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Corporate report

# Cabinet Office Evaluation Strategy 2023 - 2024

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# Introduction

The Cabinet Office is the centre of government and its strategic headquarters. It coordinates activity across Government, supports the Prime Minister and Cabinet Government and drives efficient delivery of the Government's agenda. It has responsibility for:

- Delivering for the Prime Minister and ensuring the effective running of the Government, including supporting collective Cabinet decision-making;
- Keeping the country and citizens safe, coordinating the crisis response across Government, through the work of the National Security Council and the Joint Intelligence Organisation, enhancing resilience and strengthening the UK's cyber security;
- Saving time and taxpayer money through the work of the central Functions that drive professionalism, and set and support high standards in areas such as data and digital, project delivery, fraud prevention and procurement;
- Ensuring a modern, accessible and accountable Government – which better reflects the country it represents, through reforming how government operates, supporting the levelling up agenda by moving Civil Service roles outside London and the south-east, and being an employer open to all talent; and
- Policy leadership and coordination in specific areas such as ensuring an efficient border, Veterans' affairs and advancing equality of opportunity.

## Evaluation in the Cabinet Office

Evaluations tell us what works and what does not. An evaluation should be a rigorous and structured assessment of a completed or ongoing activity, strategy, intervention, programme or policy that will determine the extent to which it is achieving its objectives and contributing to decision-making (Menon, Karl and Wignaraja, 2009).

The importance of good evaluation is recognised across government. Good quality monitoring and evaluation evidence is important for helping make and communicate decisions about where best to target public spending and demonstrating the value for money. The Cabinet Office evaluates programmes using a combination of:

- Process evaluations, which assess how the policy or programme is being or has been delivered and whether improvements can be made. This is often through collecting and analysing stakeholder perceptions and administrative data. Process evaluations cover questions relating to how the policy or programme worked, for whom, why, and unforeseen effects. In general,

process-related questions are intentionally descriptive and as such we will employ a wide range of data collection and analysis techniques.

- Impact evaluations, which examine the effects an intervention has on specific groups e.g. OGDs, businesses, citizens to look at whether the policy or programme has driven the wider change it set out to achieve. Impact evaluations assess what changes have occurred, what difference the intervention has made and why. They answer questions such as: did it achieve its stated objectives; who did the intervention affect; how did the effects vary across individuals, groups, sectors, geography, and time; what were the intended and unintended outcomes of the intervention. This is investigated through theory-based, experimental, and/or quasi experimental approaches.
- Value for Money evaluations which assess the policy by comparing the benefits of the policy or programme with its costs. Approaches include cost-benefit analysis and cost effectiveness analysis, which incorporate the evidence gathered from impact evaluations and costs of the intervention. They answer questions such as whether the project or programme is an efficient and effective use of resources.

## Vision

The Cabinet Office vision is for proportionate, good quality monitoring and evaluation to be consistently used across the department. To achieve this, we will bring about change to our governance processes and focus on further enhancement of our evaluation capability and assurance processes.

1. Governance: Embed monitoring and evaluation requirements in governance and processes to ensure evaluation is considered at key stages of the policy process.
2. Capability: ensure Cabinet Office analysts and policy makers have access to the necessary expertise and tools to deliver robust and proportionate evaluation.
3. Maintaining standards: ensure standards are in line with best practice and that appropriate assurance is sought.

## Improving our evaluation

This one year evaluation plan for 2023-24 sets out some of the immediate actions we will take in support of our vision for the department. Progress in implementing these changes will then be reviewed and consideration given to further changes.

# Governance

- A Senior Responsible Officer for evaluation in the department will be appointed to oversee the implementation of improvements set out in this strategy, promote the importance of evaluation across the departments, and assess progress. They will also have a role in ensuring that standards in the production and publication of evaluations are maintained, alongside the relevant heads of profession and project SROs within the department.
- All departmental business cases, seeking approval for spend, will include a proportionate evaluation plan or justification for not taking forward an evaluation. In reviewing the submitted cases, the Cabinet Office Approvals Board will consider whether a proportionate approach has been taken and raise any concerns with the project team and Ministers.
- A governance board will be compiled to ensure that all relevant projects have specific and actionable evaluation plans and to monitor progress in delivery of these. The board will examine barriers to effective implementation and consider appropriate resolution.
- A central repository of Cabinet Office evaluations will be created to allow greater tracking of progress. This will complement the Cabinet Office's use of the Evaluation Registry (see below), which will act as a tool for sharing methods used and facilitate greater sharing of learning and insight between Cabinet Office teams; the central record will include each project's Evaluation Registry link for ease of cross-referencing between these systems.
- A list of future commitments for Post Implementation Reviews of Cabinet Office policy will be compiled and maintained. This will be reviewed at regular intervals and plans for evaluation discussed at an early stage.

# Capability

- An evaluation training offer for Cabinet Office analysts and policy makers will be developed. This will be based on the principles set out in the Magenta Book and consider the differing levels of insight required to both practice and commission evaluations. Through the delivery and sign-posting of training, the department will ensure that its staff have the necessary skills to identify opportunities, to deliver best practice, and promote a culture where consideration of evaluation of spend / change is the norm.
- Further guidance on conducting evaluations will be produced and promoted internally on the Cabinet Office intranet. This will include a decision tree to guide project managers towards the appropriate evaluation plan for their project and sign-post appropriate support. A template to assist in the early stages of thinking about benefits monitoring and evaluation planning will also be developed.

- The department will be an active member of the cross-government evaluation group (CGEG) to maximise learning between government departments, share best practice, and grow our network in the evaluation space. [\[footnote 1\]](#)

## Standards

- All CO research and evaluation projects are expected to adhere to the Government Social Research (GSR) Publication Protocol and follow the HMT Green Book and Magenta Book.
- A prioritisation framework will ensure all projects have a proportional evaluation plan and have proportionate sign off. In prioritising evaluation resources, we will give regard to the scale of investment, the potential impact of the evaluation, statutory obligations, the level of uncertainty and risk, and contribution to the evidence base.
- Processes for internal and external peer review will be clarified and promoted to analysts within the department. Further guidance on the commissioning of evaluations will also be issued.

## Updating this strategy

This Strategy sets out changes to our governance processes, enhancement of our evaluation capability and assurance processes. We will report on progress in delivering this strategy at the end of 2024 and publish a revised strategy for the department.

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1. [Information about CGEG \(https://analysisfunction.civilservice.gov.uk/support/the-evaluation-support-team/\)](https://analysisfunction.civilservice.gov.uk/support/the-evaluation-support-team/)

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