

# Guidance on the Government's marketing, advertising and communications spending controls<sup>1</sup> for research programmes

## Background

1. This guidance is for DFID supported Research Programme Consortia and other relevant programmes funded through the Research and Evidence Division, DFID. It is intended to provide guidance to assist with making informed decisions about spend on communication, marketing and advertising in light of the Government's controls on marketing, advertising and communications spending.
2. Since May 2010, there have been controls in place on all marketing, advertising and communications activity across the UK Government. This was put in place following concerns about government agencies' wasteful self-promotion and marketing that went beyond the specific needs of clear communication of the services the agencies provide. It was also recognised that value for money was not being achieved. The controls intend to improve efficiency and effectiveness of communication spend.
3. The controls cover activity both in the UK and overseas. For programmes that spend on communication for development and those that share research to develop policy (and practice) in support of poverty reduction must ensure that their communication, marketing and advertising are done in the most cost-effective way.
4. This is only guidance about the UK Government's spending controls, issued by the Cabinet Office. It is **not** guidance or guidelines about DFID's requirement for a Research Uptake Strategy.

## General Principles

5. The overall message is that the targeted communication of research products and services, to achieve the agreed programme outcome and impact, is allowable, so long as it is done in the most cost-effective way.
6. General marketing, advertising and communication expenditure without a clear and direct impact on the research programme delivery is not allowed.
7. Those activities that are purely about advertising and promoting the research programme and potentially fall into the category of promotion and marketing should be avoided, unless there is robust evidence that they directly contribute towards achieving the research programme objectives. For any spending on activity which may be perceived as falling into the

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<sup>1</sup> The Cabinet Office definition of marketing, advertising and communication in the context of the controls includes all types of advertising (e.g. TV, radio, recruitment), all marketing, communication strategy planning, market research, all public relations, printing and publications, events, conferences

above category, specific permission must be obtained from DFID. Please speak to your DFID Research Manager if you are in any doubt.

8. Spending on communication activities to share research to develop policy in support of poverty reduction is allowed so long as it is done in the most cost-effective way.
9. To give precise guidance and figures on what is 'cost-effective' is not possible, as there are too many variables across the different research programmes. Being cost-effective is not just about reducing cost. It is also about ensuring the money is spent wisely and well. To assess whether something is 'cost-effective' or 'value for money' requires good informed judgement rather than a 'rule of thumb' approach.

### **Quick and dirty assessment of 'cost-effectiveness'**

10. When planning an activity you need to be very clear about the aims and objectives, especially for events. You should be able to fully justify the cost of every activity.
11. You could assess each activity in a simple way, for example by asking:
  - Is it essential to achieving programme outcomes?
  - If it wasn't done what would be lost and what impact would this have on the programme?
  - Look at economies of scale. Can you hold a workshop/conference jointly with another research programme or event to make it cheaper?
  - Have you actively looked at ways to reduce inputs (staff, materials), whilst still achieving the same outputs?
  - How can you improve quality whilst maintaining or reducing costs?
  - Have you actively looked at reducing the number or type of products?
12. The general idea of the controls is to maximise value for money and reduce or eliminate spend on anything that does not contribute towards or directly achieve research outcomes.
13. The following table is a non-exhaustive list of activities and media to illustrate how you might start to think about cost-effectiveness. It is not a real case example and only intends to serve as an illustration.

There are just two hard and fast rules:

- i) You may not set up a stand-alone website with an independent domain name paid for by the research programme if DFID's share of the funding is more than 50%.
- ii) Do not produce unnecessary freebies like pens or key-rings to give away to delegates at conferences and other events.

14. We ask you to think very seriously about the relevance of all activities, ensuring there is a clear need for the activity and that it is delivered in the most cost-effective way. There is no rule of thumb as objectives, size, context, etc. of research programmes are very different so the table is purely for illustration purposes to indicate how you might start thinking about whether or not resource savings can be made. The objective here is to see how and where costs can be saved, that will have minimal impact on achieving the research programme outcomes.

**EXAMPLE – some ideas on ways to save resources on communication, marketing and advertising**

Communication Activity	Use	Essential or non-essential	Possible alternatives	Resource saving
Production of promotional material e.g. pens, bags, etc	Public awareness to promote the name of the programme	Non-essential – avoid producing this kind of item	Promotion through e.g. e-alerts, blogs, twitter	Saving costs on promotional items.
Face-to-face events, discussions, human interaction	Training, awareness Workshops Face to face meetings	Depends on purpose	Online training Hold jointly with other programmes Use free venues Handbooks/training materials – joint with other programmes	Economies of scale through reducing the number and increasing the size of meetings; joint meetings with others Keep the cost down by avoiding expensive catering and drinks
Production of hard copy literature (e.g. books, research papers, policy briefs, etc.)	Interim results, discussion papers, working documents, evidence synthesis	Depends on objective or publication, timing, audience, etc.	Electronic versions only Blogs Reassess where printing/production is carried out. Changing country of production might save costs.	Savings on printing costs; possible savings through using standard templates; but there may be additional cost through managing on-line content (staffing, web space, etc.)
Production of presentations for wide awareness; Attending workshops, seminars, etc.	Awareness, discussion, results Face-to-face meetings	Depends on purpose	Joint with other Research programmes; web-casting Target for very specific audiences Timing and place	Reducing travel costs and staff time through holding phone or video conferences; fewer, shorter seminars
Design and delivery of on-line activities	Webpage for research outputs; global presence to a broad audience	Essential – though think about how web pages, etc are hosted – see points 15-18 below	None	Post outputs on established repositories (e.g. Eldis or Scribus) to make the research more widely available on-line
Production of news items, events, etc. e.g.	Valuable tool for fast delivery of information	Depends on other activities. Not	Generally low cost, though production can take time depending on how it is	Costs of production generally in editorial and layout. Consider the cost of producing

Communication Activity	Use	Essential or non-essential	Possible alternatives	Resource saving
e-newsletters	For enhancing visits to and from website For monitoring access and use For regular updates on a variety of issues	essential, but extremely useful if well produced	produced (i.e. an e-alert or a tailor-made e-newsletter)	against the circulation and response rate (i.e. cost per user)
Video documentary	Demonstrates the research in situ to those in other countries Visual can have big impact	Depends on purpose and targeting	Participatory video rather than production by a professional company Train researchers to shoot and produce video Seek pro bono or partnership arrangements where possible.	Reducing costs of professional services, though this might be at the cost of quality, efficiency and effectiveness. A poor quality video is a waste of money. A professional video is expensive, but the returns can be very beneficial –depends on the objectives, audience etc.

## **Websites**

15. Since 2011, DFID has not funded the establishment of websites with their own domain name, where DFID wholly funds the programme. Under the UK Government's rationalisation of website agenda this is not permitted. DFID will support content development and associated costs for existing research programme websites so long as it is clear how the website is used to enhance the uptake of research and access to evidence.
16. Where DFID's contribution to the website is less than fifty percent, then an independent domain name is permissible.
17. Every programme must ensure that relevant key documents are provided to DFID's Research repository, R4D. It is the responsibility of research programmes to ensure that the research programme record on R4D is kept up-to-date and the relevant documents are provided to R4D.
18. Please work within this guidance. If you are at all unsure about any of this guidance, or want further advice about how to interpret it, please contact your DFID Research Manager.

## **Branding**

19. Please note that it is a requirement for all DFID's research partners to use the UK aid logo, prefixed with the words 'Funded by' or 'Supported by', as appropriate. Guidance and the electronic versions of the logos, can be found on our website at [www.dfid.gov.uk/corporatecommunications](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/corporatecommunications).
20. If you would like further advice about using the logo, please contact [corporatecommunications@dfid.gov.uk](mailto:corporatecommunications@dfid.gov.uk).

21. Please ensure you use an appropriate disclaimer against the logo. The following wording is set out on page 8 of 'Standards for use of the UK aid logo', which is included with the logo files when downloaded from the above web page:

'This material has been funded by UK aid from the UK Government, however, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK Government's official policies.'

## **Questions and Answers**

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The following have been developed in response to queries and questions. Please let us know if any of your questions remain unanswered.

#### ***1. Why are the communication and marketing controls in place?***

To reduce unnecessary spending (further detail is provided at the start of this note or see the Cabinet Office website [www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk)).

#### ***2. What action should we take as a research programme?***

You should review your communication activities and spend. Look at this guidance. If you have further questions, or are unsure whether or not any of your communication spend might fall under the controls, please contact your DFID Research Manager.

#### ***3. Do we have to tell DFID about all the communications work we're doing?***

If the activity may be perceived as self-promotion for the research programme or your organisation, you must get specific permission to spend money on it from your DFID research manager.

#### ***4. Who do I inform about a press release?***

Press releases should be cleared with DFID's press office (if released in the UK) and the relevant country office if the release is outside the UK. You should allow at least two days' notice if non-contentious. If the information is likely to need a response from Ministers, then you should allow at least seven days. Contact your DFID Research Manager and/or DFID's Press Office [pressoffice@dfid.gov.uk](mailto:pressoffice@dfid.gov.uk). Tel: 020 7023 0600.

#### ***5. What does 'cost-effective' mean in practice?***

It means re-visiting your planned spend and allocation of resources to communication and marketing. You should assess whether or not savings can

be made, not only monetary, but also in terms of inputs and outputs. For example, there might be savings in producing fewer, but better targeted policy briefs; there might be savings through hosting joint 'thematic' conferences and workshops rather than independent research programme workshops. You might improve your presence on the web, through use of social media to reach bigger or more targeted audiences. Again, these are only examples and may not be relevant to your programme.

***6. Can we spend money on public relations, promotion and marketing?***

If the activity is directly related and essential for getting the research into use (for example, informing people about an up-coming seminar/research event) then this is permissible. The controls are in place to stop or reduce spending on unnecessary marketing and communication and to make essential spend more efficient and effective.

***7. Should we still be spending at least 30% of our budget on getting research into use?***

This was intended as a guide to ensure programmes gave due attention to research uptake, but we no longer specify a percentage. The actual amount spent will very much depend on the type of research, the scale of the research and other factors. DFID's guide is to ensure that there is money available in the budget to ensure that research is made available for use.

***8. How do we assess value for money in research communication?***

Common sense can guide what is a good use of money and resources. Thinking strategically about your aims and target audiences, sourcing quotes for work, and efficient management of staff and other resources can all help in communicating in a cost-effective way.

***9. Do we have to get each and every communication activity signed off?***

No. All we ask is that you think carefully about the cost-effectiveness of communication and related activities. As part of DFID's standard review process we may ask to see how you have responded to this guidance in terms of saving costs.

***10. Can we still print published documents and papers?***

Yes, provided these have a stated purpose and objectives, they are targeted towards a specific audience, there is a stated demand and it can be demonstrated that they are produced in a cost-effective way. At DFID we no longer print documents, but make them available electronically (PDF files) on our website. If we do need a hard copy, these are printed in-house and on demand to avoid excessive wastage.

***11. Can we still hold workshops and conferences?***

Yes, providing they are essential to achieving your research outcomes. There must be clear objectives and targeted towards a specific audience and a stated demand. You should also demonstrate that this is the most cost-effective approach for delivering your objectives. You should not produce unnecessary freebies such as bags or pens.

***12. How do we continue to reach end-users who have no, or limited access to the internet?***

In such cases common sense prevails. If the communication activity is to disseminate information about the research, especially feedback to communities and other stakeholders then the most appropriate and cost-effective mechanism should be employed.

***13. Can we produce publicity material for events and meetings?***

This should be done in the most cost-effective way possible, for example by using social media tools, email, and websites. However, we recognise that this is not always possible. Material can be produced where the main objective is to enhance the access, use and reach of the research. Glossy brochures, hand-outs and other marketing material should be avoided.

***14. Can we produce a website for the research programme with its own domain name?***

No, if it is wholly funded by DFID. Where DFID contributes less than 50% of costs, then this is permitted. Where DFID wholly funds the research programme, then web pages must be hosted on the existing organisation's website (also see points 15-18 above).

***15. How do we ensure a web presence?***

Establish research programme pages on the lead or partner institution's website. Costs for developing the pages, managing the pages and producing content can be included in the Research programme budget. This must be produced in the most cost-effective way. It is also a contractual requirement to make sure there is a record of the research programme on R4D and that ALL communication outputs (ranging from journal papers, to workshop reports, to podcasts and newspaper articles) are made available on R4D.

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