Executive summary

Environmental Action Fund
2002 - 2005

Summative evaluation by
CAG Consultants
working with Northumbria University

December 2005
Executive summary

Context

In 2002–05 Defra’s Environmental Action Fund (EAF) programme provided £12.6m in support of voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations carrying out sustainable development projects under the broad categories of: a) biodiversity; and b) understanding and awareness of sustainable development.

The 2002 – 2005 EAF round, was one in a series of EAF funding rounds stretching from the early 1990’s, managed by Defra and its predecessor departments. A more recent 2005 – 2008 round has since been initiated.

Further details about the fund, including the full list of funded projects between 2002–2005 can be found on the Defra website at http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/eaf/index.htm

Defra commissioned a summative evaluation of the 2002 – 2005 EAF programme, focusing on programme-level learning. In late August 2005, CAG Consultants, working in association with The Sustainable Cities Research Institute at Northumbria University were commissioned to undertake the work.

Methodology

The evaluation methodology has included:

- A desk review of project files and background paperwork for 35 projects
- An internal review, which involved interviews with the EAF Programme Management team, nominated officers (including Civic Trust staff contracted to carry out some grant management duties) and review of some project and programme management files
- A workshop with a small number of funded projects, and a representative from Defra’s Community Action 2020 (CA2020) programme
- Interviews with 22 projects
- A Value for Money (VFM) assessment of the programme
Key findings

The report details findings in four analysis areas:

- **Analysis 1: Defra positioning which explores:**
  - The role of EAF
  - The Compact
  - Options for EAF and for Defra funding of the VCS

- **Analysis 2: What projects were funded which explores:**
  - EAF funding focus
  - Application process
  - Appraisal process
  - Fund distribution
  - Legacy of EAF

- **Analysis 3: Programme Management and Administration which explores:**
  - Programme management
  - Project administration and support
  - Timing issues
  - Changing policy context
  - Exit and continuation strategies

- **Analysis 4: Defining and understanding success**
  - How does the EAF programme understand its own success: evaluation and learning

Analysis 5: Project delivery – project process, outputs and delivery
- Purpose and approach: methodological outline of the output, outcome and process analysis
- Typologies of project process, outputs and outcomes
- Key findings and critical success factors
- Summary of processes, outputs and outcomes for reviewed projects (in tabular form)
- Details of the analysis, exploring:
  (1) Types of project outputs and outcomes
  (2) Project processes and types of outputs and outcomes
  (3) Quantitative value for money analysis of projects: programme level assessment

A full summary of findings in each of these sections is provided in table 1 on the following pages. The six principal findings are as follows:

- The EAF programme is a successful and well managed funding stream, which is held in high regard within the VCS and is a credit to Defra.

- Projects funded by EAF by and large met their targets and delivered useful work.

- A phenomenal amount of activity was undertaken as a result of EAF funding, encompassing training, education in schools, participative project delivery, information provision, website development, research, networking and strategic development.

- Many of the projects which took a well planned and participative approach, and which were able to draw on strong knowledge of context, and a good network base in their relevant field, were able to demonstrate increased awareness and understanding amongst participants. Some were also able to show some evidence of behaviour change.

- The EAF programme encouraged an impressive diversity of projects, across a wide range of policy areas and delivery approaches. However the diversity was also in part due to an over-inclusive and woolly set of funding criteria. A more focused fund would have led to a greater combined impact within the chosen policy area(s), more transparency of funding, and greater focus for evaluation and impact analysis.
Defra placed great emphasis on ensuring regular monitoring of and reporting on outputs and outcomes. However the quarterly reporting structures, combined with a wider reluctance within the VCS to evaluate process and impact, had the undesired effect of focusing monitoring towards outputs and short term outcomes. As a result, it is difficult to draw conclusive lessons about longer term outcomes and impact.

A full summary of findings is provided in the following table
### Table 1: Summary of findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key finding</th>
<th>Explored in which section of the report</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EAF role</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Defra should be rightly proud of the scope and depth of the projects it has supported through EAF. The diversity and wealth of project scope and delivery is to be commended. Across a sample of 33 projects, the majority were successful in meeting, if not exceeding the targets in their work plans over the three years.</td>
<td>Analysis 1: Defra positioning. The Role of EAF.</td>
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<tr>
<td>EAF in 02-05 has fulfilled many functions:</td>
<td>Analysis 1: Defra positioning. The Role of EAF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Funding projects which deliver Defra policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Funding organisations which contribute either to delivering Defra policy or encouraging / coordinating others to do so</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Funding organisations which contribute to Defra policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Funding VCS organisations which add to the profile and general ‘noise’ about sustainable development</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Contributed across the spectrum of Defra policy areas, from biodiversity action plans to waste awareness, from marine biology surveying to sustainable development within regional government.</td>
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<td>EAF also makes a clear statement that Defra values the role of the VCS as credible and trusted organisations, which contribute to the influence of behaviour change and understanding, and key players in the move towards more sustainable lifestyles.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yet it is this very diversity of funding within one scheme which has caused problems, misunderstandings and failure to scale up the lessons learnt from the project. Arising issues are explored in the report, and include the combined impact of projects in any one policy area being relatively small, some difficulties in coordinating a fund across multiple policy areas and a difficulty in drawing together coherent lessons for specific Defra policy areas from the fund as whole because of the diversity of funded groups and projects.</td>
<td>Analysis 1: Defra positioning. The Role of EAF.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The broad EAF funding criteria, whilst embracing an impressive range of different VCS projects, were in some ways over-inclusive. This meant that policy links were not as strong as they could have been and also allowed a situation to occur where EAF ‘myths’ were able to continue within the VCS. (This included the perception that EAF funds long term ‘core work’ form one funding period to another, rather than specific and time-limited projects (which may or may not contain elements of ‘core’ activities.)</td>
<td>Analysis 1: Defra positioning. The Role of EAF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The fact that EAF 2005 – 2008 has become more focused in its policy agenda is therefore to be welcomed</td>
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**EAF profile**

EAF's standing within the VCS is high.

With a budget of £12.6million, EAF to some degree 'punched above its weight' within Defra. Yet given its cross cutting nature, linking to such a range of policy areas, more perhaps could have been done to promote effective departmental dissemination and learning from the projects. If Defra sees EAF as supporting its policy objectives, there has to be ownership of projects (or of the fund as a whole) within Defra, and a learning from projects as they progress. There seems to be little point in Defra, as opposed to any other agency, managing EAF if this is not the case.

The policy focus achieved through the 2005 – 2008 funding round may make such learning a more tangible programme-level outcome.

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**Options for EAF and for Defra funding of the VCS**

The future of both the EAF specifically and Defra funding of the VCS rests on the answers to the following questions:

- What does Defra want to do in policy areas?
- Where can the VCS help them to deliver this?
- Does Defra want a **funding** relationship with the VCS?
- What alternatives or additions to funding relationships are there (links to the Compact and CA2020 which relate to support structures, capacity building, information flow, reward and recognition)?
- Does Defra want to fund **delivery of Defra policy through the VCS**? And if so which policy areas? This inevitably involves prioritisation and hard choices.
- Does Defra want to fund **policy-influencing capacity through the VCS**?
- Does Defra want to **fund capacity development to take action on sustainable development** within the VCS (whether through group development grant funding, or through choosing to fund a few 'key' organisations)? Does Defra see funding as the best way to deliver this capacity, or is it more interested in softer measures such as those driven through CA2020?
- Does Defra see the links between policy and delivery as a core element of its funding package? If this is the case then it is important that Defra remains at least partially involved in managing and administering the funding packages. If not then Defra may be better advised to outsource the management and administration of funding for the VCS to organisations which have the capacity to do this.
The report explores the following management options:

- Outsource the management and administration of all grant provision
- Outsource the management and administration of delivery-focused grants and keep strategically important grants in house
- Maintain a management role and outsource administration – but maintain a policy advisor role for each recipient

The report explores the following funding options:

- Funding of projects which deliver Defra policy
- Start up funding for innovative projects, and good ideas which break new grounds
- Supporting organisational / capacity development to ensure that the VCS is equipped to deliver sustainable development
- Funding strategically important organisations – with a longer term relationship with Defra.

**What projects were funded**

EAF aimed to help voluntary and community sector organisations to advance the Government’s environmental and sustainable development policies through work in England. The 2002 – 2005 round focused on two themes:

- Biodiversity projects
- Understanding and awareness projects

56 projects were funded for the full three years. Approximately 35% of EAF money was distributed to biodiversity projects, with the remaining 65% allocated to understanding and awareness projects.

A newly formed Defra (which combined most of the Former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, with the Environment Divisions of the former Department for Environment Transport and the Regions) formed the backdrop to the development of the 2002 – 2005 EAF round. The timing presented funding opportunities to:

- Projects which rolled out the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and local and regional biodiversity planning.
- Projects which raised understanding and awareness of sustainable development, including projects with a focus on education for sustainable development, a policy area then being investigated by the Defra/DfES sponsored Sustainable Development Education Panel; and
- Projects which assisted in delivery against specific policy areas such as recycling, energy efficiency and renewables

The formation of the new Department created some practical problems for the new application round. It cut across different policy areas.
where roles and responsibilities were not yet clarified, which meant that some key policy areas were not fully engaged in the development and further management of the fund. Logistical problems (no staff directory, IT issues, different filing systems) meant delays in processing and assessing applications. Identification of strategic projects within an only partially formed Departmental agenda was also difficult at this time.

**Funding gaps?**
The funding was seen by many VCS organisations as filling gaps in funding available from a range of other sources especially:

- Policy-influencing activity
- ‘Core’ awareness raising (a category of activity which is discussed at some length in the report and in summary at key points later in the table)
- Biodiversity projects; and
- Group development (which was not a focus for EAF funding criteria but which was a by-product or wider outcome for some of the funded organisations).

**Relationship between EAF and match funding**
EAF was valued amongst funded organisations interviewed as providing useful funding in areas where it is sometimes hard to find funding options. EAF grants contributed to 47.8% of the total cost of a sample of 20 projects, demonstrating the added value of match funding. Some projects commented on the positive aspect of EAF in terms of gaining credibility with other funders, and leverage for additional funds.

**Application process**
There is scope for risk assessment and also value for money (VFM) to become more embedded in the appraisal process through the inclusion of additional questions to require applicants to demonstrate why their methodology is the most effective way of achieving their outcome. Requiring applications to specify the main outputs and outcomes would also provide a common framework for comparing project applications and determine which offer most for the level of funding sought. A stronger focus on VFM could also be achieved through providing VFM guidance to EAF applicants.

The application form asks “how will you ensure that others learn from the work you have undertaken?”. This question points to the potential for transferable learning, yet more could be done here to set the scene for effective project evaluation (in addition to monitoring). This is addressed in more detail in Analysis 4.
### Appraisal process

“Biodiversity” and “understanding and awareness of SD” projects were appraised separately. The appraisal process for understanding and awareness projects favoured those which were seen as strategic: for example having innovative features, or located within an umbrella organisation or had other mechanisms for scaling up the impact of their work, and which either addressed sustainable development as a whole, or which made strong links between specific themes and SD generally. However a relatively small proportion of funded projects were originally identified as being ‘innovative’.

### Ministerial involvement

The final decision on distribution of EAF grants is taken at Ministerial level. This has contributed to a perception that those VCS organisations who can lobby ministers for support may be given favourable treatment. Ministerial involvement also adds to the time needed to process EAF applications and renewals.

### Fund distribution

The total grant budget was £12.6m over three years. All grants were for three years, although there was a non-competitive project reapplication process every year. Grants were for a minimum of £25,000/year and a maximum of £250,000/year (between £75,000 and £750,000 over the three year grant period).

The section provides some information about the distribution between funding of biodiversity and understanding and awareness projects.

Across both categories, the evaluators also recognised the following broad categories of funded projects (some of these have been explored already within the section on funding gaps earlier in the report).

- **Policy-influencing projects** which were focused on influencing policy whether internationally, nationally, regionally or locally, developing policy positions, influencing strategic players and / or networking at a strategic level. Green Alliance, Forum for the Future and the National Wildlife Trusts projects are examples.

- **Peer or network influencing projects** which were often a mixture of strategic and delivery, but whose mode of operation was to influence the practice of others (often but not always, other VCS organisations and / or Local Authorities). Examples of these types of projects are Common Ground and the Sensory Trust. Forum for the Future also had elements of these activities within its project approach.

- **Delivery-focused projects** which were focused on the delivery of research, awareness raising projects, and education materials workshops etc. Examples included the Marine Biological Association and the Small Woods Association.

- **'Core awareness raising' activities**. activities which are described by the funded group/ organisation itself as ‘core’ activities for that organisation. Within the context of EAF, the focus on understanding and awareness brought the fund into the realms of this

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<th>Analysis 2: What projects were funded?</th>
<th>Appraisal process</th>
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<td>Analysis 2: What projects were funded?</td>
<td>Ministerial involvement</td>
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<td>Analysis 2: What projects were funded?</td>
<td>Fund distribution</td>
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sort of activity. This is discussed in more detail below.

There are many projects which cut across two or more of these categories. However, the categories have proved useful in understanding the range of projects funded.

**Defining a project**

EAF is a project fund that is subject to changing priorities at Ministers’ discretion. It does not seek to provide core funding – in the sense of all-but- guaranteed long term funding (beyond 3 years) for groups. However, funding understanding and awareness-focused work, highlights a grey area of activity which was self-defined by many of the funded VCS organisations as ‘core’ activity. On the whole this is a matter of perception since the activities are often the same whether described as ‘projects’ or ‘core’.

However this mis-match of perception and funding framework has led some expectations of continued funding beyond the three years, and some difficulties in describing outcomes for the funded period of work.

**Innovation**

Innovation was one of the funding criteria for the understanding and awareness stream. Very few of the projects were described as ‘innovative’ by appraisers. There was some discussion amongst the funded organisations interviewed as to whether innovation equated to successful projects. It was often pointed out that better value for money and effectiveness of delivery could be gained through a project which is rooted in good practice and is ‘tried and tested’.

It is worth drawing a distinction between ‘innovation’ and ‘tried and tested’ approach, both of which have their merits.

**EAF legacy**

The EAF legacy, which stretches back to the early 1990’s and which continues today, leaves a complex set of relationships between the VCS and Defra, with many organisations having been funded more than once, under different EAF programmes. It has mixed funding / administration and policy / delivery relationships together which has led in some cases to raised expectations and occasionally to confusion. Yet the overwhelming view within the VCS about the EAF programme is that it is valuable, and that Defra have been right to continue with it. It forms a cornerstone of Defra’s relationship with the VCS and, in whatever form, would be a valuable part of the Community Action 2020 delivery, and wider policy delivery into the future.

**Programme management and administration**

The contract management and administration of project grants was managed in part by Defra (through a programme management team and project-specific “nominated officers”) and in part outsourced to contractors (the Civic Trust).

The administration / reporting process was well organised and collected regular reports from projects against work plans.

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<th>Definition</th>
<th>Analysis 2: What projects were funded?</th>
<th>Definition 1: Defining a project</th>
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<td>EAF legacy</td>
<td>Analysis 2: What projects were funded?</td>
<td>EAF legacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Analysis 2: What projects were funded?</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
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These arrangements are discussed in more detail in the report, but summary findings are:

**For those projects managed by Defra:**

Policy areas which suggested funding requirements and recommended funding for groups were then obliged to provide nominated officer support. In some instances this worked well, with significant commitment from the policy unit and time invested in supporting the project. In other instances, the commitment of policy units and/or nominated officers was less forthcoming.

There were positive benefits associated with having nominated officers who were specialists in the relevant policy area.

Nominated officers were separated from the EAF team, with no line management responsibility direct to the team. This led in some instances to a disconnection between the programme management needs and delivery, and a variable influence of nominated officers from the central programme management team.

There was also variation in the level of support provided by nominated officers due to workload issues.

Nominated officers had the authority to act to intervene when they were unhappy about project progress, and to work with the organisation concerned to address issues. However there was some evidence that nominated officers did not perceive they had this authority, or feel able to use it.

**For those projects managed by the Civic Trust:**

The Civic Trust role was to provide an administrative, rather than policy or content-focused support to projects. They directed any policy or content enquires to the EAF team. However there were some projects felt that this support was not available, perhaps highlighting perceptions that they could not ask about policy or content issues.

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<th>Analysis 3: Programme management and administration: Project management</th>
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<td><strong>There are some differences in the notional cost per project of nominated officer support between those supported by Defra and those supported by the Civic Trust. This may merit further consideration, with more accurate resource data, in order to ensure that the arrangements deliver best value for money. As an indication:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• The Civic Trust managed 33 projects at an average cost of £57,000 per year(^1), equating to £1,727 per project per year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Defra managed 28 projects and estimate nominated officer costs to be in the region of £31,000 per year(^2), equating to £1,107 per project per year(^3).</td>
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\(^1\) This is an average figure based on 2003-05 only, due to additional project management work being incorporated into the 2002/03 contract following rebrigading of Defra and the Forestry Commission’s policy responsibilities. It is inclusive of VAT.

\(^2\) This is estimated based on 3.3% x HEO salary x 28 projects and does not include graded pay rises
**Scrutiny role**

There is evidence that it may be as effective, and more supportive to groups to decouple the project scrutiny and annual reporting processes from an annual reappraisal, increasing the authority to challenge projects that were not delivering, and relieving projects of the uncertainty of annual renewals.

**Reporting requirements**

Whilst many medium to large delivery organisations found the reporting structures acceptable, there are some concerns from groups that quarterly reporting was too onerous, particularly for smaller projects, and did not fit the structures of more strategic organisations. However the reporting requirements were relatively light (typically a 2 – 3 page report quarterly plus an annual reappplication).

Defra could encourage more appropriate project management by undertaking an early risk assessment for each project and, on the basis of the assessment, tailoring support to project need so that higher risk projects received greater support and reporting requirements. It is recognised, however that this may have resource implications for Defra in terms of completing the risk assessments (although subsequent monitoring and project management support for some projects would be reduced).

A greater emphasis on annual reporting (rather than reappraisals) could emphasise the longer term outcome reporting, albeit, backed up by quarterly reporting on shorter term outputs and outcomes. As summaries above, this would requiring a corresponding strengthening of the continuous scrutiny role of nominated officers.

The VCS Compact sets out a three-month advance target for notifying groups of the result of their applications for funding, although EAF 2002-05 was initiated before Defra had a Compact working group. The distribution of new EAF funds was announced in March 2002, for a start date in April 2003. Groups and Defra alike acknowledge that this was too short a time period, leading to project insecurity. The need for Ministerial approval also delayed the formal announcement of renewed grants in 2003-04. 004-05 renewals were announced earlier and in line with Compact obligations. The timing of announcements on the 2005 – 2008 round has been commended by the Compact Working Group.

It is important that other funding streams (e.g. the new Natural England biodiversity funding stream which will absorb the biodiversity component of EAF) are able to match this and other Compact aspirations.

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3 Note, these sums are in addition to the cost of the EAF team which managed the overall programme.
### Exit and continuation strategies

Both sustainability and transferability are addressed on the fund application form and thus form part of the overall selection of projects. However, there is evidence that sharing learning is interpreted in terms of learning about the subject matter (i.e. “understanding and awareness of SD” or “biodiversity”) rather than sharing good practice and lessons learnt for the benefit of future projects and/or other service providers. It is this latter type of information that would facilitate transferability. There is scope for the EAF to encourage projects to disseminate findings of this nature, either at project or fund level. This could be reinforced through the annual work plans. Notwithstanding the issue of continuation / exit strategies being raised at this early stage, several projects failed to develop such strategies and were not in a position to fund projects which could have otherwise have continued at the end of the grant scheme.

Many projects have continued their projects in some form (often in a scaled down or altered way), some with a more sustainable resourcing structure (membership, partnership agreements and trading) but most with follow on funding from some other source.

### Project delivery and impact

Defra officers and funded organisation interviewees alike were asked about what constituted a ‘successful’ EAF project in their view. Their thoughts are outlined in the report. Both agreed that a successful EAF project delivered against outputs and outcomes, was well managed and worked within its budgets. Several funded organisations also stated that projects should change people’s actions, and also would have both a funding and a content/policy relationship with Defra.

| Analysis 3: Programme management and administration | Exit and continuation strategies |
| Analysis 4: Understanding success | |

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### Outputs and outcomes

- The majority of projects met their outputs targets.

- EAF resulted in phenomenal activity. The report outlined examples of outputs.

- The majority of projects reviewed focused more heavily on reporting outcomes relating to raised awareness, and increased understanding and knowledge.

- Few projects focused on monitoring and reporting change in behaviour, which is perhaps understandable as the focus of the understanding and awareness projects was on this rather than changed behaviour. However there was some evidence of change recorded and examples provided in the report.

- One of the reviewed projects undertook conscientious evaluation activity to explore the extent to which the outcomes of the project were sustained over time. Peace Child explored retention of learning and change in behaviour over a 10 week period, and received some favourable results.

- Several projects reported outcomes in terms of their own organisation’s position or capacity.

- The mainstreaming of the Waste Watch project with long term WRAP funding by the end of year 2 was a significant outcome.

### Project processes

- There is some project-based evidence about school-focused processes leading to an increased knowledge-base, and in some instances, some level of behaviour change. The critical success factors for these projects appear to be
  - the processes employed (both projects reviewed employed innovative processes which increased ownership and participation of children and parents) and
  - the sound knowledge and network base of the organisations undertaking the work.

- There is some project-based evidence that projects employing
  - network or partnership development and
  - coordinating partnership or peer action (via partnership working, website etc), combined with
  - peer or network facing conferences, seminars and talks, have led to some informing of practice and influence of policy.

- It has proved harder to evidence the link between processes which
- engage members of the public in training, education or practical action, combined with
- information provision, to increased understanding and awareness and / or behaviour change.

**How does the EAF programme understand its own success: the role of evaluation and learning**

One of the key features of EAF is that it funds change processes and Defra is interesting in understanding the change which results from its funding.

Defra has been rigorous in encouraging regular monitoring and reporting on outputs and outcomes. Programme officers, through reporting and personal contact have been at great pains to encourage projects to especially concentrate on the monitoring of outcomes.

Quarterly reporting has been a recognised success of the EAF programme: recognised by projects themselves as well as by Defra itself. However a by-product of the focus on quarterly reporting has perhaps been an unintended focus on the short term: skewing project reporting (despite all advice) to focus reporting on outputs and short term outcomes.

Evaluation (as opposed to monitoring) is defined in this section. Formal Evaluation was not stressed within project application or reporting forms. In addition, annual reporting has been wrapped up in the reappraisal process, and groups feel to some extent that they are justifying the worth of their projects, rather than honestly questioning and evaluating performance. The irony is perhaps that Defra are very interested in those projects which did manage to measure medium – longer term outcomes, and to evaluate performance.

In particular many of the following lessons have been lost through a lack of formative evaluation at project level, which has led to a lack of information to collate at a programme-evaluation level:

- A true understanding of the impact of projects
- change over time, founded on baseline assessment
- Process evaluation.
**Types of projects, outputs and outcomes**

- **Policy influencing and policy delivery projects**: The network or partner approach taken by the policy-influencing projects can be seen to be part of strategy to generate a ‘community of influence’ within a certain sphere. All three projects identified here could have done more to use this community of influence to track and monitor change in practice as a result of the project work. There was, however, some evidence of change in practice.

- **‘Innovative’ and ‘tried and tested’ projects**: It is hard to draw distinct similarities between the innovative and tried and tested projects, as all six projects were very different. It certainly is not possible to say that one type of project was more successful than another.

- **Projects perceived as ‘projects’ and ‘core funding’**: Those projects defining themselves as ‘core’ were able to draw on the influence / impact of the whole organisation in demonstrating their outcomes, although it is hard to attribute these outcomes to EAF. The ‘projects’ chosen for this analysis found it harder to demonstrate outcomes, although this would perhaps have been different if different projects were chosen for analysis.

- **Policy ‘strategic’ and ‘non strategic’ projects**: The differences between public-influencing and peer or network influencing projects seemed to relate to project approach and process, with public-influencing reviewed employing more of or ‘programme’ of training, awareness raising or publications / materials. The peer or network influencing projects reviewed here were often more opportunistic in their project work plan, taking opportunities as they arose to influence key players, alongside a more structured programme of work.

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<th>Critical success factors</th>
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<td>In undertaking this analysis, a number of success factors have emerged in several ‘successful’ EAF projects:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sound understanding of the context within which the project operates – whether this be the school environment, a research network or a strategic environment. Those projects which innovated or expanded from this sound base were much more likely to succeed in producing useful outcomes.</td>
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<td>• A well thought through programme of work which is ‘identifiable’ by those participating in the project, whilst also maintaining the flexibility to respond as new opportunities arise.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A clear understanding of purpose, and monitoring change against this. Those projects which were able to evidence outcomes in terms of raised awareness and understanding, changed practice or influence of policy were seen to the most successful projects.</td>
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The value of transferability (where appropriate) and sharing good practice. Those projects which recognised the value of sharing information about the process of their project, and learning from others were likely to be good examples of ‘learning projects.’

Delivering action by influencing others. Several of the projects funded by EAF described themselves, variously, as ‘change agents’, ‘influencers’ and ‘networkers’. Their role is to take action to influence other actors (groups, organisations and the public sector), in their own practice. The report details some characteristics of such an approach.

Delivering action by providing a programme of support. Several of the projects funded provided some degree of support to secondary beneficiaries – whether schools, partner organisations, network members or trainees. Such support structures are often the key to ensuring successful delivery, as understanding and awareness and behaviour change rarely results from one interaction or training delivery. VCS organisations are often uniquely placed to provide trusted support, to help other organisations or individuals through a process of change and learning.

Capitalising on the potential of enterprise approaches. There is a wider trend within the VCS toward more enterprise or trading based approaches to delivering outcomes and resourcing projects. Such an approach does not suit all contexts by any means. Developing an enterprise requires a flexibility of approach, ability to alter approaches quickly and with minimal bureaucracy and to have the freedom to develop networks and partnerships, and to test ideas.
Summary of recommendations

The report comprises four analysis sections.

Based on the findings of the evaluation, the evaluators have made a number of both strategic and delivery-focused recommendations. These are highlighted in blue throughout the text and then listed in full in the last section of the report. The last section also provides a qualitative cost benefit analysis of these recommendations and provides a view of which are most directly able to be implemented.

In addition, at the end of each analysis section, there is a short summary of recommendations and cost-benefit findings. (These sections are to be added once the cost benefit analysis has been undertaken).

A summary of the recommendations is provided in table 2 below.

Table 2: Summary of recommendations

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<td><strong>Purpose:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(1) Defra should review the role and purpose of EAF, within a wider context of its relationship with the VCS and of Community Action 2020. Defra should ensure that EAF links clearly to policy agendas, and seeks to provide focus for the fund, perhaps at the expense of diversity.</td>
<td>Analysis section 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) We strongly suggest that learning about the process of change, about delivery of policy and about good practice within the VCS should be a core purpose of an EAF programme.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Funding focus:</strong></td>
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<td>Defra should consider options for the funding focus for EAF and for other VCS funding programmes within the department.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Success criteria:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>EAF or similar funding streams should be developed with clear shared understanding of the range of success criteria from both the funder and recipients.</td>
<td>Analysis section 3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Funding for success:

EAF or similar funding criteria should aid Defra in selecting projects which demonstrate some key success factors including (where relevant):

(a) A demonstrable knowledge of the subject area and context.
(b) Good networks and contacts within their chosen field.
(c) A well thought through programme of work, which allows for flexibility and opportunism within it.
(d) Clarity of purpose and a programme to monitor change against this.
(e) Thought given to learning about project process from others, and within the project itself, and some thought to the potential for transferability of learning as a project outcome.
(f) Understanding of the project / funded organisation’s role as a change agent and influencer and, where appropriate, well thought through processes for the participative elements of the project.
(g) Well thought through programme of support (where appropriate).
(h) Capitalising on an enterprise approach (where appropriate).

Funding management roles:

Defra should consider management and administration options for EAF and other VCS funding programmes within the department.

Evaluation, learning and dissemination:

(1) Put the following at the heart of the objectives and practice of the EAF programme: effective project level evaluation and learning, collation and learning from this at a programme level, encouraged interaction between projects, dissemination of learning and lastly a longer term view about change and evaluation. This last could link EAF funding programmes, tracking and commenting on change over time and gaining a longer term view on impact.
(2) Place evaluation, especially of outcomes and impact, at the centre of funding programmes which seek to fund processes of change, supported by an acknowledgement of learning as one of the core purposes of the programme.
(3) Provide quality advice for projects at the application stage on evaluation frameworks and approaches.
(4) Collate, learn from and disseminate learning from evaluation (disseminate within Defra and within the VCS as a whole, perhaps by capitalising on communication channels now developing through Community Action 2020).
(5) Encourage baseline collection at the start of the project for outcomes, and encourage tracking of change over time. For behaviour change projects and for knowledge/ education projects, encourage assessment of change over time.
(6) Encourage projects to include beneficiary voices within the evaluation technique, through participative evaluation processes, which feed in views other than those of the organisation itself.
(7) Tail off funding to allow for return evaluation, assessing change over the longer term.
(8) Further encourage projects to cost in effective evaluation, including beneficiary input and long term assessments, but not at the expense of the project budgets. Within the same overall programme budget this would mean...
Executive summary. EAF 2002 – 2005 evaluation

funding fewer projects.

**Transferability and sharing learning between projects**

1. Focus learning and sharing for transferability on process and impact – encouraging projects to share cross-cutting lessons about approaches, techniques and applications of their work.

2. Focus part of the nominated officer support on understanding barriers and learning, emerging good practice and difficulties and encourage linking between EAF projects to help address problems and share expertise.

**Supporting quality project management**

1. Decouple annual reviews and scrutiny role from re-applications. Remove the reapplication process, focusing instead on annual reporting on project progression, evaluation of impact and learning, and work planning. Provide feedback to projects from annual reporting.

2. In addition, strengthen the scrutiny process, especially processes for addressing any value for money concerns and delivery problems. Create a formal policy of ultimate withdrawal of funding if a project if not delivering. Couple this with improved information to applicants on the scrutiny process and level of rigor used.

3. Quarterly reporting should focus clearly on outputs and especially on outcome reporting. The forms could be adapted to allow for overall reporting of achievements and arising problems, focusing on learning points and transferability.

4. Vary the level of project support available (through meetings, work plans, discussions etc) and tailor more specifically to need, as defined through the original risk assessment and through project progress.

5. Involve nominated officers early in the structure of the work programmes so that they can help address problems of poor work planning early in the process.

6. ‘Signpost’ or provide project management training for project managers where there is a need identified.

7. Produce simple guidelines for developing SMART outputs and outcomes and focus attention from the very beginning on outcome and impact evaluation.
### Executive summary. EAF 2002 – 2005 evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project applications</th>
<th>Analysis section 2</th>
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<td>- &quot;What will be the main outputs and outcomes?”</td>
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<td>- &quot;How will you evaluate your project as it progresses, including measuring and understanding the impact of your project? How will you disseminate learning from your project”</td>
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<td>(2) There is also merit in providing explicit information to applicants on how the concept of value for money applies to projects funded by the EAF. Applicants should be made aware of VFM both a qualitative and quantitative term. Defra should consider 'added value'.</td>
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<td>(4) Consider other means of improving the quality (and perhaps reducing the quantity) of applications – for example by developing a two stage application stage (with short expression of interests followed by full applications) or offering more verbal guidance for applicants.</td>
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### Value for Money

Monitor value for money more formally through nominated officers in Defra and make clearer and more explicit the process of ultimate withdrawal of funding if a project is consistently not delivering. Programme management team would develop the VFM methodology and process with nominated officers acting on this and recommending ways forward.

### Full cost recovery

Provide clearer guidance (for instance in the initial application pack) about eligible EAF expenditure, including costs of management and auditing requirements, to facilitate more effective full cost recovery.

### Project administration files

In line with standard Defra records management procedures, including any new electronic document management systems, ensure that key documents are easily accessible to support effective project administration as well as effective monitoring and evaluation processes (this should include segregation of key documents from other administrative documents). Make clearer and more explicit to funded groups what management and evaluation information is important to Defra, perhaps by including a project 'timeline' with the application form, showing what administration and management inputs were required and at which stage.
### Understanding the cost of management and administration of EAF

Whilst it is recognised that the cost of Defra nominated officers are merely estimated, the EAF team may wish to look more closely at this issue with regard to future rounds of the EAF. This may involve gathering more detailed activity data from Defra nominated officers in order to obtain a more accurate estimation of in-house costs. Defra may then wish to revisit this analysis, and factor in cost savings at Defra.

### Exit and continuation strategies

1. Include requests for exit strategy alongside continuation strategy in project applications and report
2. Explore the potential of providing bridging funding for a short period towards the end of the grant period, to help smooth the transition into new resourcing structures.

### Innovation

1. Defra should capitalise on EAF funding, ensuring that projects undertake formative evaluation processes, and that learning is collated and disseminated within Defra and within the VCS more widely perhaps by capitalising on communication channels now developing through Community Action 2020.
2. Defra should clarify where it is interested in ‘solid good practice, based on proven techniques’ and where it is interested in ‘innovation’. Indeed it may be worth exploring the potential to develop two separate funding streams – one for the delivery of good and effective projects, which may have new ideas about old problems, and a second which provides ‘seed corn’ funding for exciting and innovative ideas.

### Defining and project and core funding

As part of its Compact work and the work of Community Action 2020, Defra should reassess its relationship with VCS groups in terms of ‘core’ funding. If ‘core’ funding is seen as a part of Defra’s funding strategy, we suggest a separation from project funding, with different monitoring arrangements.

### Ministerial involvement

As part of a wider review about Defra’s involvement in administering grant schemes (see later in this report), Defra may consider outsourcing the appraisal process, having had clear involvement in setting the funding criteria and guidelines by which applications would be appraised. This would separate funding decisions from Ministerial involvement.
### Evaluation, learning and dissemination

- Put the following at the heart of the objectives and practice of the EAF programme: effective project level evaluation and learning, collation and learning from this at a programme level, encouraged interaction between projects, dissemination of learning and a longer term view about change and evaluation. This last point could link EAF funding programmes, tracking and commenting on change over time and gaining a longer term view on impact.

- Place evaluation, especially of outcomes and impact, at the centre of funding programmes which seek to fund processes of change, supported by an acknowledgement of learning as one of the core purposes of the programme.

- Provide quality advice for projects at the application stage on evaluation frameworks and approaches.

- Collate, learn from and disseminate learning from evaluation (disseminate within Defra and within the VCS as a whole, perhaps by capitalising on communication channels now developing through Community Action 2020).

- Encourage baseline collection at the start of the project for outcomes, and encourage tracking of change over time. For behaviour change projects and for education projects, encourage assessment of change over time.

- Encourage projects to include beneficiary voices within the evaluation technique, through participative evaluation processes, which feed in views other than those of the organisation itself.

- Tail off funding to allow for return evaluation, assessing change over the longer term.

- Encourage projects to cost in effective evaluation, including beneficiary input and long term assessments, but not at the expense of the project budgets. Within the same overall programme budget this would mean funding fewer projects.

### Transferability and sharing learning between projects

- Focus learning and sharing for transferability on process and impact – encouraging projects to share lessons about approaches, techniques and applications of their work

- Focus part of the nominated officer support on understanding barriers and learning, emerging good practice and difficulties and encourage linking between EAF projects to help address problems and share expertise.
### Supporting quality project management

- De-couple annual reviews and scrutiny role from re-applications. Remove the repagination process, focusing instead on annual reporting on project progression, evaluation of impact and learning, and work planning. Provide feedback to projects from annual reporting.

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- ‘Signpost’ or provide project management training for project managers where there is a need identified.

- Produce simple guidelines for developing SMART outputs and outcomes and focus attention from the very beginning on outcome and impact evaluation.

### Project applications

- Defra may wish to consider the following new questions in the application form:
  
  "What evidence do you have that the methods outlined in this proposal are the best way of achieving your objectives?"

  "What do you see as the main risks which could affect the smooth running of this project, and how would you plan to manage them?"

  "What will be the main outputs and outcomes?"

  "How will you evaluate your project as it progresses, including measuring and understanding the impact of your project? How will you disseminate learning from your project?"

- There is also merit in providing explicit information to applicants on how the concept of value for money (VFM) applies to projects funded by the EAF. Applicants should be made aware of VFM as both a qualitative and quantitative term.

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### Value for Money (VFM)
Monitor VFM more formally through nominated officers and develop a process which allows for an ultimate withdrawal of funding if a project is consistently not delivering. Programme management team would develop the VFM methodology and process with nominated officers acting on this and recommending ways forward.

**Analysis section 2**

### Full cost recovery
Provide clearer guidance about management and auditing requirements as part of the initial application pack, to facilitate more effective full cost recovery.

**Analysis section 2**

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Whilst it is recognised that the cost of Defra nominated officers are merely estimated, the EAF team may wish to look more closely at this issue with regard to future rounds of the EAF. This may involve gathering more detailed activity data from Defra nominated officers in order to obtain a more accurate estimation of in-house costs. Defra may then wish to revisit this analysis, and factor in cost savings at Defra.

**Analysis section 3**

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**Analysis section 4**

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