to September 2012.
	Respondents	There were 56 respondents out of a possible 127 in 2011-12 and 80 respondents for 2012 (total possible unknown). In the 2012 survey, 82.3% of respondents were HCS and 17.7% SAIC.
6.	Name	Strengthening Learning from Research and Evaluation Online Survey, 2010
	Sponsor	Independent Advisory Committee on Development (IACDI) - contributing to the ODI paper 'Strengthening learning from research and evaluation: going with the grain'. Online survey carried out by the Evaluation Department (EVD) in close collaboration with the research team of ODI's Research and Development programme (RAPID).
	Purpose	To provide a broader look at perspectives on lesson learning in DFID. The survey questions were strongly informed by themes emerging from semi-structured interviews so it gave an opportunity to 'test' insights and hypotheses which had emerged from the smaller sample (but deeper analysis) provided by the interviews.
	Respondents	The survey was posted and advertised on Insight (the DFID internal network) and was available to all DFID staff; in total, 254 staff answered the survey.

⁷ The 70:20:10 model suggests that any individual in the Civil Service gains 70% of their learning from personal experience 20% from other people and 10% from courses and reading.

Studies of DFID by others

4.6 We will also draw evidence from others' assessments of DFID's learning. For instance, a study by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) from 2010⁸ identified the following three domains for learning in DFID:

- For **research and evaluation outputs**: ODI noted that 'the question of whether lessons are learned focusses on how influential that work is, whether findings and recommendations are taken up in policy and programming and acted upon';
- For **decision-making and action**: 'the question of lesson learning becomes a matter of looking at the extent to which evidence (and in particular, that emerging from DFID's research and evaluation) feeds into and informs the process of policy making and programming'; and
- Concerning **DFID as a learning organisation**: 'the question of lesson learning focusses on how knowledge within DFID is captured, shared and used, as and where it is needed'.

4.7 The ODI study suggests that DFID is more comfortable with using the findings of research and evaluation than it is with organisational learning (see bullet three of Figure 5). Similarly, it is much better at using research and evaluation findings during or as part of, a project cycle, than in more complex and emergent decision-making processes. ODI concluded that initiatives that promote a sense of ownership of research and evaluations and those that support the development and strengthening of interpersonal learning networks were effective. We are particularly interested in DFID's corporate learning, noting that, in 1990, Senge identified that organisational learning is 'only successful when it is based on an understanding of how the whole organisational system is connected, rather than a focus on individual parts'.⁹

Research external to DFID

4.8 In addition, we will draw upon reviews of other organisations. The topic of learning is one that many development agencies seek to address. For instance, a 2007 report for the Government of Sweden noted that 'despite increasingly rigorous feedback systems, development agencies continue to be criticised for their inability to incorporate past experience. They are routinely accused of learning too little, too slowly - or learning the wrong things, from the wrong sources'.¹⁰

5. Methodology

Conceptual framework

5.1 There is considerable general literature on how organisations learn and manage their knowledge.¹¹ The literature indicates that learning requires innovation, creativity, openness and commitment. This needs to be balanced with some structure, stability and continuity as well as focussing on achieving the organisation's aims.¹²

5.2 We want to understand how people in DFID gain knowledge and whether and how this influences their decision-making. To enable us to interpret the evidence gathered for each of the four activities set out in paragraph 3.3 above, we therefore wish to identify the different aspects of how learning takes place. This will allow the assessment framework questions to be answered (see 5.12 below). The following sets out the characteristics that we consider are required for an organisation

⁸ *Strengthening learning from research and evaluation: going with the grain*, Overseas Development Institute, 2010, <http://www.odi.org.uk/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/6327.pdf>.

⁹ Quoted by Ingie Holvand in *Knowledge management and organisational learning: an international development perspective*, Overseas Development Institute, 2003.

¹⁰ *Knowledge and Learning in Aid Organisations*, Swedish Agency for Development Evaluation, 2007.

¹¹ Knowledge Management is 'the attempt to recognise what is essentially a human asset buried in the minds of individuals and leverage it into an organisational asset that can be used by a broader set of individuals on whose decisions the firm depends' Larry Prusak, Head of Knowledge Management at IBM, cited in Sarah Matthews and Nigel Thornton, *Doing the Knowledge: How DFID Compares with Best Practice in Knowledge Management*, DFID, 2001.

¹² Skerlavaj, Miha and Ji Hoon Song and Youngmin Lee, *Organisational learning culture, innovative culture and innovations in South Korean firms*, 2010.

such as DFID to learn effectively. It is based on lessons from the general literature (some of which is referenced below).

- Clarity of Purpose;
- Connectivity;
- Creation;
- Capture;
- Communication; and
- Challenge.

Clarity of purpose: This will identify the ‘for what’.

5.3 We will seek to identify, whether DFID is clear about what learning it needs to adapt and develop in order to achieve its objectives. We are particularly interested in whether there is such clarity at all levels of the organisation, including individual staff.¹³

Connectivity: This will identify the mechanism that allows knowledge to flow through DFID.

5.4 We are interested in how well DFID’s staff are linked together; within professional groups, vertically between policy, programme management and delivery, as well as horizontally between people doing similar tasks in different places, particularly country offices. We will capture how DFID’s staff connect to intended beneficiaries, delivery agents, peer organisations and other sources of knowledge outside DFID. Such connections are through both formal and informal mechanisms and networks. We believe that the ideal state is that individuals participate in open communications that allow the transfer of knowledge and experience. This relationship requires mutual support amongst the individual, the organisation and their supporting networks.¹⁴

Creation: This will address where and how DFID staff acquire knowledge, where new ideas are created and from where they emerge.

5.5 A key issue here is identifying the relative impact of different sources that DFID uses to create knowledge, including research institutions, academics, opinion formers and communities of practice. We will include looking at whether there are opportunities for discovery through, for example, testing, trial and error and role-playing scenarios.¹⁵

5.6 When considering how DFID learns we wish to specifically make a distinction between ‘knowledge’ and ‘know-how’.¹⁶ In a paper presented to the World Bank in 1998, Steve Denning, then the World Bank’s Programme Director for Knowledge Management, also suggested the following: ‘Knowledge then is more than just information (‘Know What’). It is also about experience of what works (‘Know How’), the reasons for doing things (‘Know Why’) and who can help through contacts and networks (‘Know Who’).¹⁷

Capture: This will identify how DFID captures knowledge that can be used for learning and how lesson-learning happens before, during and after activities take place.

5.7 We wish in particular to identify how individuals and DFID as a whole learn from both success and failure and the impact this has on their decision-making processes and creative cycles. We will specifically look at DFID’s experience of learning from intended beneficiaries and its readiness to do so.¹⁸

¹³ Roschelle, Jeremy and Stephanie D. Teasley, *The Construction of Shared Knowledge in Collaborative Problem Solving*, 1995, Capra, Fritjof, *The Hidden Connections*, 2002.

¹⁴ Capra, Fritjof, *The Hidden Connections*, 2002; also Ibarra, Herminia and Martin Kilduff and Wenpin Tsai, *Zooming In and Out: Connecting Individuals and Collectivities at the Frontiers of Organisational Network Research*, July/August 2005.

¹⁵ Kira, Mari and Ekkehart Frieling, *Collective Learning, Building on Individual Learning*, September 2005.

¹⁶ Cook, Scott D. N. and John Seely Brown: *Bridging Epistemologies: The Generative Dance Between Organisational Knowledge and Organisational Knowing*, July/August 1999.

¹⁷ Steve Denning, *What is Knowledge Management?*, paper presented to the World Bank Management Board 1998 quoted in Sarah Matthews and Nigel Thornton, *Doing the Knowledge: How DFID Compares with Best Practice in Knowledge Management*, DFID, 2001.

¹⁸ See Ackermann, Edith K., *Perspective-Taking and Object Construction: Two Keys to Learning*, 1996. See also Kolb, D. A., *Experiential Learning: experience as the source of learning and development*, 1984 and Devane, Sinead and Wilson, Julian, *Business Benefits of Non-Managed Knowledge*, Electronic Journal of Knowledge Management, Volume 7, Issue 1, 2009, <http://www.ejkm.com/volume7/issue1>.

Communication: This will consider whether and how the right information gets to where it is needed.

5.8 We want to know what the processes are that are actively used to communicate knowledge around the department, rather than just how people are linked together (see points on connectivity above). We are conscious that lessons from the literature show that people learn best from each other.¹⁹

Challenge: This will identify how DFID challenges staff to ensure that they apply learning to improve delivery and impact.

5.9 We are interested in DFID's corporate culture of learning, the examples set by managers and the corporate expectations for learning. We are particularly interested in how individual staff are managed to ensure that their and DFID's learning improves performance.

Sources of Evidence

5.10 Our approach uses mixed methods to gather evidence. Through the surveys, it will use quantitative tools to assess qualitative findings from respondents. The surveys will also ensure coverage of DFID staff. Semi-structured interviews of individuals and focus group discussions, as well as case studies, will be used to drill down into particular themes and issues. Where possible, we will use evidence from currently available data in order to reduce the burden on DFID and other respondents.

5.11 The different methods we will use to gather evidence are set out below.

- a) Literature review:
 - general literature on learning;
 - private sector approaches;
 - literature specific to development agencies;
 - literature specific to DFID's approach to learning; and
 - comparison with approaches used within other organisations.
- b) ICAI review findings:
 - documentary analysis of all 27 reviews published by ICAI to date;
 - analysis of learning from ICAI's follow-up processes to date; and
 - qualitative assessments from a focus group of ICAI study team leaders.
- c) DFID's documentation (leading to compilation of foundation evidence pack):
 - desk-based Quest review of relevant DFID policy and guidance documents;
 - desk- based Quest review of DFID decisions regarding learning; and
 - desk- based review of DFID's spending on learning.
- d) External sources of learning used by DFID:
 - desk-based review of sources, knowledge and information identified by staff as providing them with information used for decision-making (e.g. resources and research centres); and
 - mapping of sources.
- e) DFID's own survey data:
 - analysis of data from DFID internal surveys undertaken during 2011, 2012 and 2013 (see paragraph 4.5 above).

¹⁹ Tsoukas, Haridimos and Efi Vladimirou: *What is Organisational Knowledge*, 2001.

- f) ICAI's own survey of staff:
 - o we will only undertake our own survey if evidence from DFID's own data is insufficient.
- g) Semi-structured interviews with DFID staff:
 - o focus group discussions with groups of staff through the organisation (horizontally through geographical or thematic areas and vertically through programme and delivery areas);
 - o decision-makers responsible for corporate learning; and
 - o specific staff as required to investigate issues arising from the surveys.
- h) Semi-structured interviews with external informants:
 - o external researchers; and
 - o other stakeholders (such as representatives from BOND).²⁰
- i) Case studies (see paragraph 4.4 above) of examples of learning relating to specific decision points (i.e. making better programme choices, creating theories of change, choosing delivery mechanisms and adapting and improving during implementation of activities):
 - o individual case studies will primarily be derived from ICAI reports to date;
 - o evidence will be gathered mainly from documentary evidence and in-depth telephone interviews via video conference with decision-makers and stakeholders, as well as with ICAI team members; and
 - o specific case studies on India and Nepal, to discuss learning issues including following up on relevant findings from our previous reports. This will involve focus groups and interviews with DFID staff, following up on previous ICAI findings and talking to third parties in each country. We have decided that it will be possible for us to do this remotely, as we will be able to conduct focus groups and interviews using video conferencing. If, however, these case studies do not produce the necessary material we may need to revisit the decision not to visit these countries; we do not consider this to be likely.

²⁰ BOND is the UK membership body for organisations working in international development, see <http://www.bond.org.uk>.

5.12 Since this is a thematic study of learning, we will not be following ICAI's usual assessment framework, although the questions below draw upon the thinking behind it. As usual, we wish to consider DFID's clarity of vision for learning (its objectives, captured under 'incentives for learning' below), how well it undertakes learning (effectiveness), the impact on DFID's work and how well DFID develops its own learning approaches as a result of experience. We have shown the relationship between the assessment framework and how we will be ordering the evidence into our conceptual framework set out above. This should be seen as indicative only.

Review Questions	Criteria for Assessment	Sources of evidence
Objectives: Incentives for learning		
<p>Are DFID's policies and targets for learning appropriate and adequate? (TOR 6.2.1) <i>(Clarity)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and relevant objectives for learning • Objectives are appropriate and realistic for the organisational context • Convincing theory of change • Rational consideration of different learning options • Appropriate policies in place to guide staff learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with DFID staff • Focus group discussions with DFID staff • DFID documentation • Documentation/policy on learning from other organisations
<p>How well do managers provide leadership to guide staff learning across DFID? (TOR 6.2.2) <i>(Challenge)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate advisory support for learning • Sufficient management time allocated to learning • Adequate level of management expertise available on learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFID learning surveys • Interviews with DFID staff • Focus group discussions with DFID staff • DFID documentation and learning reports/ templates
<p>How well do DFID's departments create time and opportunities for staff to learn? (TOR 6.2.3) <i>(Creation)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient time allocated to learning for staff at different grades • Staff satisfied with learning opportunities • Adequate level of resources allocated for learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFID learning surveys • Interviews with DFID staff • Focus group discussions with DFID staff • Focus group discussions with ICAI Team Leaders • ICAI reports published to date • Case study programme/project documentation
<p>How well are staff held to account for ensuring that learning takes place and what effect do personal targets have on improving learning? (TOR 6.2.4) <i>(Challenge)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate learning-related reporting • Appropriate accountability and effective supervision for learning (e.g. timely line management meetings) • High quality reporting against learning targets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFID learning surveys • Interviews with DFID staff • Focus group discussions with DFID staff • DFID documentation

Review Questions	Criteria for Assessment	Sources of evidence
<p>How well is learning integrated into the operational processes of DFID? (TOR 6.2.5) <i>(Clarity, Creation, Capture, Communication, Challenge)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective learning systems (e.g. Annual Reviews) within and across DFID programmes and departments • Appropriate use of technology • Staff satisfied with learning processes • Adequate technical and advisory support for country offices and departments • Sufficient integration of learning within country programmes and departments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFID learning surveys • ICAI reviews published to date • Interviews with DFID staff • Focus group discussions with DFID staff • Focus group discussions with ICAI Team Leaders
<p>How well does the evidence system work to support Continuing Personal Development and learning? (TOR 6.2.6) (All)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff satisfied with the evidence system • Clear examples of how the evidence system is providing high quality support to staff development and learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with DFID staff • DFID learning surveys • Focus group discussions with DFID staff
<p>Delivery: Effectiveness of learning</p>		
<p>What is the relative importance of the different sources of knowledge used by staff in DFID? Are some sources of knowledge privileged over others? (TOR 6.3.1) <i>(Creation, Capture)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality of different knowledge sources • High level of staff awareness of different knowledge sources • Appropriate use of knowledge sources • Appropriate consideration of alternative knowledge sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFID learning surveys • Interviews with DFID staff • Focus group discussions with DFID staff
<p>How well is DFID's knowledge maintained over time? (TOR 6.3.2) <i>(Capture, Communication)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate knowledge management and storage systems • Appropriate and broad knowledge sharing across DFID • High retention of knowledge by DFID staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFID learning surveys • Interviews with DFID staff • Quest shared filing system • Third party assessments/ external evaluations • Focus group discussions with DFID staff
<p>In which ways do staff prefer to learn? What are the formal and informal methods they use? How well does this match the opportunities for learning provided by DFID? (TOR 6.3.3) <i>(Connectivity, Creation, Challenge)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear identification of preferred learning processes (e.g. on the job, formal training courses) • Staff satisfied with learning opportunities provided by DFID • Adequate monitoring and improvement of learning methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFID learning surveys • Interviews with DFID staff • ICAI reports published to date • Focus group discussions with DFID staff • Focus group discussions with ICAI Team Leaders
<p>How well does DFID learn from intended beneficiaries? (TOR 6.3.4) (Connectivity, Capture)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of high quality consultation with intended beneficiaries (e.g. field visits) • Adequate beneficiary participation in programme feedback mechanisms • Civil society and intended beneficiary satisfied with these processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with DFID staff • ICAI reports published to date • Focus group discussions with ICAI Team Leaders • Focus group discussions with DFID staff • Case study programme/ project documentation • Interviews with civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

Review Questions	Criteria for Assessment	Sources of evidence
<p>How well does DFID learn from those partners who deliver its programmes? (TOR 6.3.5) <i>(Connectivity, Capture)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality learning relationships established and maintained with partners (e.g. regular feedback mechanisms in place) • Adequate partner reporting on learning • DFID utilising partner learning well in its programme and policy approaches (e.g. partner learning incorporated into Business Cases) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with DFID staff • Interviews with CSOs and NGOs • Interviews with multilaterals • Programme documentation and reporting • Focus group discussions with ICAI Team Leaders
<p>How well does DFID learn from its own operations and experience, including both success and failure? How well is learning captured and communicated through the delivery chain? (TOR 6.3.6) <i>(Capture, Connectivity, Communication)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality DFID programme evaluations • Adequate capacity to translate learning into practice • Operational learning feeding well into new and ongoing programmes (e.g. learning reflected in programme design documents) • Adequate inter-departmental and cross-programme learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFID learning surveys • Interviews with DFID staff • ICAI reports published to date • Case study programme/ project documentation • Focus group discussions with ICAI Team Leaders • Focus group discussions with DFID staff
<p>How well is DFID overcoming any barriers to learning? (TOR 6.3.7) <i>(Creation)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality risk assessments taking place • High quality risk monitoring and mitigation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFID learning surveys • Interviews with DFID staff • Case study programme/ project documentation • Focus group discussions with DFID staff • Third party assessments
<p>How does DFID's learning compare with best practice and experience elsewhere? (TOR 6.3.8) <i>(Creation, Capture, Challenge)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate learning compared to other donors and aid agencies • Appropriate take up of international evidence and best practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group discussions with ICAI Team Leaders • Documentation/ policy on learning from other organisations • DFID documentation • Third party assessments
Impact of learning		
<p>How effectively does individuals' learning impact on the activities they perform? (TOR 6.4.1) <i>(Capture)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff awareness of how learning impacts their activities • Strong staff performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFID learning surveys • Interviews with DFID staff • Case study programme/ project documentation • Focus group discussions with DFID staff • DFID documentation
<p>What is the relative impact of the different sources of knowledge on programme delivery and effectiveness? Does this correlate with the relative importance attached to these sources (by DFID corporately or individual staff)? (TOR 6.4.2) <i>(Creation, Capture)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate take-up of different sources of knowledge for programme management • Different sources of knowledge being used well to strengthen programme delivery (e.g. programme reporting, thematic studies) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFID learning surveys • Interviews with DFID staff • Case study programme/ project documentation • Focus group discussions with DFID staff • Focus group discussions with ICAI Team Leaders

Review Questions	Criteria for Assessment	Sources of evidence
How well does knowledge and learning support decision-making in DFID (i.e. making better programme choices, creating theories of change, choosing delivery mechanisms and adapting and improving during implementation of its activities) (TOR 6.4.3) (Capture)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient evidence of action taken in response to learning (e.g. changes being made to programmes) • Adequate of programme implementation against programme reporting • Sufficiently improved programme delivery/policy development (e.g. more cost effective delivery chains) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFID learning surveys • Interviews with DFID staff • Case study programme/ project documentation • Focus group discussions with DFID staff • ICAI reports published to date • Focus group discussions with ICAI Team Leaders
How well is DFID identifying the impact of learning on its performance? (TOR 6.4.4) (Clarity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate identification of how DFID's learning chain is improving its performance • High quality monitoring and evaluation processes • Sufficient evidence of evaluations and recommendations being followed up (e.g. tracking of recommendations over time) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with DFID staff • Focus group discussions with DFID staff
Systematising learning		
How well does DFID build systems for learning into its operations and management? (TOR 6.5.1) (Creation, Challenge, Communication, Capture)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate of DFID organisational learning systems • Appropriate monitoring and evaluation of DFID's learning systems • High quality of DFID evaluations • Continual update and improvement of DFID learning systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with DFID staff • Focus group discussions with DFID staff • DFID learning surveys • Case study programme/ project documentation • Focus group discussions with DFID staff • ICAI reports published to date • Focus group discussions with ICAI Team Leaders
How well does DFID ensure that its lessons and experience are fed back into its operations, planning and policy-making? (TOR 6.5.2) (All)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate of systems for lessons capture • Good evidence that lessons learnt are influencing programme/ policy (e.g. lessons reflected in new Business Cases and new policy guidance) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with DFID staff • Focus group discussions with DFID staff • DFID learning surveys • Case study programme/ project documentation • ICAI reports published to date • Focus group discussions with ICAI Team Leaders
Are the levels of investment and effort in learning made by DFID sufficient to meet its needs? (TOR 6.5.3) (Clarity, Challenge, Communication)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good evidence that resources (e.g. time and money) allocated for learning are appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFID learning surveys • Interviews with DFID staff • Case study programme/ project documentation • Focus group discussions with DFID staff • DFID documentation, including expenditure
How much does DFID change its approach to learning based upon experience and measurement of impact? (TOR 6.5.4) (Challenge)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good evidence of DFID using learning to adapt and improve implementation of activities (e.g. projects being adjusted during delivery) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with DFID staff • Focus group discussions with DFID staff • Focus group discussions with ICAI Team Leaders • DFID learning surveys • Case study/ programme documentation

Coverage of evidence and limits to the methodology

5.13 This is a thematic study covering all of DFID. We are taking evidence from 2011, 2012 and 2013 and looking to draw conclusions about the organisation as a whole.

5.14 We will adhere to the standard ICAI principle of ensuring findings, relying on triangulated sources of evidence. Thus in order to enable an evaluative judgement to be made, there must usually be evidence from at least three different sources to provide a credible finding and evaluators must not be aware of credible contradictory evidence able to falsify or refute the finding. In some cases, where evidence is strong and cannot be contradicted, one or two sources of evidence may be sufficient.

5.15 It will be important that the staff sample sizes (e.g. from surveys and interviews) have validity. For instance, we are aware that DFID's Use of Evidence survey (see paragraph 4.5 above) had responses from 461 middle and senior staff respondents on eight elements of the use of evidence (see Figure 6). This covered some 23% of all DFID's staff (it had a response rate of 88% of those invited to respond). This survey provides a sample of sufficient size to provide a margin of error of 4% at a confidence level of 95%. In other words we know that, technically, it could be between 91% and 99% accurate in its representation of DFID staff's views for each particular question it asked.

Figure 6: DFID's Use of Evidence Survey Analysis of respondents²¹

DFID Grade	Number of respondents
SCS	26
A1	121
A2	209
A2L	70
B1D	28
Other	7
Total	461

5.16 There is a specific need, however, to ensure that participation bias does not skew our findings. For instance, we will need to ensure that we have sufficient evidence from locally employed staff and from programme implementation level personnel.

5.17 For each of the four decision points (making better programme choices, creating theories of change, choosing delivery mechanisms and adapting and improving during implementation of activities we will identify three case study examples to draw upon, leading to a total of 12 examples.

5.18 We are sensitive to the need to avoid 'survey fatigue' in DFID and do not want to add unnecessarily to the burden of staff, hence we will only undertake our own evidence gathering, if insufficient evidence exists from current material.

5.19 Since we are covering the entire DFID organisation, any case studies will be our best attempt at finding examples that represent the whole. DFID is clearly a complex organisation and we will be careful not to simplify our findings in an unwarranted way.

5.20 The study of organisational learning has many different and reputable approaches. We have chosen a structure and set of learning elements, that we consider will provide the necessary support for assessing how effectively DFID and its staff learn in order to improve value for money and impact of aid programmes. We will, however, be attentive to any situations where the structure needs to be adjusted to accommodate new learning as the review progresses.

²¹ DFID's grading system: SCS = Senior Civil Service, A1 = G6, A2 = G7, A2 (L) = Senior Executive Officer, B1 (D) = Fast Stream, B1 = Higher Executive Officer, B2 = Executive Officer, C1 = Administrative Officer, C2 = Administrative Assistant, D = Drivers and Ancillary Staff.

6. Roles and responsibilities

6.1 This review will be led and managed on a day-to-day basis by the Team Leader, who will be the primary point of contact with DFID.

6.2 Oversight of this review will be under the overall leadership of ICAI Project Director.

6.3 It is proposed that this assessment be undertaken by a core team of three with supplementary peer review if deemed necessary. While team members will have lead responsibility for answering sections of the framework, all will contribute to the analysis supporting the findings for each section.

Team Leader (Agulhas)

He is a Director of Agulhas Applied Knowledge. He specialises in aid effectiveness, governance and institutional development. He is on the core consortium team delivering ICAI's reports. He has led ICAI reviews considering Bangladesh Climate Change, UNDP's management of elections, DFID's programmes of Health and Education in Bihar, its support for Rural Livelihoods in Western Orissa and Programme Partnership Arrangements. He has written on learning and knowledge management in development organisations, including in the past analysing how DFID compares with best practice in knowledge management. He will lead the team.

Learning Expert (Independent)

He will provide specialist learning expertise. As a consultant/coach for over eight years, he has worked with and supported senior management teams, government departments, small businesses and charities and other types of organisations such as laboratories. This work includes strategic realignments, restructuring, team and department development, system and process improvements and key relationship management. He is Steward with the Society of Organisational Learning in the UK (SoL-UK). For three years he was the part-time Director for a small international charity, Acid Survivors Trust International (ASTI). Working with the Chairman and Trustees, he developed the charity's strategic goals and worked to ensure that they were successfully achieved. Currently, he is a part-time director of the small charity Working in Trust which is focussed on developing interdependence and trust in organisations. Prior to this, he spent over 25 years working in large corporations (up to 16,000 employees) with increasing responsibilities which included managing an overseas office.

Team Member (Agulhas)

She is a consultant with Agulhas Applied Knowledge and a former programme manager in the DFID Somalia team. She conducted much of the field research for ICAI's reviews of DFID's Climate Change Programme in Bangladesh²² and ICAI's evaluations of DFID's Electoral Support through UNDP²³ and DFID's Bilateral Aid to Pakistan.²⁴ She also supported Agulhas's work on ICAI's review of DFID's Support for Civil Society Organisations through Programme Partnership Arrangements.²⁵ She will provide analytical, research and administrative capability to the team.

Methodology Peer Review (University of Manchester)

He has more than 10 years' experience teaching undergraduate and MA and MSc students development microeconomics (theory and applied) and supervising and teaching PhD students quantitative and qualitative research methods in British (University of East Anglia) and Indian higher education institutions. He has been in charge of extensive primary data collection exercises with a

²² DFID's Climate Change Programme in Bangladesh, ICAI, 2011, <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/ICAI-Report-DFID-Climate-Change-Programme-in-Bangladesh-FINAL1.pdf>.

²³ DFID's Electoral Role through UNDP, ICAI, 2012, <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/UNDP-report-FINAL.pdf>.

²⁴ Evaluation of DFID's Bilateral Aid to Pakistan, ICAI, 2012, http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/ICAI-Pakistan-Report_P1.pdf.

²⁵ DFID's Support for Civil Society Organisations through Programme Partnership Arrangements, ICAI, 2013, <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/ICAI-REPORT-DFIDs-Support-for-CSOs-through-PPAs.pdf>.

development economics angle in India (Western Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Coastal and Central Karnataka, Delhi, Mumbai), in Nepal and in East Africa. These included household surveys, tracking of in-depth interviews documenting the worklife histories of (young and other) migrants, interviews with local political leaders and behavioural experiments. He is the editor of the Journal of South Asian Development. His academic publication record features a wide range of poverty and development-related themes.

Researcher (KPMG)

He is a programme manager for the ICAI programme and assists in managing the overall programme. He is educated to Master's level in Economics, with particular knowledge of economic growth and development and has previous experience in international financial institutions and non-profit organisations. He is familiar with ICAI, having worked on the recent ICAI reviews of DFID's Support to Agricultural Research²⁶ and of DFID's Support to Palestine Refugees through UNRWA.²⁷

He will support the gathering of information from DFID systems.

7. Management and reporting

7.1 We will produce a first draft report for review by the ICAI Secretariat and Commissioners by 10 January 2014, with time for subsequent revision and review prior to completion and sign off in w/c 24 February 2014.

²⁶ DFID's Support to Agricultural Research, ICAI, 2012, <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/ICAI-Agricultural-Research-report-FINAL.pdf>.

²⁷ DFID's Support for Palestine Refugees through UNRWA, ICAI, 2013, <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/ICAI-UNRWA-report-FINAL-110913.pdf>.

8. Expected outputs and timeframe

8.1 The assessment will consist of the following elements

Phase	Timetable
<p>Preliminary Assessment</p> <p>Literature Review</p> <p>Analysis of findings from ICAI's reports to date</p> <p>Initial analysis of DFID's internal documentation</p>	<p>July 2013 - August 2013</p> <p>July 2013 - August 2013</p> <p>August 2013</p>
<p>Field Work</p> <p>External sources of learning used by DFID</p> <p>Analysis of DFID's own survey data: ICAI's own survey of staff (if required)</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews with DFID staff (individuals and focus groups)</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews with external informants (individuals and focus groups)</p> <p>Case study investigations, using information from ICAI reports, ICAI study teams and informants</p> <p>Country-based case study if required. The decision on this will be taken in the second week in October. A contingency element will be placed in the budget to accommodate this</p>	<p>September 2013</p> <p>July 2013 - September 2013</p> <p>October 2013</p> <p>September 2013 - November 2013</p> <p>September 2013 - November 2013</p> <p>September 2013 - November 2013</p> <p>November 2013</p>
<p>Final Analysis</p> <p>Roundtable with Commissioners</p> <p>First draft report</p> <p>Report quality assurance and review by Secretariat and Commissioners</p> <p>Report to DFID for fact checking</p> <p>Final report sign off</p>	<p>02 December 2013</p> <p>10 January 2014</p> <p>10 January - 28 February 2014</p> <p>28 February 2014</p> <p>28 March 2014</p>

9. Risks and mitigation

9.1 The following sets out the key risks and mitigating actions for this assessment:

Risk	Level of risk	Specific Issues	Mitigation
Breadth of subject makes it difficult to identify a specific focus and emphasis for findings	Medium	Prioritisation of findings	Evidence gathering, analysis and recommendations will focus on specifics of individual behaviour and corporate processes
Inability to access key people or information	Medium	Unable to hold review sessions with key DFID personnel who influence the learning culture and process. Unable to have full access to raw data from all appropriate surveys. Unable to access non-DFID respondents.	Ensure clear authorisation given at start-up. ICAI Secretariat available, as a last resort, to assist with any specific problems.
No outcome information available on impact of programmes or value for money in case studies.	Medium	Information weak or incomplete.	Identify case studies that clearly show learning and the possible link to value for money (VfM) and impact on aid. If none are found this is learning in itself.
Political	Low	Risk that findings prove politically challenging, particularly in relation to specific individuals or areas of responsibility.	If findings are likely to be controversial, this will be signaled early to Commissioners and a response will be suggested.
Safety and Security	Medium/High	If any overseas travel to fragile states: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of terrorism • Risk to the person 	Operate within Foreign and Commonwealth Office guidance. Use experienced local guides and drivers.

10. How this ICAI review will make a difference

10.1 This review seeks to synthesise ICAI and others' observations that DFID is not learning adequately from its own and other's experience. The review will seek to focus attention on corporate and individual behaviours and practices that could be changed. By improving its learning, we expect that the impact and value for money that DFID achieves will be improved.

Annex 1: Selected Bibliography

The following is a selected bibliography of material used in drafting this inception report.

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