

Evaluation, research and policy analysis

Three Year Strategy 2020 – 2022

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**An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail**
Department of Rural and
Community Development

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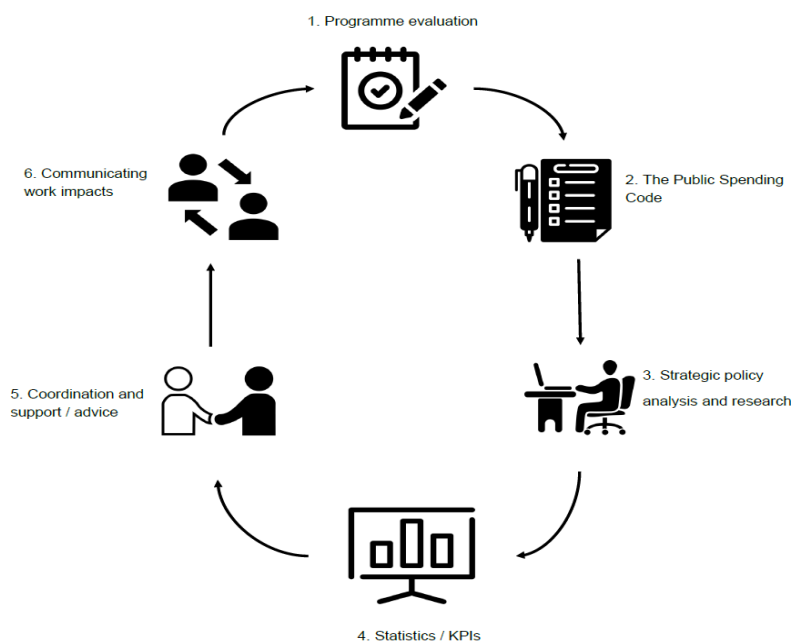
Introduction

The purpose of this document is to set out the evaluation unit's three year strategy for evaluation, research and policy analysis covering the period 2020 to 2022.

It should be noted that the evaluation unit is part of a broader approach to evaluation and research across the Department. Research agreements with external bodies, internal reviews by Department units and commissioned reviews also form part of the overall approach. For example, the Department has a research agreement with the ESRI, and a review of CSP and LEADER (as part of the Rural Development Programme review) have been undertaken by consultants.

This strategy is ambitious and dependent on suitable resourcing. It is also subject to change based on priority needs. It is based on the following six areas of work.

1. Programme evaluation.
2. The Public Spending Code.
3. Strategic policy analysis and research.
4. Statistics / KPIs.
5. Coordination and support / advice.
6. Communicating work impacts.



Examples of work completed and ongoing to date include:

- A Spending Review of Dublin North East Inner City Initiative was completed in 2019.
- A draft Focused Policy Assessment of the Local Improvement Scheme is nearing completion.

- A research agreement was established with the ESRI, with initial outputs due in 2020.
- An internal Department evaluation sub-group was established and three meetings were held in 2019.
- Relationship building with Central Statistics Office (CSO) is continuing which includes participation at CSO data events such as the data champions group.

1. PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Programme evaluation involves collecting and analyzing information to reach conclusions on specific questions after the programme has been implemented. The purpose is to ensure improved value for money of public expenditure. Under guidelines by DPER, Departments are to prepare multi-annual schedules for review, as every three years DPER will ask Departments to make suggestions of topics for review.

It is proposed that evaluations of DRCD's programmes will take place as outlined in table 1 below. This represents circa 60% of Department programme budget in 2020. The ESRI research agreement may also provide opportunities for linkage with this work.

Table 1: Programme areas of evaluation, 2020 - 2022

Programme area	Period for completion
Local Improvement Scheme	Q1 2020
Senior Alerts Scheme	Q3-Q4 2020
Assessment of DRCD community development supports to local authorities	2021
Initial assessment of RRDF e.g. case studies	2021
Review of rural development supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town and Village Renewal • Outdoor Recreation and Infrastructure Scheme 	2021 2022
Review aspect(s) of LEADER e.g. activities funded / beneficiaries, geographical spread of funding	2022
Review of aspect(s) of SICAP	2022

2. THE PUBLIC SPENDING CODE

The Public Spending Code (PSC) is a set of rules and procedures that apply to ensure standards are upheld in the public service. The aim of the PSC is to ensure Value for Money (VFM) for public services i.e.

- Doing the right things – spending money on the right objectives.
- Doing things right – efficiency / avoiding waste.

It applies to current and capital expenditure in terms of:

- Future spend – appraisal and planning.
- Current spend – implementation and management.
- Past spend – post review.

The evaluation unit will:

- Assist in the application of the PSC across the department where relevant, including input from the Department's finance accountants, and inspection and compliance unit as needed (ongoing work agenda).
- Produce a summary document on the PSC requirements on the Department's intranet website in Q2 2020.
- Organise a tailored briefing session / presentation on the PSC in conjunction with DPER in Q3 2020.

In addition to the above, an obligation under the PSC is that each Department should put in place an internal, independent, Quality Assurance Process involving annual reporting on how organisations are meeting their PSC obligations. DRCD's first Quality Assurance Report will be completed in Q3 2020, and periodically thereafter, as appropriate.

3. STRATEGIC POLICY ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH

The work agenda in this area consists of three aspects:

- i. Management of the DRCD ESRI research agreement to support monitoring and evaluation of rural and community development.
- ii. Engagement with the CSO in terms of public sector data developments, in particular those relevant to rural and community development.
- iii. Management of the DRCD evaluation sub-group to support the delivery of work in the evaluation unit and the ESRI research agreement.

Managing the ESRI research framework

The Department agreed a joint research programme with the Economic and Social Research Institute in September 2019. This agreement runs until the end of 2021 and is managed by the evaluation unit. Under this agreement the ESRI will undertake research and analysis to:

- Support the monitoring and development of rural and community policy.

- Help develop a framework for monitoring and evaluation of rural and community development programmes.
- Produce bespoke outputs to inform Department policy areas and contribute to analysis of specific programmes and projects funded by the Department.

Work outputs are agreed by a steering committee consisting of Department and ESRI staff. Initial outputs to be completed under the agreement are:

- International best practice in measurement and evaluation of rural and community development programmes in terms of outcomes and policy objectives to be completed in Q1-Q2 2020.
- Identification and analysis of indicators for monitoring rural and community development in Ireland to be completed by end of 2020.
- Assessment of the data infrastructure held by DRCD for research and policy purposes (will begin in 2020).

Identification and agreement of other work-streams for a longer term plan continuing into 2021 will also be undertaken by the steering committee in 2020.

Engagement with the CSO

As an ongoing work agenda, the evaluation unit will continue to engage with the Central Statistics Office (CSO) to improve understanding of data availability and enhance the approach to using data for rural and community development.

To date, engagement has consisted of DRCD staff attending a CSO data champions group which discusses public sector data developments to share best practice, and providing feedback to the CSO regarding their urban rural life publication in late 2019.

The evaluation unit will build on this engagement by:

- Continuing to attend the CSO data champions group to keep informed of public sector data developments.
- Liaising with the CSO regarding approach to geocoding of public sector data as relevant.
- Staying apprised of data developments, and scope possibilities of data collection relevant to rural and community development – including possible linkage to ESRI work on rural and community development indicators.

DRCD evaluation sub-group

An evaluation sub-group (consisting of staff across the Department) was set up in 2019, meeting three times throughout the year. Its purpose is to contribute to a greater level of evidence informed decision making in the Department through the development of an enhanced culture of monitoring and evaluation.

The evaluation unit will continue to manage sub-group meetings each year with a view to:

- Supporting the delivery of work both within the evaluation unit and under the ESRI research agreement by advising on topics for consideration as part of the work programme and reviewing draft outputs (ongoing work agenda).
- Develop consistency to programme monitoring and evaluation across the Department e.g. assessment of approaches for monitoring and review of DRCD programmes (ongoing work agenda).

It is also likely that Department units will engage in such work during the period of this strategy. For example, this may include undertaking of periodic critical reviews as noted in section 5 of this strategy.

4. STATISTICS / KPIS

The purpose of this work area is to assess and improve statistics / KPIs relevant to rural and community development through:

- Clarity on what we have (baseline) - what is measured (how best can we use it), and not measured (how can we address this).
- Identification of key macro-level (for Department goals - rural/community development), and micro-level (for programmes/schemes) statistics.

Under the research agreement with the ESRI they will identify and analyse indicators / KPIs for monitoring rural and community development in 2020. This may also have cross over with CSO engagement.

There are a number of other tasks which will be undertaken including:

- Completion of internal assessment of the type and format of data collected for DRCD programmes in Q1 – Q2 2020.
- Assess and promote the integration of geocoding (eircodes, unique business identifiers) into Department programmes to identify the distribution of Department funding in (to commence in Q2 2020).
- Identify and progress an approach that can be used to map geocoded data for monitoring and research purposes (to commence in Q3-Q4 2020).
- Assess the scope for improving the type of data collected across DRCD programmes in 2021.
- Assess the suitable approach to the collection of data across programmes in 2021.

5. COORDINATION AND SUPPORT / ADVICE

In 2019 a report on the findings of an internal survey on research and analysis of Department programmes was produced. Building on this, as an ongoing work item the evaluation unit will act a central point of knowledge for evaluation and monitoring in the Department. It will compile and maintain a list of reviews, research and policy analysis in DRCD for corporate knowledge (commencing in Q2 2020 and ongoing).

Support / advice has been provided by the evaluation unit to Department units relevant work areas e.g. assessment of applications under the RRDF, and through participation on oversight group for the review of the CSP. The evaluation unit will continue to provide support / advice to units where appropriate and feasible. For example, assistance may be required in terms of:

- Developing indicators / KPIs for monitoring the CSP (Q1 - Q2 2020).
- Periodic critical reviews of Department agencies.

6. COMMUNICATING WORK IMPACTS

For transparency and accountability reviews and research will be published on DRCD's website.

- Commencing in Q4 2020 the evaluation unit will work with the communications unit to develop a dedicated area on DRCD's intranet and external website for published reviews, research and other relevant analysis for improved access and transparency.
- In 2021, the unit will also work with the communications and ICT unit to develop suitable approaches to communicate the work of the Department. For example, in terms of use of infographics and interactive visualisation tools.
- Discussion and presentation of outputs will also be provided at relevant events such as IGEES conferences, internal and external working groups, and other relevant events as part of an ongoing work agenda.