

*The SARH (DFID)
Systematic Review (SR)
Programme for South
Asia*

About the programme

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) endeavours to undertake rigorous research to inform policy-making at the global and regional levels. The Research and Evidence Division (RED) of DFID leads the commissioning and synthesis of research evidence.

The South Asia Research Hub (SARH) of DFID has launched the **Systematic Review Programme for the South Asia**. The specific objectives of the SARH systematic review programme is to provide the DFID country offices, policymakers and other practitioners in the region with a robust assessment of the available evidence and to determine what works and what does not for development programming and policy making in South Asia. The other major focus of the programme is to identify and build capacity for conducting systematic reviews and other rigorous evidence products among South Asian organisations.

Types of studies to be commissioned under the programme

Based on the above objectives, the programme seeks to commission several research products, comprising of **systematic reviews and evidence summaries**, in themes relevant to the development priorities of South Asia.

A **systematic review** (SR) is a high-level overview of primary research on a particular research question that tries to identify, select, synthesise and appraise all high-quality research evidence relevant to that question in order to answer it¹. SRs involve developing and publishing the protocol and carefully documenting the progress of the review

that makes them more transparent as it is easier to scrutinise the methods and audit the process. Furthermore, SRs reduce bias by systematically searching the literature and extracting relevant evidence. For details on SRs and SR methodology, you may refer to our brochure on SR methodology.

Evidence summaries are summaries of findings from existing SRs drawing implications for policy, programming and future research. Evidence summaries are relevant for themes where there are existing reviews precisely focussed on the research priority.

SRs will be commissioned from organisations having prior experience in conducting such reviews (to be called **competitive systematic reviews**) as well as from other teams having basic technical skills but requiring additional support to conduct SRs (to be called **systematic reviews through capacity building**; teams conducting these to be called **trainee review teams**). Evidence summaries can be prepared both by organisations having prior experience in conducting SRs and by teams with limited exposure to SRs. Selection of organisations will be done separately for each study through open bidding.

Service provider to manage the programme

SARH (DFID) has selected a consortium of **PricewaterhouseCoopers Pvt Ltd (PwC), the EPPI-Centre and LIRNEasia** (to be called the SR consortium) to implement the SARH SR programme in South Asia. The SR consortium is led by PwC as the lead management team (LMT), with the Evidence for Policy and Practice

Information and Coordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre) as the quality assurance team (QAT); and LIRNEasia as the capacity building team (CBT).

Introducing the service providers

PwC is a leading Tax and Advisory firm with strong experience in supporting development planning and policymaking across South Asia. PwC's Government Reforms and Infrastructure Development (GRID) team is extensively engaged with various governments as well as with key donor agencies in areas including policy and strategy development, service delivery, performance improvement, institutional strengthening and capacity building and human resource development.

The EPPI-Centre, based in the UK, is part of the UCL Institute of Education. It is a leading institution in conducting systematic reviews and has led developments in policy-relevant systematic reviews since the mid-1990s. It has been strengthening capacity in the use of reviews since 1996 and in the production of reviews since 2000. It undertakes and supports policy-relevant systematic reviews of the evidence in a range of key areas of education, social policy, health, social welfare and international development.

LIRNEasia is a leading thinktank in South Asia engaged in policy relevant research and conducting systematic reviews. Working across the emerging Asia Pacific, it has a mission to catalyse policy change through research, training and advocacy, with a particular emphasis on strengthening capacities. It functions as a regional organisation with active participation from researchers located in other Asian countries.

1. Cochrane A L *Effectiveness and Efficiency: Random Reflections on Health Services*. London: Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust, 1972. <http://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/publications/effectiveness-and-efficiency-random-reflections-health-services>

Programme management structure

The functions of the SR consortium include commissioning, managing and assuring quality of research products developed under the programme. The consortium is also responsible for building capacity of selected teams and guiding them in conducting SRs.

The SR consortium is working with SARH (DFID) to identify research questions relevant to the development priorities of South Asian region. It will invite tenders from research and academic organisations for conducting SRs and evidence summaries and will evaluate the bids in consultation with SARH (DFID) to select the review and trainee teams. The SR consortium will also manage the contracts with selected organisations for conducting the studies.

The SR consortium and SARH (DFID) will support review teams in disseminating their review findings to targeted stakeholders.

Planned support for studies under the programme

The SR consortium will provide continuous guidance and support to the review teams for conducting the studies under the programme. The selected review teams will benefit vastly from the cost-free access to international standard resources, experience of interacting with experts from different fields and from developing or harnessing the capacity to conduct rigorous evidence-based research. Key support planned for review teams under the programme include the following:

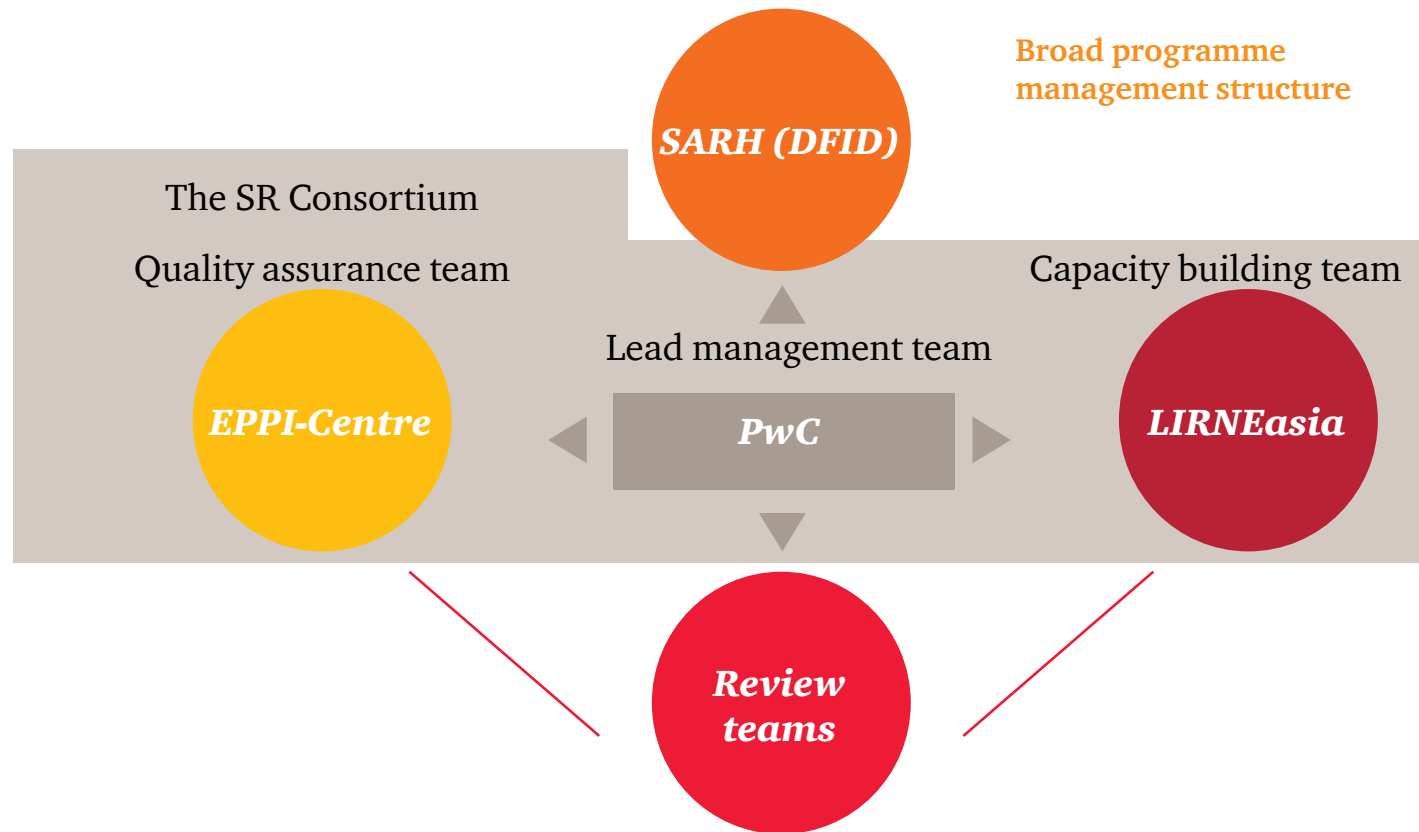
Quality assurance support and access to review tools: Teams commissioned to produce SRs and evidence summaries will be registered and supported in their work by our QAT (the EPPI-Centre), who will provide the following:

- A web space for distance learning and support using the Moodle platform (<http://moodle.org/>)
- Training for conducting systematic reviews through distance learning
- IT solutions for information management from downloading the outputs of electronic searches to preparing final reports
- Online review software to support qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods reviews
- Tools for screening search outputs, deleting duplicate citations, critical appraisal, statistical meta-analysis and qualitative synthesis
- Advice about involving potential review users in shaping the focus of a review and interpreting the emerging findings

- On-going distance support, by email, Skype and telephone
- Organising peer review of protocols and final reports

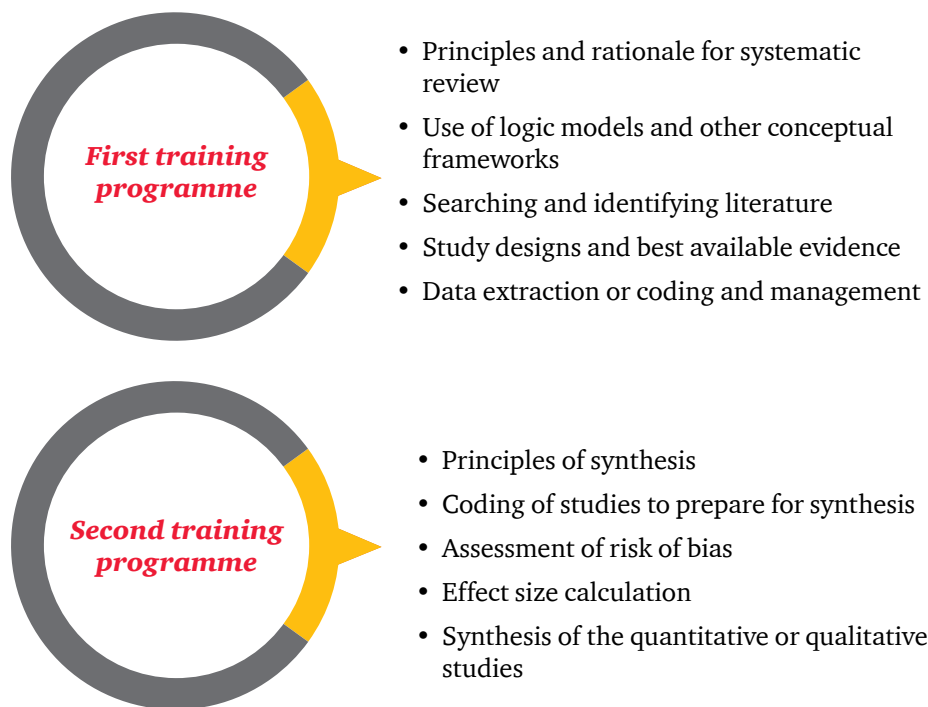
The above mentioned IT tools will be provided to review teams **without any cost** (for the purpose of studies under the programme only).

Capacity building support to trainee teams: Selected trainee teams will be invited to attend two training programmes, organised by the SR consortium. These trainings will be provided to selected trainee teams without any charge and all expenses for attending these, including travel and stay, will be funded from the programme. These training programmes will include residential as well



as online training sessions. Online training sessions will be customised to the specific requirements of each trainee team.

The training programme will cover following topics



Further, the CBT will support trainee review teams in addressing comments of peer reviews and in improving the protocols and draft reports.

Note: The abovementioned training programmes will be organised only for trainee review teams and not for teams undertaking competitive SRs².

². Some evidence summaries may also be covered under training programme. In that case, training support will be provided to teams preparing those evidence summaries. However, this will be declared at the RfP stage only.

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Existing SRs for reference

Please refer to the following link for accessing some existing SRs on varied topics: <http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=2960>

Interested in conducting studies under the programme?

If your organisation is interested in conducting studies under the programme, you may email a brief profile to sr.southasia@in.pwc.com. We will add your email address to our mailing list to keep you posted regarding the tenders for the studies. Alternately, you may look for tender notices on EPPI-Centre website <http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=53>.

The first call for systematic reviews (and evidence summary) under the programme is expected to be launched by early June 2015.



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