Schools Research Action Plan
*Improving Evidence-Informed Policy into Practice*

Evaluation Report of Progress and Impact
(July 2006 – March 2007)

Victoria White


For more information about this report or to sign up for the monthly research updates please e-mail Victoria White victoria1.white@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk
INTRODUCTION
In July 2006 Schools Directorate (responsible for school phase policy within the Department for Children Schools and Families) agreed an action plan setting out its priorities for improving evidence informed policy and practice for 2006 to 2008.

The aims of the action plan are to:
- Help Schools Directorate harness research to define and deliver effective policies to improve schools and raise standards; and
- Ensure Schools Directorate secured a good investment on its expenditure on commissioned research which was £2.54\(^1\) million in 2006/07.

Progress and impact of the action plan
This report evaluated progress and impact of the action plan from the time of implementation (July 2006) to the end of March 2007. Data were collected throughout the period through surveys and meetings with field and policy staff, practitioners and researchers, and by capturing ad hoc feedback from stakeholder groups.

The report evaluates progress and impact against the six objectives in the action plan as follows:
1. To capture, commission and circulate research which is highly relevant to our existing and emergent priorities.
2. To secure better use of research by policy makers.
3. To secure better use of research by our field staff.
4. To promote better use of research by practitioners.
5. To define more clearly how research activity is organised, prioritised, processed and managed within Schools Directorate as well as in the interfaces with other directorates.
6. To make sure our key interests are represented in the research community within and outside the Department.

Outcomes from July 2006 – March 2007
Outcomes in the first nine months include:
- 300 education field staff\(^2\) are significantly better informed about research and data and have drawn down on these to inform their plans.
- Schools Research News now reaches 34,000 teachers and all local authorities through partner organisations’ networks.
- The Schools Directorate Research Newsletter is rated as good or excellent by 93% of policy staff who responded to a recent survey.
- Research briefings have informed a range of policies including strategies to improve children’s vocabularies.
- Stickmen presentations (visual images of pupil progression) will soon reach every school and local authorities and ministers have used them in speeches.

\(^1\) 2.54 million comprised 2 million committed to existing projects plus £540,00 available to spend on new work in 2006/07
\(^2\) Field staff include National Strategies, SEN advisers, Children’s Services Advisers – and other staff funded by the Department and working at the interface between the DfES and schools.
1. TO CAPTURE, COMMISSION AND CIRCULATE RESEARCH WHICH IS HIGHLY RELEVANT TO OUR EXISTING AND EMERGENT PRIORITIES.

Our commitment:

To organise a twice yearly seminar for policy staff to articulate likely policy needs from research and to provide an update on mapping the evidence base against the previous year’s priorities.

Our progress:

Action has been met.

- A workshop was held in November 2006 with policy representatives from across Schools Directorate. 2007-08 Broad Strategic Questions (BSQs) were drafted in the workshop and then agreed by senior civil servants. The aim of the BSQs is to provide a framework for shaping future analytical activity, gaps in the evidence base and newly commissioned research. (See annex 1 for list of BSQs).

- A report was produced listing analytical activities against previous years’ questions.

- 300 education field staff were circulated the Schools Directorate’s 2007/08 BSQs and consulted about their own 07/08 research needs. A field staff priorities report was produced.

Impact of workshop and setting 2007/08 Schools Directorate BSQs

The setting of the 2007-08 BSQs helped to ensure Schools Directorate’s analytical work was brought into alignment with the new strategic aims (see annex 1) of the Department.

All 20 newly approved research bids were directly related to the new BSQs. These include: a review of independent learning; evaluating Choice Advisers; and investigating the role of parents.

Field staff appreciated being able to find out about each others’ research priorities and three bids out of Schools Directorate’s 20 bids for new research were suggested by field staff. These directly tacked gaps in the evidence in relation to pedagogy.
Our commitment:

**To develop, promote and update Schools Directorate’s Intranet site**

Our progress: Action was met.

- Research website for policy staff was made live at the end of March 07. This brought all internal research briefings and topic notes into one place for policy staff to access.

Our commitment:

**To maintain robust internally produced research briefing in the form newsletters, data analyses and topic notes for ministers and civil servants.**

Our progress:

Action has been met.

Outputs include:

- Monthly Schools Directorate Research (external copy available to educational professionals and all those with an interest in education)
- Statistical reports
- Briefing papers relating to research priorities.

**Impact of providing research briefing on policy staff**

Policy staff have provided positive feedback in response to bespoke briefings saying that the reports have been useful to their needs.

80 policy staff replied to a recent evaluation of the Schools Directorate Research Newsletter. The findings showed:

- 92% of respondents thought the newsletter was good or excellent and 88% thought the level of detail in reporting was about right.
- 43% of respondents said they sometimes followed up research covered in the newsletter.
- 35% of respondents said they sometimes forwarded items on to colleagues.
Our commitment:

To arrange seminars for policy staff to draw out implications from DCSF commissioned research and plan dissemination strategies where relevant e.g. to partners and the teaching profession.

Our progress:

Action has been met.

Events related to recently published research included:
- *Education Outside the Classroom* (November 2006)
- *London Challenge* (November 2007)
- *Teacher Status* (March 2007)

(Reports can be downloaded from [www.dcsf.gov.uk/research](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research))

Impact of research seminars at the end of DCSF projects

Analysis of end of seminar evaluation forms showed that policy staff found the seminars a useful means of getting to grips with the research findings and drawing out implications from DCSF research.
2. TO SECURE BETTER USE OF RESEARCH BY POLICY MAKERS

Our commitment:

To produce a handful of PowerPoint slides on key research findings to be used in presentations both within and beyond the Department

Our progress:
Action has been met. Sets of slides included:

- Ethnicity and education
- 2006 results
- Pupils with Special Educational Needs
- English as an additional language
- Vocabulary Learning
- Stickmen presentations (visual displays of pupil progression)

Impact of PowerPoint slides

Every school and LA now have access to challenging Stickmen data which are diversifying from national figures to BME, gender and free school meals (FSM).

Policy and field staff have found the presentations a useful way to engage with data and research. There have been many requests for electronic copies of the slides after seeing them presented at seminars and programme boards.

Researchers have been given examples of the slides to help them prepare for presenting their work at the DCSF. They found the slides a useful steer on how to best convey findings to policy staff.
Our commitment:

To make research more visible within Schools Directorate working areas of the DCSF building

Our progress:

Action has been met. We have:

- Produced illustrated monthly research display boards
- Produced and displayed posters advertising policy research seminars in walkways
- Produced and displayed information posters for Lessons from the frontline event and advertised it on plasma screens
- Mounted an exhibition of teacher research for policy staff in public areas including refectory
- Promoted research seminars in weekly policy directorate, electronic update notes to all staff in Schools Directorate

Impact of making research more visible in Schools Directorate

Around 10% of policy staff attending seminars have signed up to events from spotting them on posters.

Policy staff have commented that they welcomed the increased visibility of research on the fourth floor. One adviser said that: “research seems to have a higher profile now”.

Learning point about impact...

Presenting and promoting research in a variety of formats seems to improve policy makers’ awareness of and interest in research.

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3 Lessons from the Frontline took place in Jan 2007 – providing an opportunity for policy staff to meeting with 14 teacher researchers who have developed good practice in the classroom. Event was co-hosted with the National Teacher Research Panel and The Innovation Unit.
3. TO SECURE BETTER USE OF RESEARCH BY FIELD STAFF

Our commitment:
To compile and target a named contact list of education field staff with relevant evidence on a regular basis

Our progress:
Objective was met. We have:

- Compiled a list of 300 education field staff serving the Department and partner organisations. List includes National Strategies, Directors of Children’s Learning, Children’s Services Advisers, special educational needs advisers, School Improvement Partners’ regional co-ordinators, National Centre for Excellence in Teaching of Maths, Training and Development Agency for Schools’ link advisers and remodelling advisers.

- Produced and supplied field staff with a regular supply of relevant research including:
  - Monthly Schools Research Newsletter – tailored for field staff requirements to include extra sections on statistical information, and beginning to include children’s services issues.
  - Subject specific updates on English, mathematics, ICT and science – for subject specialists.
  - An evidence induction pack for new recruits to field staff comprising best sources for locating evidence, Schools Directorate research priorities, and a list of research seminars for field staff.

- Consulted field staff about their research priorities and compiled evidence in response to their needs.

**Impact of research service for field staff**

99 field staff replied to our recent evaluation of the research service for field staff. The findings showed:

- 52% of respondents found the overall research service very useful and 31% found it quite useful.

The Schools Research Newsletter and subject specific updates were rated as the most useful aspects of the service.

- Half of respondents said they had used the newsletter and subject specific updates to inform their work. A similar proportion of field staff said they forward the newsletter or parts of it onto colleagues.

- Field staff were very positive about the induction pack (from an earlier evaluation) – with many saying they would share it with colleagues.

**Typical field staff comments about the overall service included:**

“This is an invaluable service and really helps to keep me up to date on research. I find it very useful in pointing members of my teams to areas of work to areas of current research that are key to informing their work”. Senior Regional Director, National Strategies.
Our commitment:

Plan an annual evidence seminar series for field staff to inform their research planning cycle – to which policy staff will also be invited.

Our progress:

Objective was met. We have planned and held the following events:

- Pedagogy for E-Learning Resources (PERLS) – (Manchester Metropolitan University) June 2006
- Outcomes from systematic reviews in learning skills, maths, English and assessment (EPPI-Centre review groups) September 2006
- Outcomes from Network Learning Communities (NCSL) October 2006
- Closing the attainment gap (Strategy Unit and Universities of Bath and Glamorgan) October 2006
- Presentation of 2006 national test and exam results November 2006
- Gap between boys and girls (Cambridge Assessment) November 2006
- Raising standards of BME pupils (Universities of Bristol and Warwick) December 2006
- Technology and assessment (Cambridge Assessment) January 2006

Events were typically attended by 25 to 50 field and policy staff.

Impact of seminar series

Based on feedback across all events:

- 100% of respondents said they would like to attend future seminars.
- For eight out of nine events 100% of respondents said the event fully met their expectations.
- At least 50% of respondents said that the event they attended had been useful in terms of helping them to inform their future policy plans. For a couple of the events – 100% of respondents indicated the event gave them ideas to follow up later.

Examples of comments made by field staff on aspects of events they found useful:

- “Data on variable performance across different policies were very useful” (Presentation of 2006 results)
- “There was a wealth of information about what works – didn’t just dwell on health warnings or methodology” (Closing the attainment gap)
- “Seminar has prompted me to read up on how children learn in and across subjects” (Outcomes from systematic reviews)

Learning points….

Field and policy staff favoured ‘short sharp inputs’ with plenty of time for discussion. There was also a slight preference for plenary discussion to discussion in groups.
4. TO PROMOTE BETTER UPTAKE OF RESEARCH BY PRACTITIONERS

Our commitment:
Increase take-up of DCSF resources by practitioners

Our progress:
Objective was met. We have:

- Overall membership to Schools Research News has gone up from around 6,000 to around 7,000 since July 06 – March 07 – with highest sign ups by school staff, LA staff and ITT providers).
- Liaised with partner organisations to increase reach of Schools Research News to the profession – it now goes to 34,000 teachers and all local authorities via networks.
- The Research Informed Practice Site (TRIPS) unique visitors have increased from around 6,000 (July 06) to around 9,000 (March 07). The most popular digest themes downloaded were: assessment for learning; early years; pupil grouping; and inclusion.
- Worked with the Teacher Training Resource Bank (TTRB) to promote TRIPS digests on its site. Now nearly all TRIPS digests are featured. The average number of downloads for each article on TTRB is 2,500 a day – these are mainly accessed by initial teacher training providers and trainee teachers.
- Worked with the Innovation Unit to provide on-line dialogue opportunities for teachers to discuss the implications from latest research in relation to their own contexts. 16 studies have been discussed since July. Working with teaching assistants was most popular with 200 contributions.

Impact of promoting resources to practitioners

We received around 200 responses to our recent evaluation of the schools research newsletter. More than half of these were from schools or organisations working directly with schools including local authorities and initial teacher training educators.

All respondents found the Schools Research News useful – and many liked the research for practitioners section. Typical comments include:

“I am a primary school head teacher’s PA. I read the newsletter and print research which I believe would be useful to the school or of interest to the head teacher or senior management team. The articles are interesting and useful to the school.” (Primary school)

“At a recent conference I organised … I mentioned the existence of your newsletter. The delegates (mainly teachers) were unaware of this service you offer, but such was the interest, I forwarded them this copy of the newsletter. (Around 20 teachers signed up to the newsletter as a result of this action). (Former secondary head)

“The newsletter is useful to me with ITT and PPD students. I find it particularly useful when there are electronic links to full articles and research resources (TRIPS) to which I can refer students”. (Initial teacher training provider)

“Each month I go through it and send relevant articles to schools” (local authority officer)

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4 The Research Informed Practice Site includes summaries of research for teachers on recent and relevant research rewritten from academic journals. The Innovation Unit sponsors the TRIPS site, www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research

5 The Teacher Training Resource Bank is funded by the TDA to pull together existing research digests and resources on topics of interest to ITT providers and trainee teachers, http://www.ttrb.ac.uk
Our commitment:

**Define and promote the role of research co-ordinators in schools by visiting at least two schools, organising an event for research co-ordinators and writing a paper on their role.**

Our progress:
Objective is on the way to being met. We have:

- Visited a mix of nine primary and secondary schools to find out about their engagement in and with research and how they access evidence.
- Developed a small-scale project with Essex local authority to look at the impact of teachers' undertaking their own research on a range of outcomes including their likelihood to draw down on existing research to inform practice. (Report is due end of Summer 2007).
- Begun to plan event for research co-ordinators which will take place in December 2007.
- Completed a topic note on the benefits of teacher research.

**Impact of visiting schools to find out about their engagement in and with research**

From our school visits we are beginning to build a picture about the kinds of factors associated with practitioners’ engagement in and with research. These include:

- Action research has helped the schools connect or reconnect with pupils
- Buy-in from senior management is important.
- Research engagement seems to produce promotable people.
- Proximity of a university or higher education institute to a school can facilitate schools’ engagement with research.
- Schools are more likely to draw on external research once they have undertaken their own enquiry – often as means of validating their own findings.
- Research engagement takes place in a diversity of forms from individual teachers, to groups of teachers within the school or across clusters of schools.
- The local authority can play a big difference in helping schools co-ordinate their activities.

**Learning point...**

Practitioners seem to be generally enthused about undertaking their own research. It seems to give them a sense of purpose and can be useful in motivating certain groups of teachers e.g. those near to retirement.
Our commitment:

Develop and trial ‘research bites’ or hooks to engage practitioners with findings on key research and policy initiatives

Our progress:
Objective is on the way to being met. We have:

- Produced and circulated two research bites on reading circles and teaching maths in vocational classes. Further research bites are being developed.

Impact of producing and circulating research bites

The bites have reached our field staff database and practitioner groups. The overwhelming response has been positive – with many saying they have passed them onto colleagues. They have also welcomed the accessibility of the bites – which are designed to be self-running PowerPoint presentations lasting for up to 90 seconds.

What happened in classes that set up literature circles?

- Children gained autonomy and enthusiasm for reading
- They also began to ask to set up additional groups
Our commitment:

Organise a practitioner research day for policy staff at the DCSF – to enable policy staff to find out at first hand the array of innovative practice and action research teachers are developing within their schools.

Our progress:
Objective has been met. We have:

- Planned and held “Lessons from the Frontline” event on 19 January 2007. The event involved teachers from 14 schools and a research engaged school council. The teachers presented their work and mounted an exhibition in the Bridge (policy development and presentation area of Schools Directorate working space within the building).

- The event was attended by more than 60 policy staff from the Department and partner organisations.

Impact of Lessons from the Frontline event

Feedback from policy staff was very positive – with many requesting that similar events are held in the future.

Typical comments included:

“I found the session I attended highly relevant to my policy area and therefore very useful. I would certainly be interested in any event in the future which lets me see at first hand how teachers are raising standards in schools.”

“It’s important and very useful to see and hear how teachers are developing practice in their schools, what motivates them to engage in work like this”
5. TO DEFINE MORE CLEARLY HOW RESEARCH ACTIVITY IS ORGANISED, PRIORITISED, PROCESSED AND MANAGED IN SCHOOLS DIRECTORATE

Our commitment:
Compile a calendar of research activity for external funders covering publication schedules, dissemination strategies and research priorities.

Our progress:
Objective is on the way to being met. We have:

- Incorporated a "Forward Look" of research activity in the Schools Research News – this captures forthcoming research for publication and newly commissioned work.

Impact of Forward Look
Forward Look has been useful in spotting studies which we would not have known about through other routes.
6. TO MAKE SURE OUR KEY INTERESTS ARE REPRESENTED IN THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE DEPARTMENT

Our commitment:

To hold an annual meeting with key researchers in the field to advance our plans and identify informal ways of working together to get research upstream of policy

Our progress:

Objective has been met.

We have planned and used the 2007 annual open meeting between the Heads of schools research across the Department and its agencies and the academic community to share common issues in building an evidence base for policy and practice. Academic participants included: the Chair of the education Research Assessment Exercise, British Educational Research Association (BERA), Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Impact of the meeting

The meeting provided a real opportunity to discuss common issues in building an evidence base in education, assessing the quality of research, and how funders’ future plans could be better accessed.
Annex 1

Broad Strategic Questions for Schools Directorate mapped against overall departmental analytical themes

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<tr>
<th>DfES analytical themes</th>
<th>Broad Strategic Questions for Schools Directorate 2006-08</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Social equality, mobility, and cohesion</td>
<td>• What are the most effective ways of closing attainment gaps?</td>
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| 2. Users, incentives and behaviours | • What forms of personalisation are most effective in enhancing pupils’ chances of success?  
• What are the most productive and effective ways of mobilising the ‘pupil voice’?  
• What measures improve practitioners’ access and uptake of research evidence as a vehicle for improving teaching in learning?  
• What in-school practices support staying on and training after school? |
| 3. Standards | • What changes to the accountability system will be most effective in raising standards, particularly with regard to targets, incentives and funding?  
• How can we optimise the levers of school choice, competition, contestability and new governance arrangements to yield improved outcomes for pupils?  
• How are the energies and skills of the workforce best harnessed to raise standards?  
• Which forms of school intervention and rescue work best and in what conditions?  
• Which emergent models of school leadership work best and under what conditions? |
| 4. Transitions and progression | • Which interventions and approaches work best for groups of pupils who persistently under perform?  
• How do effective teachers plan a lesson or sequences of lessons? |
| 5. Curriculum and teaching | • What curriculum and assessment measures are most effective in accelerating the progress of pupils in core subjects? (both 9 and 10)  
• What methods of curriculum organisation work best for lower-attaining pupils? |
| 6. Parenting | • What parental support is most effective for pupils struggling to progress at school, and how is this best harnessed?  
• Where is best practice on parenting in LAs and how can we share it? |

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