



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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Strategic Evidence and Analysis Evidence Plan

Policy portfolio: Strategic Evidence and Analysis

Timeframe covered by Evidence Plan: 2013/14-2017/18

Date of Evidence Plan: March 2013

This evidence plan was correct at the time of publication (March 2013). However, Defra is currently undertaking a review of its policy priorities and in some areas the policy, and therefore evidence needs, will continue to develop and may change quite rapidly. If you have any queries about the evidence priorities covered in this plan, please contact StrategicEvidence@defra.gsi.gov.uk.

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Contents

1. Policy context.....	1
2. Current and near-term evidence objectives	1
3. Future evidence needs	2
4. Meeting evidence needs	2
5. Evaluating value for money and impact	4

1. Policy context

What are the key policy outcomes for the policy programme/area?

Strategic Evidence and Analysis (SEA) supports the Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) and Director of Analysis (DA) in challenge, allocation of resources, coordination, facilitation and assurance of evidence. Underpinning Defra's overarching objectives to:

- Support and develop British farming and encourage sustainable food production.
- Enhance the environment and biodiversity to improve quality of life.
- Support a strong and sustainable green economy, including thriving rural communities, resilient to climate change.

The ultimate outcomes of our work in Strategic Evidence and Analysis are that:

1. Defra's policies and strategic direction are led by, and based on, reliable evidence.
2. Defra is highly influential with Other Government Departments, the European Commission and other EU member states because of its sound base of evidence and analysis.
3. Defra's short, medium and long term needs for evidence to support its policy development are clearly identified and assured.
4. Evidence and analysis activities across the Defra network are joined up to ensure best value for money from evidence investment and high quality standards.

2. Current and near-term evidence objectives

What are the current and near-term objectives for evidence and how do they align to policy outcomes?

Our multidisciplinary team in Strategic Evidence and Analysis (SEA) is focused on supporting the Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) and Director of Analysis (DA), through the following functions:

- Strategy – driving the new Departmental evidence model; horizon scanning and foresight; use of Geography and Earth Observations; developing the Evidence Investment Strategy in support of Departmental plans and strategy, and evidence elements of business plans; assuring the effectiveness of policy evaluation; advising CSA on the allocation of evidence resources to business areas; overview and evaluation of evidence spend and impact; commissioning strategic cross cutting projects and development of methodology where appropriate.
- Assurance – supporting the CSA by overseeing quality assurance to ensure evidence used in Defra and the wider network is suitably robust and reliable and assuring its integrity. Guiding and facilitating assurance in Defra evidence teams. CSA and DA assure evidence aspects of business plans and oversee evaluations. The CSA commissions independent science reviews of Defra laboratory agencies

and some other science-based bodies and oversees implementation of recommendations.

- Partnership – Represent Defra strategy to external stakeholders and partners; coordinate and facilitate Defra’s engagement with other funders (nationally and internationally) to lever evidence funds, improve evidence coordination across the Defra network (including on Geographic Information and Earth Observation), and increase the availability of expertise to Defra.
- Capability – allocation of specialist workforce, workforce planning for specialists and oversight of specialist performance; support for Continued Professional Development. Support strategic leadership and coordination of Defra Evidence & Analysis professionals in conjunction with the Heads of Profession, Evidence and Analysis Deputy Directors and Directors.
- Corporate activities – supporting the CSA and his Science Advisory Council; representing Defra on cross-Whitehall, national and international evidence policy development, engaging with Government Heads of Professions, and coordinating Defra returns on evidence.

3. Future evidence needs

What are the longer-term evidence needs for the policy area/ programme?

The needs outlined above and which focus on support, challenge and assurance of Defra’s evidence activities will remain, though the means through which we deliver these may change.

In a period of economic challenges and change for Government, we will continue to identify and help maintain key capabilities, internal and external, and help develop relationships with other funders to maximise value for money in partnerships.

We will also continue to use our Advisory Bodies (Science Advisory Council and others), and Horizon Scanning capabilities to help identify the long term needs of the Department.

In addition, we will provide a strategic view on future statistical evidence needs, via the UK Official Statistics Theme group and sub groups on “Agriculture” and “Environment” Statistics.

4. Meeting evidence needs

What approach(es) will be taken to meeting evidence needs?

We are responsible for allocating evidence budgets across core Defra. At the start of the 2010 Spending Review (SR), the CSA allocated indicative R&D and non-R&D evidence

budgets to policy programmes for the SR period. A reserve R&D fund, held outside the core-SEA budget, was created to give flexibility to respond to new and emerging evidence needs. The CSA allocates this reserve annually: policy areas bid for additional funds; bids are quality assured (involving Heads of Profession, Evidence and Analysis Deputy Directors and the Devolved Administrations); the CSA makes recommendations; and final evidence allocations are approved by Ministers.

In addition, the SEA evidence spend is focused on providing business areas with funds for cross-cutting, collaborative or novel evidence work that would not otherwise be funded. About 75% of the core-SEA budget is allocated to projects across the department by open competition through the Strategic Evidence Partnership Fund. Criteria for awarding funds are:

- developing new internal and external partnerships,
- leveraging funds from other funders towards our policy objectives,
- addressing long term cross-cutting issues,
- testing novel/interdisciplinary approaches,
- developing novel and risky innovative policy solutions.

The remainder of the budget is spent in supporting the evidence needs outlined in section two. Funding is reviewed and prioritised annually.

In order to meet our objectives, we work in a highly collaborative way, developing and maintaining both internal relationships and external partnerships, specifically:

- We actively work with policy colleagues in adapting to the new evidence and analysis structure and working practices, and to gather the information necessary for a strategic view of evidence activities across the Department. This also helps us develop specific outputs, such as the Evidence Investment Strategy and Evidence Plans.
- We work closely with Defra Network evidence and analysis colleagues to ensure join up across the network and efficiency gains. To this effect, we have formed and are coordinating a Strategic Network Evidence Group at CSA/Chief Scientist level supported by an Operational Group of officials. A separate network of statistical leads is already in place to co-ordinate the work on Official Statistics.
- We work across Whitehall to ensure Defra analysis is of the highest standard and recognised by other Government Departments.
- We work with other evidence funding organisations, such as the Research Councils, the European Commission and funders in other countries, to develop common research agendas and lever funding that helps us achieve our goals most efficiently.
- We work with the external expert community to bring the best state of the art evidence and analysis to bear on Defra's policy needs. As an example we will make full use of Defra's Science Advisory Council (a group of independent experts) to deliver effective advice and challenge to the evidence underlying Defra's strategy and policies.

5. Evaluating value for money and impact

What approach(es) will be taken to maximise and evaluate value for money and impact from evidence?

We lead on the evaluation and assurance of evidence activities for the Department. This includes:

- Supporting the role of the CSA in ensuring evidence activities are aligned to departmental objectives and make best use of available resources. This includes the coordination, review and analysis of Evidence Plans, and the allocations of evidence budgets.
- Science reviews of Defra's laboratory agencies and evaluation of our Seedcorn investments.
- Addressing issues related to our sponsorship of SAC, in particular producing annual reports, annual Chair and member appraisals, and conducting a triennial review of SAC's performance and effectiveness in 2014.
- The Head of Profession for Statistics annual report to the National Statistician.
- Implementing the recommendations from the 2012 Defra Internal Audit and Assurance report of the Evaluation of Evidence in core Defra.
- We work closely with procurement colleagues to ensure best practices are used when procuring evidence within Defra. As part of this we maintain the Evidence Handbook, which provides Defra staff with the guidance and tools needed to commission and manage evidence activities.

We are not the prime users of the evidence that we are funding through our programme budgets. The evidence gathered is therefore evaluated by the policy areas which received funding and managed the evidence activities according to their needs.