

8 June 2007

Linking Consultation

AH501

DFID

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Dear Consultation Team

DEA response to DFID's Public Consultation Document on the Format of DFID's Linking Scheme

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the implementation of DFID's White Paper commitment to '*Set up a scheme to help other groups – such as faith groups, community groups, local government, business and charitable organisations – build links with developing countries*'. This letter forms our response.

Our key points are:

- Government policy, especially that which involves spending large amounts of public money, must be evidence based to ensure effectiveness and value for money. This is important to maintain long-term support for DFID's agenda. There is extremely limited evidence on the impact of linking and what constitutes 'good linking' and this is needed before any scheme is developed. We strongly recommend that a major research project (perhaps of £0.5m) is carried out first to learn lessons from existing practice and inform any future involvement.
- If it is decided that the scheme should go ahead without evidence, rigorous evaluation must be central to it. There should be money ring-fenced for overall evaluation as well as a requirement that all recipients engage in monitoring and evaluation which is gathered centrally and also used in peer learning. In addition to the managing agent, it would be very valuable to have an independent research institute/university responsible for these two elements.
- Educational aims must be central to any linking scheme. Support organisations for this aspect of any scheme must be supported by DFID. The aims of the scheme must be made clearer and more explicit than 'Building support for development'.

Evidence around linking

Para 1.2 states, “one of the ways we feel”. We are concerned at the proposal to spend large amounts of public money a scheme that is not evidence based. Para 2.3 states that this consultation is ‘being issued to enable DFID to form our thinking on what constitutes good linking’. We do not believe that this consultation will be enough to fulfil this role.

We welcome DFID’s recognition that “More evidence is needed relating to the impact of linking” However, we do not agree with the identified solution: “so DFID will ensure that a key objective of the first three years is to evaluate different approaches in order to establish what approaches have the greatest impact, both North and South.” This evidence is needed before any scheme is started. There is a large amount of linking work already happening. The most useful place DFID could spend its money is in gathering the lessons from present practice.

4. Issues for consultation

If after full consideration of the above points, DFID decides that the scheme should go ahead immediately, the following forms our response to the specific questions posed.

4.2 The Potential Scope of the Linking Scheme

Do you feel that the Scheme should ring fence support for each sector?

If funding is not ring fenced, DFID may want to monitor barriers to each sector’s engagement.

Should there be separate objectives for each sector?

Critical and reflective learning should be a key objective for every sector.

“Understanding global interdependence” should be a key objective. Participants need to become more aware of how their everyday actions impact on people throughout the world. This objective should be informed by ‘Building Support for Development’, 1999: “going beyond attitudes to development based on compassion and charity, and establishing a real understanding of our interdependence and of the relevance of development issues to people’s everyday lives”.

Do you have any views on what the objectives would be for the sector which you are particularly interested in?

See above

Or is the greatest benefit felt from those linking programmes that involve a wider range of stakeholders from across different sectors, such as schools, the health sector, and faith groups for example?

We are not aware of any evidence in this area.

What level of financial support would be most valuable to those involved in linking?

A feasibility study into the capacity for quality linking or flexibility for the amount in the fund is needed. It would counterproductive if the amount of money available through the scheme was too great for the number of good quality applications that the scheme received.

There should be a considerable percentage of the fund ring-fenced for overall research and evaluation.

Evaluation and education should be central to the funding. There is anecdotal evidence that there are a number of poor quality links already existing. Best value for money might be achieved by providing funding to develop the education and evaluation/critical reflection aspects of these links rather than funding the development of more (potentially poor quality) links.

What specific activities, North and South, work best to sustain longer-term partnerships?

Learning is essential. When the links are between organisations whose key function is not education, extra work must be done to ensure that structured reflection and learning take place.

What should not be supported/be avoided; what are the risks?

There are major risks to be avoided in linking. The government is therefore taking a risk in embarking on a scheme without further rigorous research.

Intuitively it sounds as if linking would be a win-win way to promote global understanding and development. There is not evidence to support this. Furthermore, it is an expensive way to achieve this aim.

Risks for UK participants include their attitudes and the reinforcement of prejudices (these are discussed, for example, in "A Postcolonial Reading of Contemporary Discourses related to the Global Dimension in Education in England" (V Andreotti) at www.osdemethodology.org.uk/keydocs/andreotti.pdf).

Risks for participants in poor countries are several. Linking projects inevitably have an imbalance of power. The benefits for poor partners can be unclear, and the process can be extractive.

4.3 Potential Impact of Linking – a learning experience

What impact do you feel a linking scheme could have in building support for development in the UK?

More evidence is needed. We welcome DFID's decision to fund a major research project into school linking at the Institute of Education (through UKOWLA) and would strongly recommend that the same is done for linking by the groups being proposed in this scheme.

'Building support for development' is a very broad aim which is needs to be narrowed to provide a coherent scheme. Self-awareness and critical literacy are essential for people to appreciate the broader picture of global issues and the interconnections between their own lives and those of others throughout the world. These do not flow automatically from a linking scheme and need support from an education programme.

How do you ensure that the benefits of any linking scheme will be mutually beneficial to both the Northern and Southern partners?

There are assumptions within this question that this is possible and that the benefits and risks are commensurable. This is unlikely.

How does DFID ensure that the first three years of the scheme has built in learning objectives to ensure we go into the future only supporting initiatives which have guaranteed impact, both North and South? What measures can we use to monitor impact?

We would strongly recommend that a major research project (perhaps £0.5m) is carried out first before any scheme is considered.

Any projects funded must have monitoring and evaluation that feeds back into their work – evaluation is too often seen as a report to give to funders. There must be evaluation of the whole scheme and of the impact of linking generally as well as of individual projects. Peer learning should also be encouraged.

There needs to be clarity about the desired impact.

4.4 Potential beneficiaries of new support from DFID

Do you feel that the Scheme should be limited to any particular groups e.g. only open to not for profit groups?

The most important thing is their understanding and experience of educational processes.

4.5 Added Value

How do you feel that the Linking Scheme could be designed in such a way as to show how support under this Fund does not duplicate any of the other DFID funding schemes?

DFID should not expect organisations receiving other DFID grants to support this scheme as part of their existing work. Support will be very important and this should be funded. Assumptions cannot be made about the quality or quantity of existing support for this type of work.

How can it show added value?

Focus on promoting learning and evaluation in existing links.

4.6 Process

What specific skills do you feel a potential managing agent should possess? What relevant experience is necessary?

They need to understand Development Education and have received up to date professional development in this. Obviously they need to be competent in financial matters, grant management etc.

In addition to the managing agent, it would be very valuable to have an independent research institute/university responsible for overall evaluation as well as to support those receiving grants to ensure that their evaluation is useful and learning is disseminated widely. We would recommend that this is a separate body from the managing agent to ensure independence.

We look forward to seeing the outcome of the consultation.

Best wishes

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Director