

Evaluation, research and policy analysis

Three Year Strategy 2022 – 2024

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

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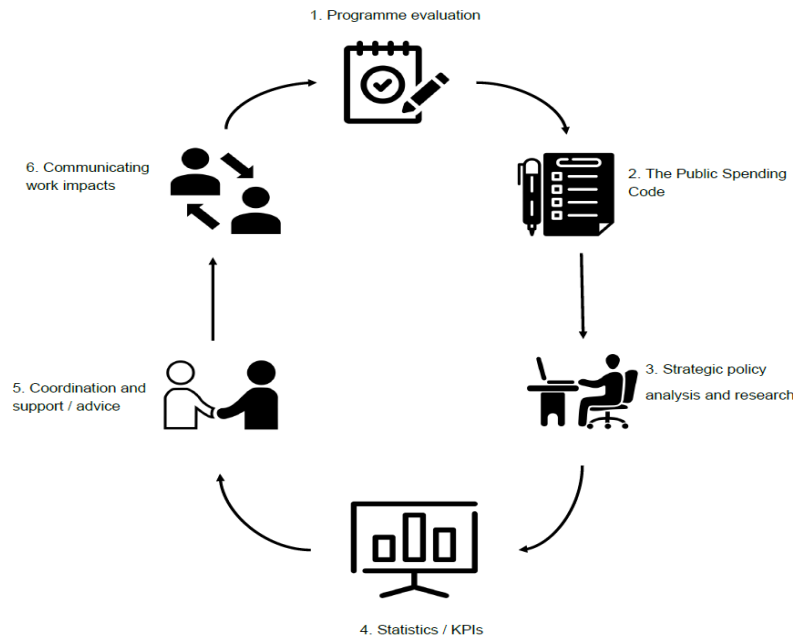
Introduction

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 2022 to 2024.

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.

This strategy is dependent on suitable resourcing and 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. 5. Interdepartmental Coordination and support / advice.
6. Communicating work impacts.



Work completed to date includes:

- Spending Review of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme (2021).
- Focused Policy Assessment of the Senior Alerts Scheme (2021).
- Focused Policy Assessment of the Local Improvement Scheme (2020).
- Quality Assurance Process Report (2020).
- Spending Review of Dublin North East Inner City Initiative (2019).

- Establishing a research agreement with the ESRI. The first output was published in April 2020.
- Establishing an internal Department evaluation sub-group, which meets three times a year.
- Relationship building with Central Statistics Office (CSO) and other external groups. This includes participation at CSO data events such as the data champions group, interdepartmental groups/sub-groups on wellbeing, climate research and modeling, equality budgeting, DCEDIY growing up in Ireland, and IGEES.
- An internal assessment of the level of reviews and research completed by the Department was undertaken, as well as an assessment of the type and format of data collected for DRCD programmes.
- Promotion and development of data enhancements through developing a data identifier's policy, progressing the rollout of data mapping services (ArcGIS) across the Department and completion of geomapping projects e.g. Storymaps.
- Development of a dedicated area on DRCD's external website for published reviews, research and other relevant analysis for improved access and transparency.

1. PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Programme evaluation involves collecting and analysing information to reach conclusions on specific questions after the programme has been implemented. Under guidelines by DPER, Departments are to prepare multi-annual schedules for review.

It is proposed that evaluations of DRCD's programmes will take place as outlined in table 1 below. The ESRI research agreement may also provide opportunities for linkage with this work.

Table 1: Programme areas of evaluation, 2022 – 2024

Programme area	Budget €	Starting period
Programme of libraries supports The Department provides funding towards libraries in Ireland including the My Open Libraries project. The current Library policy ends in 2022. It is proposed that a review be undertaken in a similar format to other reviews, which have been undertaken by the evaluation	€7.7 million in 2021	End-2021

unit. This review may be submitted as part of the requirement to contribute to the annual Spending Review process.		
RRDF 2019 was the first full year of operation of the RRDF. As it runs to 2027, it is appropriate to conduct an initial review during its implementation to ensure the initiative is progressing as intended. It is expected that further reviews will be necessary over the lifetime of the initiative. This review will consider the background, policy context, operation, funding, outputs e.g. case studies, efficiency and outcomes of the initiative, where appropriate/feasible.	Up to €1 billion fund over its lifetime	Early-mid 2022
Programme of volunteering supports Funding for volunteering supports has increased but no scheme review has been conducted to date. However, it should be noted that work is underway by the unit to examine scheme funding. This proposed review will follow the approach used in other DRCD reviews, such as the SAS. This review may be submitted as part of the requirement to contribute to the annual Spending Review process.	€5.5 million in 2021	End-2022
Outdoor Recreation and Infrastructure Scheme A previous assessment on the level of reviews in the Department highlighted that little to none had been undertaken on rural supports schemes. The evaluation unit has undertaken a review of the LIS and TVRS since then. It is proposed that a similar review be undertaken for ORIS. This review may be submitted as part of the requirement to contribute to the annual Spending Review process.	€12 million in 2021	Early-2023

LEADER Programme The LEADER Programme is evaluated as part of the overall review of the RDP, commissioned by DAFM. A review of the 2014-2022 RDP including LEADER will most likely occur in 2023. However, as the evaluation is focussed on the RDP, the evaluation of LEADER is high level. DRCD's evaluation will look to leverage this work and aim to add knowledge / value from the Department's perspective. The review will use existing available data/information on the programme. Feedback from a small number of stakeholders will also be used to inform the review.	€44 million 2021	End-2023
SICAP There have been many reports published on SICAP, which generally focus on the approach to measuring the outcomes of the programme e.g. ESRI research and reviews. The purpose of this review is to complement that work by providing a concise overview of the scheme, following the same structure as other reviews by the evaluation unit, where possible. This review will leverage existing data and reports. Feedback from a small number of stakeholders will inform the review.	€45 million 2021	Early-mid 2024

Figure 1: Timelines for initiation of programme/scheme reviews

	Starting period for work					
	H2 2021	H1 2022	H2 2022	H1 2023	H2 2023	H1 2024
1 Programme of library supports	■					
2 RRDF		■				
3 Programme of volunteering supports			■			
4 ORIS				■		
5 LEADER Programme					■	
6 SICAP						■

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. 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).

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 initially 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. The next outputs envisaged for completion under the agreement are:

- Identification and analysis of indicators for monitoring rural and community development in Ireland.
- Assessment of the data infrastructure held by DRCD for research and policy purposes.

Identification and agreement of other work-streams will also be undertaken by the steering committee in 2022.

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. The evaluation unit will:

- Continue to attend the CSO Data Champions Group to keep informed of public sector data developments.
- Liaise with the CSO regarding approach to geocoding of public sector data as relevant.
- Stay 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).

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.

With the support of our research agreement with the ESRI, we will identify and analyse indicators / KPIs for monitoring rural and community development. This may also have cross over with CSO engagement.

5. INTERDEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION AND SUPPORT / ADVICE

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.

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.

In addition, the unit will continue to represent the Department and contribute to cross-governmental work, as relevant, through various groups including interdepartmental groups on Climate Research and Modelling, Equality Budgeting, Wellbeing, DCEDIY growing up in Ireland, the CSO Data Champions Group and IGEES.

6. COMMUNICATING WORK IMPACTS

For transparency and accountability, reviews and research will continue to be published on DRCD's website. The evaluation unit will continue to work with Department units to progress approaches to communicate the work of the Department through data mapping tools such as ArcGIS Storymaps. 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.