

Evaluation in Sciencewise

Sciencewise is the UK's national centre for public dialogue in policy making involving science and technology issues, funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Sciencewise provides co-funding and specialist advice and support to Government departments and agencies to develop, commission and evaluate public dialogue activities in emerging areas of science and technology.

The overall objective for Sciencewise is as follows:

To improve policy making involving science and technology across Government by increasing the effectiveness with which public dialogue is used, and encouraging its wider use where appropriate.

This note summarises why and how evaluation works throughout the Sciencewise programme to help achieve and measure progress against this objective.

1. Why do we evaluate?

Sciencewise evaluates all its activities - all the individual public dialogue projects and the programme overall - for the following reasons:

- Improving the effectiveness of future practice and policy around public dialogue, by developing and sharing knowledge and evidence of 'what works' from project evaluations
- Demonstrating the value of public dialogue to encourage its wider use, by providing evidence of the impacts and benefits
- Increasing the transparency and accountability of the Sciencewise programme, by openly reporting what is being done and what is being achieved
- Improving the effectiveness and impacts of the Sciencewise programme in meeting its overall objective, by measuring progress against agreed metrics of success.

2. How do we evaluate?

In practical terms, evaluations involve collecting, analysing and reporting information. Data may be collected through

various methods including questionnaires, observation and interviews.

Evaluations also include opportunities for individual and collective reflection, to share, test and develop views and conclusions.

The emphasis of the evaluation work in Sciencewise is designed to ensure that we:

- Gather and present objective and robust evidence of the activities, achievements and impacts of the programme overall - covering impacts on policy and on all those involved (including policy makers, government bodies, scientists and other stakeholders, and public participants)
- Draw out and share learning from the evaluations of all Sciencewise public dialogue projects and other programme activities to identify what works well and where changes may be needed in future.

In summary, project and other evaluation activities in Sciencewise are designed to support learning and accountability by developing and sharing practical and useful knowledge.

3. Individual dialogue project evaluations

Every public dialogue project co-funded by Sciencewise is independently evaluated in terms of good practice, impacts and lessons. Around 10% of each project budget is allocated to this. These evaluations are managed by the government bodies running the public dialogue projects. The actual evaluation work is commissioned by those government bodies responsible, and delivered by independent contractors (universities, freelance evaluators and others).

All project evaluation reports and case studies are published on the Sciencewise website.

The six key questions for each public dialogue project evaluation are:

- has the dialogue met its objectives?
- has the dialogue met standards of good practice (Sciencewise principles)?
- have those involved been satisfied with the dialogue (value to them)?
- what difference/impact has the dialogue made?
- what was the balance overall of the costs and benefits of the dialogue?
- what are the lessons for the future (for good practice and more widely)?

4. Sciencewise programme-wide evaluation

Each year (from 2012), the Sciencewise programme overall is evaluated, and an evaluation report published - the first annual report in March 2013. This will build on and update the findings of the first Sciencewise evaluation report published in 2011.

As well as drawing on the findings of the individual project evaluations, this overall evaluation will in future years cover all Sciencewise activities including the project support and guidance provided to government bodies; the website and social media; training and mentoring; the Community of Practice; internal governance and accountability; thought leadership and stakeholder engagement.

The key questions for this programme-wide evaluation are:

- **How is the programme being delivered?**
Factual descriptions of activities, numbers

reached and feedback from stakeholders on quality and value.

- **What difference has the programme made?**
Analysis and evidence of the impacts of the programme to policy, people and organisations; the extent to which the programme has met its objectives; any unexpected outcomes; and what would have been lost without the programme.
- **Have the benefits of the programme justified the costs?**
Not a full economic evaluation, but a basic assessment of costs and benefits including leverage of resources from others as a result of Sciencewise activity, any costs saved as a result of Sciencewise activity, and benefits in terms of outputs (products and activities) and outcomes (results).

To assess the success of the Sciencewise programme in meeting its overall objective, we have identified five critical success factors:

- Positive influence of public dialogue on Government policy and policy making
- Increased quantity and quality of public dialogue projects
- Increased willingness and ability of public bodies to undertake public dialogue
- Increased awareness and understanding of public dialogue by public policy bodies and other stakeholders
- Increased recognition of the value of Sciencewise from key stakeholders.

5. Further information

For more information about Sciencewise evaluations of individual projects, see www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/project-evaluations-2/

For more information on the Sciencewise guiding principles for public dialogue, see <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/guiding-principles/>

For the first full Sciencewise evaluation report, see www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/sciencewise-erc-evaluation/

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