

icarus
enabling positive change

December 2013:
Final evaluation report

Access to Nature

“The evaluation has provided positive challenge through the programme and this has helped to ensure the programme has continued to evolve and improve – there has been no room for complacency.”

Access to Nature team member

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Executive Summary

Access to Nature is a grant programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund and run by Natural England as a Changing Spaces award partner. Natural England works on behalf of a consortium of eleven other major environmental organisations and distributes £28.75 million funding, which aims to bring lasting change to people's awareness of, access to and engagement with the natural environment, particularly those with little or no previous contact with the natural environment. A total of 115 grants have been awarded, ranging from £50,000 to £500,000, including three flagship projects awarded more than £500,000.

This paper is one part of the final round up of the formative evaluation process that has sat alongside the Access to Nature programme across its lifetime. It focuses on programme management, providing a brief overview of the five years of Access to Nature and how the management challenges have varied over that time. The learning has been brought up to date with evidence about the later stages of the programme's management.

This paper has shown how the Access to Nature programme has been managed well and how the evaluation process has been an important management tool. Natural England adopted a new approach to the funder-grantee relationship and it is arguable that the effectiveness of the programme, and the high proportion of spend against budget, demonstrate the success of this in practice.

Moving forward it is the case that there is no Access to Nature successor programme, and Natural England has no programme of a similar scale on the horizon. However, there remains a not insignificant legacy for the organisation.

- There is a skilled and knowledgeable staff team. The skills extend beyond delivering a revenue based grant programme, and to the strategies and approaches that enable people with little or no previous experience of the natural environment to access and enjoy it.
- There is a richer understanding of the outcomes associated with engaging people in natural environment, as evidenced by the projects funded by Access to Nature, including skill development, health and well-being benefits, community cohesion, ambition and employability, learning about and appreciation of the natural environment, local pride etc.
- There is an extensive series of learning products that capture the breadth and depth of the evidence generated by the Access to Nature evaluation process.
- There is a detailed understanding of the contribution that formative evaluation can make to programmes and work streams.
- There is a body of organisations that have a track record of delivering challenging and innovative projects; which are more reflective about their practice and have enhanced skills in evaluation; and are more sustainable as a result.

To exploit and maximise this legacy, there are key steps that Natural England can take.

- Maximising the opportunities that the current political and strategic climate offer in terms of building on the work of Access to Nature.
- Exploring how the partnership approach embodied in Access to Nature can inform on-going work within Natural England following the forthcoming organisational refresh and its increased focus on delivery by and through partners.
- Remaining in a state of readiness to respond to opportunities to instigate new funding programmes, applying the learning from Access to Nature.
- Utilising the expertise that has been developed and particularly the extensive skills of the Access to Nature team to best effect within Natural England.
- Seeking opportunities to implement formative evaluation in other work areas to help build the Natural England evidence base.
- Continuing to respond to the findings from Icarus' evaluation of Access to Nature and Supporting Change and Impact, and to disseminate the learning from its published papers.
- Sharing the learning from Access to Nature both internally within Natural England and more widely.



1 Introduction

1.1 About this paper

This paper is one part of the final round up of the formative evaluation process that has sat alongside the Access to Nature programme across its lifetime. It focuses on programme management, providing a brief overview of the five years of Access to Nature and how the management challenges have varied over that time. In most parts it is a summary paper and more detail about much of its content can be found in the annual Access to Nature evaluation reports and the learning embodied in the Building Good Grant Programmes paper.¹ The learning is however brought up to date in this paper with evidence about the later stages of the programme's management; this was the main focus of the research undertaken by the evaluators Icarus during the autumn of 2013.

There is a partner paper that accompanies this one. It summarises the impact the programme has had for the communities the Access to Nature projects have engaged, as well as the benefits there have been for the natural environment as a result of the programme.²

1.2 About Access to Nature

Access to Nature is a grant programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund and run by Natural England as a Changing Spaces award partner. Natural England works on behalf of a consortium of eleven other major environmental organisations and distributes £28.75 million funding, which aims to bring lasting change to people's awareness of, access to and engagement with the natural environment, particularly those with little or no previous contact with the natural environment.

A total of 115 grants have been awarded, ranging from £50,000 to £500,000, including three flagship projects awarded more than £500,000. The funded projects range from local community based schemes through to national initiatives from large organisations. Diversity in scale is mirrored by a diversity and richness of projects, from equipment to allow people with disabilities to access the natural environment; supporting disadvantaged groups and those who ordinarily face barriers to visiting the countryside; as well as many projects which are providing a range of volunteering and educational opportunities for local communities and young people.

Access to Nature projects must contribute to the programme level outcomes - outcome five and at least one other as a minimum requirement. Targets linked to each outcome emphasise the aspiration to benefit 1.7 million people as a result of the grant programme.

Footnote 1 See: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/8871008>.

Footnote 2 This paper will be published in April 2014 and will be available at: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/8871008>.

| Outcome | Associated targets |
|--|---|
| <p>Outcome 1: A greater diversity and number of people having improved opportunities to experience the natural environment.</p> | <p>Target 1a: At least one million people to have improved opportunities to actively experience and enjoy the natural environment.</p> |
| <p>Outcome 2: More people having opportunities for learning about the natural environment and gaining new skills.</p> | <p>Target 2a: 75,000 people will have a new learning opportunity related to the natural environment by 2014.</p> <p>Target 2b: 50,000 volunteers will have a new opportunity to actively participate in training and development programmes, gaining new skills by 2014.</p> |
| <p>Outcome 3: More people able to enjoy the natural environment through investments in access to natural places and networks between sites.</p> | <p>Target 3a: Investment in access links and associated networks to 130 natural places by 2014.</p> <p>Target 3b: 325,000 people experiencing better links with the natural environment by 2014.</p> |
| <p>Outcome 4: Richer, more sustainably managed, natural places meeting the needs of communities.</p> | <p>Target 4a: Investment in the quality of 100 natural places to better meet the needs of local people and wildlife.</p> <p>Target 4b: 250,000 people benefiting from physical improvements to their local natural environment.</p> <p>Target 4c: 5,000 people regularly participating in the care of these natural places over the lifetime of the programme.</p> |
| <p>Outcome 5: An increase in communities' sense of ownership of local natural places, by establishing strong partnerships between communities, voluntary organisations, local authorities and others.</p> | <p>Target 5a: 100% of projects actively and positively engaging with local communities.</p> |

In addition projects must focus on at least one of the target beneficiary groups.

- People currently under represented in terms of contact with the natural environment, including disabled people, the young, black and ethnic minority communities and older people.
- Communities and individuals experiencing social exclusion through disability, unemployment, age or economic and social disadvantage.
- People disadvantaged by where they live through a lack of accessible natural environments.

In 2012 a further £1.37 million was provided by the Big Lottery Fund for Access to Nature projects in the last 18 months of their funding through Supporting Change and Impact (SCI), meaning that not all projects were eligible to apply. The purpose of this funding was to enable projects to review the way they work and explore ways of becoming more sustainable as reflected in the SCI outcome:

Mechanisms are in place to ensure the benefits of the project will be sustained longer term, after funding from Natural England ends.

52 projects were successful with Supporting Change applications (total funds of £507,222 were awarded) and, of these, 12 were also successful with Supporting Impact applications (total funds of £1,026,373 were awarded).

1.3 The Access to Nature evaluation process

Icarus was appointed in Spring 2009 to develop and implement an evaluation process for the Access to Nature programme. This has been a formative approach to evaluation, where the evaluation has been ongoing and has fed back into management and planning processes to inform the development of the programme as it progressed. As such, it has been a vital management tool because, critically, formative evaluation highlights the key lessons, achievements and issues as they arise, enabling informed decision-making about the programme's future direction to take place.

Evaluation of the Access to Nature programme has been directed and guided by an Evaluation Reference Group, comprising the Access to Nature Evaluation Lead Adviser in the Access Grant Schemes team (Access and Engagement Function) and a representative of Natural England's Evidence team. They have met and communicated regularly with Icarus, and have supported the evaluation process throughout.

The evaluation addresses a series of key questions within an evaluation framework (see Appendix 1) that was developed by Icarus in conjunction with the Evaluation Reference Group. This framework has been applied consistently from the start of the evaluation process and is the principal, guiding document for evidence gathering, analysis and feedback.

The framework has been applied in a number of ways, delivering what has primarily been a supported self-evaluation process. The onus has been on projects to implement the pro forma materials with support provided by Icarus, and to report their findings to Icarus for collation and aggregation. This bank of data sits alongside the evidence generated by Icarus' primary evaluation research activities.

1.4 The research for this paper

The focus of the research undertaken for this paper has been on Access to Nature's programme management. Attention has particularly been paid to what has been happening over the last year of the programme, and the findings have been compared to earlier reporting periods. The data sources for this paper are as follows.

- Structured interviews with the Access to Nature team and Access and Engagement Function colleagues (13 interviews in total).
- Review of the on-line project survey (53 returns).
- Review of the on-line survey for Strategic Working Group members (2 returns).
- Review of existing Access to Nature evaluation reports and products.
- Review of the Quarterly Management Reports and Access to Nature exit strategy.
- Analysis of the completed end of grant reports (that form part of the Natural England contractual requirements).
- Analysis of completed project evaluation reports (produced as part of the self-evaluation process).

2

Evaluation Findings



2 Evaluation findings

2.1 Introduction

This part of the paper focuses on the evaluation findings in relation to programme management. It is split into a number of subject headings.

- The application and assessment process.
- Staffing and capacity.
- Team management and decision-making.
- The Lead Adviser role.
- Monitoring and evaluation.
- The fit with Natural England.

Each one starts with a summary table that includes the following.

- A brief overview of the early evaluation findings (from the first two years of Access to Nature, 2009 and 2010).
- Interim findings (from the period covering years three and four of Access to Nature, 2011 and 2012).
- The recent findings (from the research undertaken in the autumn of 2013).

This is followed by an analysis of those recent findings, plus a series of summative observations. The summative observations are the key points that have currency and prominence at this stage in the programme where there is a full picture of progress over much of its lifetime.

2.2 The application and assessment process

“The portfolio of projects suggests that the application process did do its job. The programme has had a broad set of projects with different organisations and different bodies leading them and a wide spectrum of beneficiaries.”

Access to Nature team member

2.2.1 Applicant and assessment – key features

| Early findings | Interim finding | Recent findings |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good guidance materials available to applicants • Intensive support available to applicants from Lead Advisers • Poor definition / lack of clarity about some of the programme terminology • Lengthy application / assessment process • Evolving interpretation of funding criteria leading to what could be perceived as inconsistency in early grant awards • Too many conditions placed on projects in the grant award • Significant weaknesses in the grant management system | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is possible to see that the two stage process gives opportunity for independent scrutiny within the assessment process • Split of decision-making between Project Board and Independent Grants Panel works well • Support from Lead Advisers to applicants commended • Changes to the points threshold made due to increased demand • More consistency in decision-making noted • No scope to reject poor quality applications at Stage 1 identified as a weakness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little flexibility from the Big Lottery Fund to transfer the process learning to SCI • Where possible, learning was applied to the design of SCI |

2.2.2 Application and assessment – recent findings

It was the case that the Big Lottery Fund was very directive about how SCI should be implemented. With a tight turnaround for the submission from Natural England, and strict eligibility criteria imposed by the Big Lottery Fund, the team was prevented from maximising the application of their learning from Access to Nature when designing SCI. Team members found it difficult to reconcile knowledge of what the Big Lottery Fund required with their experience of what works best:

“There is a message for the Big Lottery Fund here – if you use award partners, then afford them some flexibility in how they develop the application process.”

Access to Nature team member.

Nevertheless it is felt that some learning was transferred to SCI.

- The process was generally less convoluted and more 'stripped down'.
- There was an attempt to keep the guidance as simple as possible.
- The awarding process was quicker because organisations were not asked to supply more information after the panel had considered their application.
- Panel members were not expected to read too much paper work.
- The monitoring and evaluation requirements were explicit and embedded from the outset.
- The burden of financial reporting was reduced as the need to evidence spend under £100 was removed for projects deemed to be low risk.

2.2.3 Application and assessment – summative observations

- There was some degree of dislocation at the outset of the programme in the design of the application and assessment process. For example, the format of the application form was confused and repetitive in place, and terminology had not been clearly defined.
- The two stage application process has generally been regarded as successful, but with the potential for some improvement. It has been suggested that Stage 1 should have included a quality check to ensure poorly developed or weak schemes did not progress to assessment; and that there should be less duplication of information between the two stages. At Stage 2 it should not have been an option to provide additional information; the form should have been framed in a way that secured all the information necessary for a reasoned assessment of what was being proposed.
- Resources were committed to supporting applicants effectively, both in terms of written guidance and the allocation of a dedicated Lead Adviser.
- It is beneficial to have some separation between the tasks of supporting and advising applicants, and the assessment process. In the case of Access to Nature the Project Board and Independent Grant Panel added objectivity, rigour and independence to the decision-making process. Apart from some very early concerns about the consistency of the decisions reached, this approach has been regarded as wholly successful.
- Now in a position to have a good overview of the programme, team members by and large believe that Access to Nature achieved what it set out to do in terms of supporting a broad spectrum of projects that worked with a wide range of beneficiaries. However there remain some concerns from a handful of Lead Advisers that their region fared less well than others and / or that the reach within their region did not sufficiently reflect the targeting plan. Views have also been expressed by some that the process disadvantaged smaller / inexperienced applicant organisations, and that there was insufficient scope or desire to support riskier projects.

2.3 Staffing and capacity

“This is one of the nicest jobs in Natural England.... because of the team we work in, the contact with projects and the sense that we are involved in doing something good...it is one of the best teams you could possibly work in.”

Access to nature team member

2.3.1 Staffing and capacity – key features

| Early findings | Interim findings | Recent findings |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High levels of commitment and motivation from team members • Capacity issues at times, particularly during peaks in the application process • Short-term responses to capacity issues that create confusion about and overlap between roles • Issues regarding differing skill sets for grant assessment and grant management noted | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearer staffing structure developed over time • National portfolio roles clarified and no longer additional to other delivery functions • Team gaining considerable grant management skills • Less resource available as team capacity has shrunk overall • Ongoing capacity issues at peak times (e.g. SCI roll out) • Under estimation of the time required for grant management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team membership continues to remain stable with little change until final stages of programme • Exit strategy includes retention of team until the end of the programme • Balance successfully achieved between (naturally) reducing team size and projects ending |

2.3.2 Staffing and capacity – recent findings

Team membership has continued to remain stable with little change until the final stages of the programme, when some team members have been attracted by other job opportunities within the organisation. This is a considerable strength of the programme and reflects the commitment and motivation of the team to provide a ‘gold standard’ level of service to projects. This has been unwavering and it is something that has been consistently noted and valued by projects. The size of team that now exists is commensurate with the current level of work as projects draw to a close.

This is clearly a team in transition. The programme is drawing to a close and projects are ending at the same time that Natural England is facing a further re-organisation with future roles and jobs uncertain beyond 31st March 2014. The temptation exists for the organisation to start the process of disbanding the team and moving people into new, interim roles. However a good overview of the ongoing work commitments of the team, and of the pattern of project end dates, has allowed the team leader to argue the case for keeping the team intact, while offering any 'spare' capacity to others in the Access and Engagement Function. This is coupled with the need to ensure Natural England delivers its contractual obligations to the Big Lottery Fund, requiring the retention of an experienced and knowledgeable core team. This is universally regarded across the team as critically important. It is felt that there is a continuing need to retain the approach to a 'single point of contact' that has existed throughout Access to Nature during what is often a complex process of project close downs.

2.3.3 Staffing and capacity – summative observations

- A national team comprising regionally based Lead Advisers with good, local knowledge has provided an effective way of managing and delivering Access to Nature, with consistent line management and a clear and cohesive structure for decision-making.
- Dedicated staff taking key roles on a programme-wide basis (post re-organisation) has proved successful – these roles are financial management, communications and evaluation.
- There has been a considerable degree of skill development among team members in (revenue) grant management, engaging beneficiary groups, and formative evaluation.
- Input from the Evidence team has proved beneficial in providing independence, oversight and expertise to the evaluation process.
- Stability in team membership has helped maintain a high level of service to projects, and has given confidence to the Big Lottery Fund that the investment they have made will not be compromised as the programme approaches the end of its life cycle.
- Retaining the Access to Nature team to the end of programme delivery has ensured that Lead Advisers can, where possible, maintain a consistent relationship with projects ensuring minimal disruption.

2.4 Team management and decision-making

2.4.1 Team management and decision-making – key features

| Early findings | Interim findings | Recent findings |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong commitment from Steering Group and Project Board • Regional structure creates multiple lines of management to region and national team leadership • Protracted and confused decision-making; lack of clarity about who makes what decision • Lack of leadership / champion for Access to Nature within Natural England | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team re-structure creates more clarity, despite less capacity and little investment in knowledge transfer • Quicker, more effective decision-making results • Effective team communications, including ongoing commitment to face to face meetings • Good team leadership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent team leader • Clear protocols and spend management, resulting in low predicted under spend overall • Effective management of the close down period • Growing interest in Access to Nature at senior level, but generally viewed as too little, too late • Perception from team members of little on-going engagement by strategic partners |

2.4.2 Team management and decision-making – recent findings

Access to Nature team members have described the team leader as “*excellent*” and “*the right person for the job*”. The manager has maintained high expectations of the team, she has secured their trust and admiration, and motivated them to continue working at a high standard:

“She is a pro-active manager and has made a big contribution to team cohesion.”

Access to Nature team member.

A key task of the team leader has been to ensure effective management of project spend since the Big Lottery Fund identified Access to Nature as high risk due to the degree of predicted under spend in 2011. A strict regime of financial monitoring was placed on the team by the new team leader, with clear protocols and systems, and the result is a final underspend likely to be in the region of just £100,000, a remarkably low figure for a grant programme of this scale.

This level of leadership is also a feature of the way in which the programme close down is being managed to best reconcile programme and project needs with wider organisational demands, and gives a clear structure to everyone affected. The team has been retained until March 2014 in order to minimise the disruption to the delivery in the final stages of Access to Nature and preserve a high level of customer service. This has required careful planning and monitoring to anticipate changes in workloads across the team and ensure that any extra capacity is utilised by Access to Nature or other parts of Natural England.

Active promotion of Access to Nature has also been important in the final stages of the programme. There is a strong sense that the team leader is working hard to promote and champion Access to Nature internally with the support of the communications lead and the rest of the team:

“She is tireless in her support and promotion of the programme.”

Access to Nature team member

This has all been achieved despite significantly reduced capacity within team management, with five posts condensed into the current, single team leader position. As a result, the degree of engagement and interest displayed by the team leader has been a critical factor. Had the team leader been less committed to the programme, or struggled with the volume of work, then the outcomes for the team might have been a lot less evident.

While team members at the national level do see some positive steps in terms of senior level interest in Access to Nature, other colleagues are very sceptical about the extent to which there is any real internal interest or ‘buy in’ to the programme and its work. There is a great sense of disappointment about this, reinforced recently when Access to Nature was omitted from an Intranet article about the work of the Function. This has been a consistent issue for Access to Nature across its lifetime, exacerbated in the past by the (inappropriate) Functions within which the programme sat.

There is also little in the way of evidence around the recent engagement of Access to Nature’s strategic partners. The majority of team members have little in the way of understanding about the ongoing role of strategic partners:

“I am not aware how instrumental partners have been in guiding Access to Nature more recently.”

Access to Nature team member

2.4.3 Team management and decision-making – summative observations

- The team's move into the Access and Engagement Function (from Customer Services and National Programme Delivery) has been a positive step for Access to Nature. There is a more obvious link between the team's work and that of others in the Function than previously, where the programme was somewhat 'hidden'.
- An appropriate / fit for purpose team structure, with clear lines of reporting and decision-making, has been central to the successful and effective management of this large scale programme. This has emerged in the last three years of Access to Nature, since the move from regional to national line management, the appointment of the new team leader and dedicated staff in other key, programme-wide roles. However this has been reliant upon the energy and commitment of the team leader in post and may have been less successful in other circumstances, particularly given the large workload for that individual (with five posts condensed into one).
- Sound management has helped create a motivated, committed and cohesive staff team. This has been characterised by regular, structured communication across the team; effective delegation of tasks and responsibilities; and an accessible team leader who is willing to listen, acknowledge issues and be pro-active in enabling their resolution.
- Despite a concerted effort to champion Access to Nature internally within Natural England, there has remained a sense of dislocation, and of sitting on the margins of core delivery, throughout the programme's life. The minimal level of senior level interest in Access to Nature across Natural England has been a recurrent theme and it has been suggested that this has been exacerbated by the organisation's 'silo' approach that provides little opportunity for the cross fertilisation of ideas and the sharing of learning between different work areas.

2.5 The Lead Adviser role

“The Lead Adviser was supportive, giving constructive help and understanding about the demands of the project; he was approachable and always gave practical solutions to problems the project had.”

Access to Nature project

2.5.1 The Lead Adviser role – key features

| Early findings | Interim findings | Recent findings |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to the Lead Adviser structure / regional contact for projects • Commitment to supporting projects in a resource intensive way through the Lead Advisers • Understanding of the issues around managing risk versus trusting projects, through grant management processes that would be acceptable to Big Lottery Fund and to Natural England | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing commitment to providing intensive support to projects • Lead Advisers recognised by most projects as making a valuable contribution • Projects welcome single point of contact for queries • Different approaches adopted by team members: some more hands off / some micro management in places • Lead Advisers demonstrate flexibility and adaptability as they take on programme management roles through the implementation of SCI | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing commitment to dedicated Lead Adviser support for projects • Very positive final feedback from projects about the Lead Adviser support they have received • Potential exists for the close relationship between Lead Advisers and projects to compromise their ability to challenge • The lack of a formal cross team quality assurance process has been identified • Important role for Lead Advisers during project shut down, particularly where project staff have left |

2.5.2 The Lead Adviser role – recent findings

The Access to Nature team leader has successfully lobbied for the team to remain in place until the end of programme delivery in March 2014, and for the financial and evaluation leads to stay until September 2014. Given the current organisational refresh she felt it was important to avoid unsettling the team more than is necessary.

This kind of dedicated support from Lead Advisers has been a consistent and prominent feature of Access to Nature, and has been valued by projects. In the recent on-line survey 100% of projects rated the quality of advice and support from their Lead Adviser/s as very good or good.³ The following lists some of the many references in the survey to the benefits that projects have derived from the support of their Lead Adviser.

- Links to what is happening in Natural England.
- Networking opportunities with other projects.
- Prompt and clear responses to requests for information or advice.
- Assistance in dealing with unexpected staffing issues.
- Advice about financial claims and re-profiling.
- Support in responding to practical challenges.
- Support with evaluation.

The comments below are typical of many that were made by projects:

“[The Lead Adviser] was helpful and supportive with salient advice that ensured we remained within the funding regulations and achieved all our targets.”

“The Lead Adviser has been a great sounding board, offering pragmatic advice and generally being a great person to access and chat to about the project.”

“...our current Lead Adviser has been excellent, giving very clear messages, responses and support which is exactly what you need when running a big partnership project.”

Footnote 3 Project on-line survey, November 2013.

However this close working relationships does also have pitfalls. For example, some Lead Advisers have found it uncomfortable to apply rigour with their projects and to challenge them when necessary.

Lead Advisers do have different working styles, and are 'hands on' with their projects to varying degrees. While this has not been problematic in any obvious way, there is potential for difficulties to arise. The fact that there is no formal quality assurance process in place to ensure everyone is following procedures correctly, means it is possible for there to be a lack of consistency in overall approach. It would usually be good practice for a programme of this scale to have someone in place that has the responsibility to quality assure procedures internally, to ensure consistency across the team.

It could be assumed that a declining number of projects result in a similarly diminishing workload. It is the case though that there is a lot of work involved in a project close down, for project and Lead Adviser alike. In some instances, where project officers have moved on before their project end, the Lead Adviser is the remaining person with a detailed knowledge of the project. As a result they play a key role in supporting the host organisation with the completion of their final Access to Nature paper work. This is happening at a time when some team members have chosen to secure new posts, leaving smaller overall capacity, and requiring a periodic re-shuffling of workloads.

2.5.3 The Lead Adviser role – summative observations

- The investment in the Lead Adviser role has been significant and un-wavering. It has allowed Lead Advisers to work closely with a dedicated portfolio of projects, providing advice, support and guidance that in many cases lasted for the entire lifetime of projects.
- The regional location and coverage of Lead Advisers has ensured a good understanding of the context in which their projects have operated, and has been beneficial in allowing face-to-face meetings to take place where necessary (particularly, for example, where problems have arisen in projects).
- The good working relationship between Lead Advisers and projects has generally created a climate where projects have felt comfortable raising issues and problems at an early stage. The evidence suggests this has avoided problems escalating into insurmountable / very difficult issues. However there are instances where this closeness has created difficulties, with Lead Advisers uncomfortable with the notion of challenging their projects.
- The detailed project knowledge acquired by Lead Advisers has given them sufficient understanding and background information to be confident in assessing project requests for variations and re-profiling. This has resulted in a degree of flexibility that is valued by projects:

“He has been flexible about new ideas as the project has progressed, he has always been available to give advice and is very quick in his responses to any communication. This has allowed the project to move in an organic direction, as we have learned about the project through evaluation we have been able to make adjustments to our practice to best engage the children we have been working with.”

“Our Lead Advisers have given us flexibility to financially re-shape and re-structure the project on a couple of occasions.”

Access to Nature projects

- Detailed project knowledge has meant that Lead Advisers have been in a position to work alongside projects to ensure maximum spend within their allocated budget. As a result it is anticipated there will be minimal programme-wide underspend.
- Throughout the lifetime of Access to Nature, the Lead Advisers have been commended on their commitment to the programme and the high quality of their work with projects. They are described as approachable, supportive and accessible in equal measure, and their timely response to queries has been noted by projects:

“She has always offered advice which is honest and understandable.”

Access to Nature project

2.6 Monitoring and evaluation

“It can be easy to let evaluation slip but having to self evaluate has made the project very reflective throughout instead of just at the end. We have been more aware and have adapted the project as we go because of this.”

Access to Nature project

2.6.1 Monitoring and evaluating – key features

| Early findings | Interim findings | Recent finding |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant management system not fit for purpose • Data collected but not collated, analysed nor used • Confusion over target reporting • Lack of early guidance from Natural England to applicants about evaluation requirements • Uncertainty about the processes / sanctions for poor reporting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good engagement with Icarus evaluation process by team and projects • Reporting requirements generally regarded as satisfactory by projects • Overly detailed financial monitoring questioned by some projects • Target recording system confusing and unclear in places • Lack of clarity about how the monitoring and evaluation evidence is used by Natural England and the Big Lottery Fund | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in projects’ financial monitoring burden by removing need for production of evidence against spend under £100 • Continuing engagement with monitoring and reporting by projects |

2.6.2 Monitoring and evaluation – recent findings

The requirement for projects to evidence every item of expenditure below £100 has been removed, lessening the reporting burden as a result. This has a knock on impact for Lead Advisers, similarly reducing the time it takes for them to check and verify claims. Any further relaxing of financial reporting systems has not been possible however because of the accountability requirements set by the Big Lottery Fund.

There has been a positive and ongoing engagement from projects in the evaluation process and many used their evaluation findings to evidence their Supporting Change and Impact bids. Only a very small number have failed to produce an evaluation report.

The quality of final evaluation reports has been largely good, and consistent with the quality of interim reports. However difficulties can occur – and the quality diminishes – when project staff leave before the report has been drafted. Others in the host organisation are charged with the task of completing an evaluation report for a project with which they may have had minimal day-to-day involvement, and this can be reflected in the quality of the evaluation reports they generate.

2.6.3 Monitoring and evaluation – summative observations

- The grant management system absorbed a lot of time at the beginning of the programme but was ultimately abandoned as it proved not to be fit for purpose. As a result there was a lost investment in terms of both payment for the system, and staff time. The replacement multiple and dispersed spread sheets for financial and target monitoring have had their own problems. These include the number of people across the team accessing the same files; the need to update various different spreadsheets rather than inputting all of the information in one place; and the necessity of manually implemented reminders.
- With very few exceptions, Access to Nature projects have been satisfied with the quantity of the monitoring and evaluation requirements; there is a dominant view that they have been proportionate for the amount of grant received. There is no pattern among those that have not engaged effectively with the reporting requirements. For example, for every small organisation that says the requirement was too much, there is another that will say how beneficial they found the monitoring and evaluation.
- There are big differences in the amount of detail included by projects in their quarterly monitoring reports, as well as in the quality of their reporting. The bottom line was that the Lead Advisers needed to see evidence of activity that justified the accompanying claim, but what that meant in terms of level of detail was not spelt out and was therefore open to interpretation:

“Some have habitually included a lot of information, others only minimal feedback.”

Access to Nature team member

- With no previous experience in this area, the Access to Nature team found it difficult to create a comprehensive and usable format for beneficiary reporting. The result is that there have been continual issues around the reporting of beneficiary data. The potential has existed for a lot of overlap across different outcomes and activities, and the question of repeat visits and double counting was never fully resolved. The failure to specifically capture data about repeat visits was an omission, as this is critical to the question of sustainability and legacy for Access to Nature. In general, the team recognises that the target data supplied by many projects is problematic. Data can be largely based on guesstimates due to difficulties encountered in collection or ineffective systems; or it might not be recorded accurately because of the complexity of the monitoring report format.

“Output measures could have been simpler especially when linking to reporting forms.”

Access to Nature project

“The split between beneficiary groups, targets and outcomes was too complex. The consortium provided the framework for targets/ beneficiary groups without really appreciating what it would mean in practice to capture and track this information.”

Access to Nature team member

- The evaluation was not a mandatory, contractual requirement for Access to Nature projects. While it was always intended that the evaluation would be fully embedded in the programme, incorporating it as a requirement within the grant agreement was overlooked. As a result a small number of projects have consistently argued that they had not allocated sufficient staff resource for evaluation at the outset.
- Projects and team members have overwhelmingly welcomed the formative nature of the Access to Nature evaluation. The opportunity to review practice across the lifetime of projects and the programme alike has provided a changing picture of progress, and helped inform changes to delivery and management as required.

“With so much happening through the project, the self-evaluation process was helpful to review success that might otherwise be overlooked. The formal reporting system was also useful to flag up potential issues / concerns to senior managers and to the Lead Adviser.”

“The evaluation helped us to see where the gaps were in the project and which elements of the projects had been particularly successful allowing us to continue the work in a focused direction.”

Access to Nature projects

A number of factors have contributed to the high level and quality of (the non mandatory) engagement by projects with the evaluation process, including: the evaluation briefing workshop and supporting materials provided by Icarus; a common evaluation framework and evaluation process; the evaluation support available from Icarus and the Lead Advisers; and the evaluation report feedback from Icarus. Indeed, 98% of projects state that the level of support they have received on evaluation overall has been sufficient:⁴

“Good initial guidance about evaluating a project....will also be of benefit for future projects.”

Access to nature project

- More support could have been provided at the point of ‘signing off’ projects’ individual evaluation action plans at the outset. Due to the limited amount of direct support Icarus could offer, their role was limited to taking note of the action plans that were completed. It would have been beneficial for projects to have more input at this stage, particularly in terms of helping with the selection of fit for purpose evaluation methods and ensuring sufficient resources had been allocated for the evaluation:

“More critique of what is feasible in practice would have been helpful – we went in a bit blind and it therefore wasn’t as strong as expected.”

Access to Nature project

“For future programmes I’d spend more time getting the evaluation action plans right at the start... more time was needed to get this right.”

Access to Nature team member

- The Access to Nature evaluation has demonstrated how a primarily self-evaluation process can elicit valuable and robust evidence, both for internal and programme-wide purposes. A significant majority of projects have undertaken their evaluation activity themselves, often using minimal resources; only a handful have employed external evaluators. The quality and quantity of evaluation data generated has however been high, and at a level of detail that a summative, external evaluation could not have hoped to achieve. As a result it has been possible to provide a picture of Access to Nature’s progress across its lifetime, with a robust evidence base of qualitative and quantitative data.
- The way in which Icarus designed the evaluation process has resulted in significant added value for projects. This has included: building evaluation knowledge and skills within the project team; building evaluation knowledge and skills within the host organisation; influencing future developments in the organisation as a whole; and providing evidence to

Footnote 4 Project on-line survey, November 2013.

support future / other funding opportunities.⁵ Individual projects have also noted other unplanned benefits from the evaluation process, for example:

“organising plans for future projects”; “gaining feedback as a partnership to understand how we best work together and can move forward once our project finishes”; “[collecting] evidence that we have used to lever in additional funding.”

Access to Nature projects

- The Access to Nature team has been interested in and committed to the evaluation process throughout. While some were initially sceptical, the evidence suggests that any early doubts were quickly replaced by an enthusiasm for the evaluation. As a result Natural England has a number of staff members who will continue to advocate for well-formulated evaluation processes, and for formative evaluation in particular. The legacy for Natural England, in terms of the evaluation skills and expertise that Access to Nature team members have acquired over the programme’s lifetime, is considerable.

“The evaluation has worked exceptionally well and has been very rewarding for the team. The training at the beginning was very important – it sold evaluation to the projects and also built the understanding of the Lead Advisers. The interim evaluation reports have been very informative and there is a sense that the projects have bought into the approach because they can see the value of it.”

Access to Nature team member

- The evaluation contractors, Icarus, have worked alongside the Access to Nature team throughout the programme. Their emphasis has been on ensuring the self-evaluation process was designed in way that was easy to use and would generate robust data; undertaking systematic primary evaluation activities; acting as ‘critical friend’ to Natural England and the programme staff; and ensuring that capacity around evaluation was built in both projects and the programme alike. The evaluation products drafted by Icarus have been designed to be audience appropriate in both style and content, with the intent of disseminating learning from Access to Nature as widely as possible.
- Despite its Learning Strategy, the Big Lottery Fund has not taken any significant interest in the material generated by the Access to Nature evaluation. This is disappointing given the amount of evidence that has been created about this area of work, as well as the learning about implementing a robust and formative self-evaluation process.

Footnote 5 Over 70% of projects stated that the evaluation process was beneficial in each of these areas; project on-line survey, November 2013.

2.7 The fit with Natural England

“An internal fit will best be achieved by embedding Access to Nature learning into the rest of Natural England business.”

Access to Nature team member

2.7.1 The fit with Natural England – key features

| Early findings | Interim findings | Recent findings |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor internal fit and relationships • Little evidence of learning from Access to Nature being shared widely • Lack of high level managerial interest in or commitment to Access to Nature • Ad hoc internal requests for (hard to source) information / evidence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several changes of overarching Natural England team / function • Good final placement within Access and Engagement Function • Clear links to Natural England strategic objectives • Growing interest in learning from the Access to Nature experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not as much integration into Access and Engagement Function as had been hoped • Learning from Access to Nature used internally to inform Outdoors for All and Paths for Communities • Learning materials have a growing following, particularly the themed Learning Papers • Uncertainty about how the learning from Access to Nature can be applied in the proposed new structure |

2.7.2 The fit with Natural England – recent findings

While there is good crossover between Access to Nature and other work areas in the Access and Engagement Function, there is a sense that the relationship between the two is not as well developed as it could be. This could be due to the fact that Access to Nature is a new addition to what was already a large function, and had it been in Access and Engagement from the outset the picture could have been very different. It is also the case that, despite cross team working being a recommended Natural England behaviour, the potential for ‘silos’ working is in fact enhanced by the prevailing organisational structure.

The question has also been posed about whether the fact that the Big Lottery Fund funds Access to Nature has been an obstacle in terms of securing a natural fit and advocacy within Natural England. It has been argued that since the majority of Natural England’s work is funded by Defra, and given the importance of Defra with regard to its future direction, anything supported by another source may quite naturally be seen as peripheral.

It is encouraging that advice has been sought from Access to Nature by the Outdoors for All team and from Paths for Communities. For example, Paths for Communities adopted elements of the Access to Nature application process: they cast the net wide through partners for applications; Grant Officers were provided to support projects through the application process; and the Grants Officers attended the Grants Panel and spoke about the individual applications. However these kinds of linkages appear to be most prominent where they involve staff members who have had a previous connection with Access to Nature.

Colleagues in Natural England have largely welcomed the Access to Nature Learning Papers enthusiastically. Together with the more formal evaluation materials, they comprise an important record of the learning from the programme, and form a body of evidence that, it is argued, does not exist for other programmes. However there is no certainty among team members that this documentation will inform others’ learning, as there is a prevailing perception that this kind of work is of declining importance within Natural England, as is direct project delivery.

2.7.3 The fit with Natural England – summative observations

- In theory there has been an excellent fit between Access to Nature and Natural England strategy, as reflected in the statutory purposes: *“securing the provision and improvement of facilities for the study, understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment”*; *“promoting access to the countryside and open spaces and encouraging open-air recreation”*; and *“contributing in other ways to social and economic well-being through management of the natural environment”*.⁶ There is also an underpinning principle in Natural England to *“add value to the hard work of others, and secondly enable new partnerships to address local and national challenges – always endeavouring to build the capacity of local communities and society to act”*.⁷ Furthermore, one of the organisation’s four outcomes relates to inspiring people to value and conserve the

Footnote 6 Natural England (2012); *Corporate Plan 2012-2015*. UK: Natural England

Footnote 7 HM Government (2011); *The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature*. UK: Defra

natural environment. What all of this provides is a strategic and policy framework from Natural England within which Access to Nature has had a clear place. It is a framework that embodies the Access to Nature ethos, outcomes and practice and that demonstrates its rightful place within Natural England. Sitting in the organisation's Access and Engagement Function there has been significant potential to influence practice broadly across these kinds of activities, both internally and with partners, and particularly given the structured evaluation and learning process that has run alongside Access to Nature, and SCI, since their inception.

- Despite the apparent high degree of fit with its strategic goals, there has been a dislocation of varying degrees between Access to Nature and Natural England throughout the programme's lifetime. A number of factors appear to have played a part in this, and it is possibly the case that a time limited programme, with its own strong identity, and a more 'out of the ordinary' funding source, will always be seen as somewhat separate to core business.
- It has been disappointing for the team that there has been a relatively low level of interest from colleagues in their work, and in the impact of Access to Nature. The Access to Nature team has shown a high degree of commitment to the programme and has expressed frustration that there appears to be little interest from beyond their team in what it has achieved.
- The materials produced via the Access to Nature evaluation process (themed Learning Papers, annual evaluation reports, Building Good Grant Programmes paper, SCI review, and a legacy review) ensure that the programme leaves a solid legacy in terms of learning about managing and delivering a programme of this scale, and about engaging non-traditional audiences with the natural environment.

3

Conclusion



3 Conclusion

3.1 Learning from experience

“The evaluation has provided positive challenge through the programme and this has helped to ensure the programme has continued to evolve and improve – there has been no room for complacency.”

Access to Nature team member

A key benefit of the formative evaluation of Access to Nature has been its role in capturing evidence on an on-going basis, delivering programme management recommendations to Natural England at a minimum of annual intervals, and facilitating an internal process of review and action planning. Writing a summary paper such as this can therefore be done in a meaningful way; the evidence has been collected in real time as the programme has progressed, and is far removed from the kind of snapshot memory of a programme that summative evaluation generates. With summative evaluation it is easy to forget the struggles and challenges faced in a programme set up phase, and indeed its successes; formative evaluation captures this data at the time it is happening and ensures the learning is not over looked or forgotten.

In this paper it has therefore been possible to look back over almost five years of Access to Nature and consider again the progress of programme management over that period, updated with findings from research undertaken by Icarus in October 2013. The result is a summary paper that describes Access to Nature’s programme management under a series of headings and across time. Importantly, it also highlights a series of summative observations. This is the key learning about programme management, specifically those aspects that retain some currency at this stage in the programme, and are likely to require consideration in the design of future programmes.

If a key task of formative evaluation is to review progress over time, then it is important to reflect on the degree to which this has had an on-going impact upon and has informed Access to Nature programme management. This paper has clearly shown how programme management has evolved, and how there have been different challenges and successes at different stages in the programme’s lifetime. But, to what extent has the team been able to respond to the evaluation findings and recommendations, and make changes accordingly?

Where changes have taken place the evidence suggests that these happened partly by default and partly by design. For instance, the re-organisation of Natural England in 2010, and the change from a regional structure to a national team, was an organisation wide shift that happened to address some of the early challenges the programme was facing in terms of accountability and line management. In contrast there are other examples where changes were made or practices were continued as a direct result of learning identified by Icarus about how the programme was functioning.

- Separating the grant assessment and grant management functions.
- Refreshing all projects' stated outcomes to ensure they were SMART⁸ and then aligning them with the programme outcomes.
- Adding a post reporting telephone call to projects by Lead Advisers, providing the opportunity to clarify any aspects of the quarterly monitoring report, as necessary.
- Reviewing the evaluation reporting by Icarus to produce materials relevant to different audiences.
- Introducing a system of reviewing projects' evaluation reports, providing detailed feedback to help them build evaluation capacity and improve their reporting to Natural England.
- Reducing the financial reporting requirements.
- Retaining the Lead Adviser 'one point of contact' model through periods of change and re-organisation as a direct result of the consistent feedback on the success of this approach.

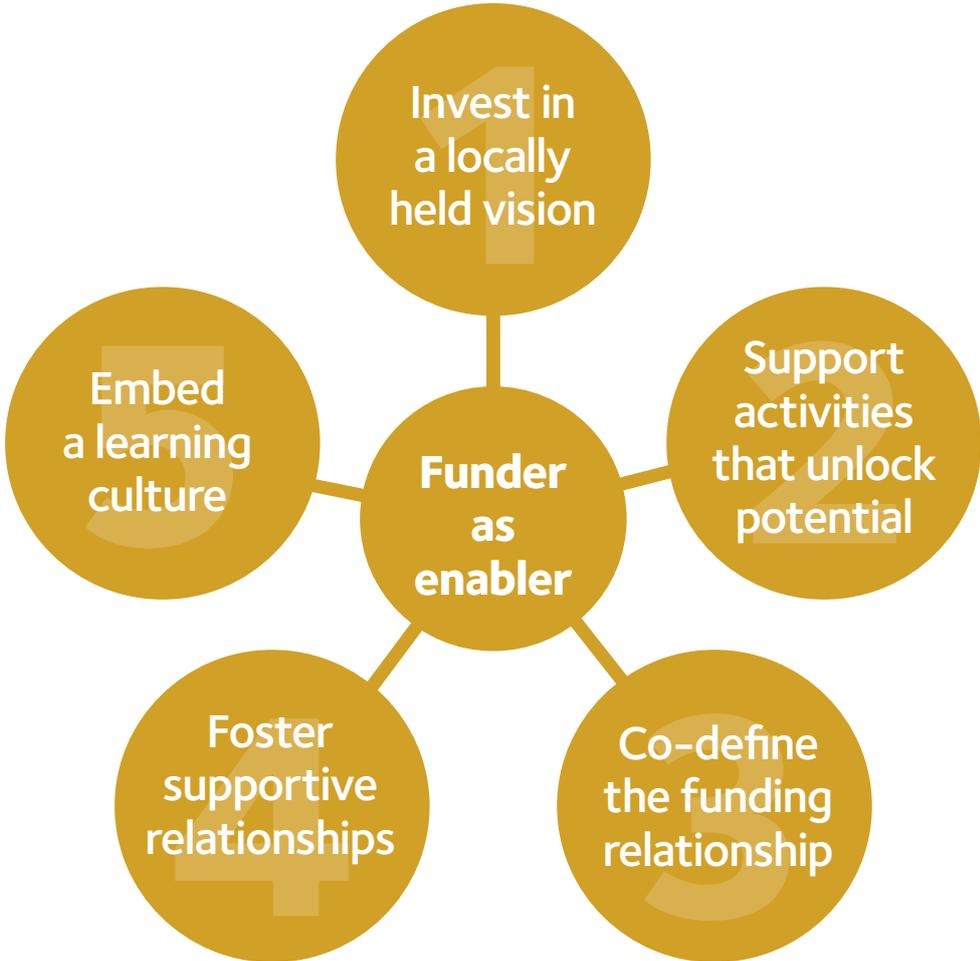
What this clearly demonstrates is the degree to which formative evaluation has been an important tool; it has provided the opportunity for the programme to adjust its management and practice at regular and timely intervals. Access to Nature has embraced the learning from the evaluation process. It has responded to the recommendations where it has been possible to do so given the organisational constraints that have inevitably existed, and the requirements of the Big Lottery Fund.

As a result the evidence suggests that this has been a well-managed programme, particularly in the second half of its life following internal re-organisation and a new team leader in post. There have been robust systems and protocols in place, and team members have been committed to providing high quality support to projects to improve both project management and delivery, and their reporting.

Footnote 8 SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timebased.

3.2 Funder as enabler

It is useful at this point to place Access to Nature within a broader context of grant programmes, and the degree to which it reflected practice elsewhere. While this was not a question uppermost in the programme designers' minds, it is possible to see with the benefit of hindsight, that the role that Natural England has taken with regard to Access to Nature is aligned with the concept of 'Funder as Enabler' to a significant degree.⁹



Footnote 9 This is a concept that Icarus has developed with Nesta as Learning Partner in their Neighbourhood Challenge programme. More information can be accessed at http://www.nesta.org.uk/areas_of_work/public_services_lab/past_projects_public_services_lab/neighbourhood_challenge/assets/features/neighbourhood_challenge_learning_paper

This is a set of ideas about how the funder shifts its role from that of provider to enabler in order to mobilise local assets and enable locally led change to take place. It is possible to assess how the five characteristics of the funder as enabler have been embodied in Access to Nature.

| An enabling funder... | Match with Access to Nature ... | Features of Access to Nature ... |
|--|---------------------------------|---|
| Invests in people with a strong, locally held vision for change | Medium | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported projects that worked directly with local people • Outcome 5 strove to embed the work and create local ownership |
| Support activities that unlock potential | Medium | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project targeted beneficiary groups that had little or no previous experience of the natural environment • Outcome 5 required projects to work with beneficiary groups to build confidence and skills in order to increase on-going involvement with the natural environment and local ownership of green spaces |
| Co-defines the funding relationship | High | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects had a degree of freedom to experiment, reflect and adapt |
| Fosters supportive relationships | High | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and challenge increased capacity to act, to take risks, and to innovate • Lead Advisers developed good, supportive relationships with projects, acting as 'critical friend' |
| Embeds a learning culture | High | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formative evaluation of the programme and self-evaluation by projects provided an opportunity to learn openly about what worked and what didn't work – this meant it was possible to capture real time learning and ensure it had the greatest impact |

The Access to Nature evaluation suggests that Natural England (somewhat unintentionally) took a bold step with a programme and an approach that embraced and reflected these principles to a significant degree. This has required a step change in the way that the team has worked, being 'critical friend' to projects in a way that has been appropriately supportive and challenging in equal measure, while also ensuring accountability both internally and to the Big Lottery Fund.

This approach however that can be testing for projects more familiar with a traditional funder - grantee relationship. There is an in-built inclination to keep problems from the funder; to stick to a work programme regardless of how it is performing; to be risk averse; and generally to try and keep 'under the radar'.¹⁰ Access to Nature has turned this thinking on its head and has encouraged projects to be open about their performance, to test and reflect on new approaches, and to be part of a programme-wide culture of learning.

While a small number of projects have not embraced this approach, the evidence in this paper demonstrates the extent to which the remainder have welcomed their Lead Adviser input; have enjoyed the scope that has allowed them to reflect on practice and the flexibility to adapt and re-profile as necessary; and benefited from the formative evaluation process.

3.3 In summary

This paper has shown how the Access to Nature programme has been managed well and how the evaluation process has been an important management tool. Natural England adopted a new approach to the funder - grantee relationship and it is arguable that the effectiveness of the programme, and the high proportion of spend against budget, demonstrate the success of this in practice.

Moving forward it is the case that there is no Access to Nature successor programme, and Natural England has no programme of a similar scale on the horizon. However, there remains a not insignificant legacy for the organisation.

- There is a skilled and knowledgeable staff team. The skills extend beyond delivering a revenue based grant programme, and to the strategies and approaches that enable people with little or no previous experience of the natural environment to access and enjoy it.
- There is a richer understanding of the outcomes associated with engaging people in the natural environment, as evidenced by the projects funded by Access to Nature, including skill development, health and well-being benefits, community cohesion, ambition and employability, learning about and appreciation of the natural environment, local pride etc.
- There is an extensive series of learning products that capture the breadth and depth of the evidence generated by the Access to Nature evaluation process.
- There is a detailed understanding of the contribution that formative evaluation can make to programmes and work streams.
- There is a body of organisations that have a track record of delivering challenging and innovative projects; which are more reflective about their practice and have enhanced skills in evaluation; and are more sustainable as a result.

Footnote 10 See for example, Cairns, B. & Chambers, R.; *ATM or Development Agency? Challenges of moving beyond grant-making for charitable foundations*; London: Institute for Voluntary Action Research.

To exploit and maximise this legacy, there are key steps that Natural England can take.

- Maximising the opportunities that the current political and strategic climate offer in terms of building on the work of Access to Nature.
- Exploring how the partnership approach embodied in Access to Nature can inform on-going work within Natural England following the forthcoming organisational refresh and its increased focus on delivery by and through partners.
- Remaining in a state of readiness to respond to opportunities to instigate new funding programmes, applying the learning from Access to Nature.
- Utilising the expertise that has been developed and particularly the extensive skills of the Access to Nature team to best effect within Natural England.
- Seeking opportunities to implement formative evaluation in other work areas to help build the Natural England evidence base.
- Continuing to respond to the findings from Icarus' evaluation of Access to Nature and Supporting Change and Impact, and to disseminate the learning from its published papers.
- Sharing the learning from Access to Nature both internally within Natural England and more widely.

4

Appendix 1

Evaluation Framework



Appendix 1

Evaluation framework

| Broad evaluation questions | Specific evaluation questions | Key stakeholders | Source of data | Methodology |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| IMPACT: Targets and Outcomes | | | | |
| 1. What contribution has the A2N programme made to the Big Lottery's Changing Spaces Outcomes? | <p>1a) What evidence is there that the A2N programme has contributed to improved local environments, open spaces and countryside – accessible to all and relevant to needs?</p> <p>1b) What evidence is there that the A2N programme has contributed to a greater sense of community ownership of local natural places?</p> <p>1c) What evidence is there that the A2N programme has improved social, economic and environmental sustainability?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A2N Steering Group • A2N Project Board • A2N Project Team • Grant recipients • Independent Grants Panel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation reference groups: monitoring reports and maps • Icarus interim evaluation reports • Reports from the project team including six monthly reports to the Board • Six monthly progress reports from grant recipients • Interview evidence • On line survey evidence • Case Study evidence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On line surveys • Interviews • Desk based research • Focus group • Case studies |

Continued on following pages

Continued from previous page

| Broad evaluation questions | Specific evaluation questions | Key stakeholders | Source of data | Methodology |
|---|--|---|--|---|
| <p>2. What contribution has the A2N programme made to Natural England's strategic outcomes and supporting evidence base?</p> | <p>2a) To what extent has the A2N programme contributed evidence about how 'people are inspired to enjoy, understand and act for the natural environment'?</p> <p>2b) What evidence is there that the programme has contributed to the conservation, enhancement and good management of England's natural environment?</p> <p>2c) How robust is the evidence base that is being generated by the Programme and how is this being used?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural England Evidence Team • A2N National Project Team • Grant recipients • Regional advisers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation reference group: reports and maps • Icarus interim evaluation reports • Reports from the project team • Six-monthly progress reports from grant recipients • Case study evidence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On line surveys • Interviews • Desk based research • Focus group • Case studies |
| <p>3. To what extent has the Consortium's vision for the A2N programme been realised?</p> | <p>3a) What evidence is there that the programme has contributed to high quality environments which are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valued and accessible • Rich in wildlife and opportunities for learning, health and well being • Safe, clean and attractive and well used | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A2N Steering group • A2N Project Board • A2N National Project Team • Natural England Evidence Team • Grant recipients and their stakeholders • Regional advisers • Independent Grants Panel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation reference group: monitoring reports and maps • Icarus interim evaluation reports • Reports from the project team • Six-monthly progress reports from grant recipients • Monthly updates from grant recipients • Case study evidence • Interview evidence • On line survey evidence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On line surveys • Interviews • Desk based research • Focus group • Case studies |

Continued from previous page

| Broad evaluation questions | Specific evaluation questions | Key stakeholders | Source of data | Methodology |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| <p>4. To what extent has the A2N programme achieved its 5 main outcomes and related targets?</p> | <p>4a) What impact has the A2N programme had on the diversity and number of people that have improved opportunities to experience the natural environment (outcome 1)?</p> <p>4b) What impact has A2N programme had on the number of people that have opportunities for learning about the natural environment (outcome 2)?</p> <p>4c) What impact has A2N programme had on the number of people that are able to enjoy the natural environment as a result of investment in access to natural places and networks between sites? (outcome 3)?</p> <p>4d) What impact has the A2N programme had on improving the quality of natural places so that they are better able to meet the needs of local people and wildlife (outcome 4)?</p> <p>4e) What impact has the A2N programme had on communities' sense of ownership of local natural places? (outcome 5)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A2N Steering group • A2N Project Board • A2N National Project Team • Natural England Evidence Team • Grant recipients and their stakeholders • Regional advisers • Independent Grants Panel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation reference group: monitoring reports and maps • Icarus interim evaluation reports • Reports from the project team • Six-monthly progress reports from grant recipients • Monthly updates from grant recipients • Case Study evidence • Interview evidence • On line survey evidence • Grant assessments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On line surveys • Interviews • Desk based research • Focus group • Case studies |

Continued from previous page

| Broad evaluation questions | Specific evaluation questions | Key stakeholders | Source of data | Methodology |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| <p>5. To what extent has the A2N programme reached its target beneficiaries?</p> | <p>5a) To what degree of success has the programme engaged people currently under-represented in terms of contact with the natural environment (including disabled people, the young, black and minority ethnic communities and older people)</p> <p>5b) To what degree of success has the programme engaged people disadvantaged by where they live through a lack of accessible natural environments?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A2N Steering group • A2N Project Board • A2N National Project Team • Natural England Evidence Team • Grant recipients and their stakeholders • Regional advisers • Independent Grants Panel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation reference group: monitoring reports and maps, including targeting maps and targeting hits • Icarus interim evaluation reports • Reports from the project team • Six-monthly progress reports from grant recipients • Monthly updates from grant recipients • Case study evidence • Interview evidence • On line survey evidence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On line surveys • Interviews • Desk based research • Focus group • Case studies |

Continued from previous page

| Broad evaluation questions | Specific evaluation questions | Key stakeholders | Source of data | Methodology |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| <p>6. What has been learnt from the A2N programme about the approaches that are needed to achieve the 5 main outcomes and related targets, and reach the target beneficiaries (i.e. good practice legacy)?</p> | <p>6a) Which approaches have been particularly successful or effective in terms of achieving the 5 main outcomes and related targets, and reaching the target beneficiaries?</p> <p>6b) Why were these approaches successful?</p> <p>6c) What challenges and barriers has the programme encountered in relation to achieving the A2N programme outcomes and related targets and reaching the target beneficiaries?</p> <p>6d) How have these challenges and barriers been overcome?</p> <p>6e) How are lessons learned and good practice identified?</p> <p>6f) How is this information being used?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A2N Steering group • A2N Project Board • A2N National Project Team • Natural England Evidence Team • Grant recipients and their stakeholders • Regional advisers • Independent Grants Panel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence team: monitoring reports and maps • Icarus interim evaluation reports • Reports from the project team • Six-monthly progress reports from grant recipients • Monthly updates from grant recipients • Case study evidence • Interview evidence • On line survey evidence • Action plans following interim evaluations • Conference evaluation • Outcomes spreadsheet • KPI reports to Big Lottery (quarterly and annual) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On line surveys • Interviews • Desk based research • Focus group • Case studies |

Continued from previous page

| Broad evaluation questions | Specific evaluation questions | Key stakeholders | Source of data | Methodology |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| <p>7. How successful have the regions been in implementing their targeting plans?</p> | <p>7a) To what extent have grant recipients contributed to achieving the priorities identified in their region's targeting plans?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A2N Project Board • A2N Project Team • Regional advisers • Grant recipients • Independent Grants Panel • Evidence Team | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation reference group: monitoring reports and maps • Reports from the project team • Six-monthly progress reports from grant recipients • Monthly updates from grant recipients • Case Study evidence • Interview/focus group evidence • On line survey evidence • Grant assessments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk top research • On line surveys • Telephone interviews • Focus groups • Case studies |

Continued from previous page

| Broad evaluation questions | Specific evaluation questions | Key stakeholders | Source of data | Methodology |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| PROCESS | | | | |
| <p>8. To what extent has Natural England managed the programme effectively and efficiently?</p> | <p>8a) Has the process of managing and steering the programme been effective and efficient?</p> <p>8b) Has the process of selecting projects been efficient?</p> <p>8c) Has the process of selecting projects been effective in terms of securing a spread of grant aid across regions, project and application types?</p> <p>8d) To what extent has the process of gathering information from successful projects been effective and efficient?</p> <p>8e) Have projects had access to the right support at the right time?</p> <p>8f) To what extent have opportunities to improve programme management been identified and acted upon?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A2N Project Board • A2N Project Team • Regional advisers • Independent Grants Panel • Grant recipients • Evidence Team • Unsuccessful grant applicants • Big Lottery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study evidence • Interview/focus group evidence • On line survey evidence • Grant assessments • KPI reports to Big Lottery • NE internal audit reports | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk top research • On line surveys • Telephone interviews • Focus groups • Case studies |

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| Broad evaluation questions | Specific evaluation questions | Key stakeholders | Source of data | Methodology |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| <p>9. How well are projects progressing against their proposed timescales/action plans?</p> | <p>9a) To what degree have projects been able to meet their proposed timescales and action plans?</p> <p>9b) What challenges and barriers have emerged in relation to delivering the project work plans and how have they been addressed/ overcome?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A2N Project team • Regional advisers • Grant recipients | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence team: monitoring reports and maps • Reports from the project team • Six-monthly progress reports from grant recipients • Monthly updates from grant recipients • Case study evidence • Interview/focus group evidence • On line survey evidence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk top research • On line surveys • Telephone interviews • Focus groups • Case studies |
| <p>10. What methodologies have been used to gather monitoring and evaluation evidence by projects and how successful have these been?</p> | <p>10a) How have the projects developed their evaluation methodologies?</p> <p>10b) What factors have helped and hindered projects in gathering the monitoring evaluation evidence?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A2N Project team • Regional advisers • Grant recipients | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence team: monitoring reports and maps • Reports from the project team • Six-monthly progress reports from grant recipients • Monthly updates from grant recipients • Case study evidence • Interview/focus group evidence • On line survey evidence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk top research • On line surveys • Telephone interviews • Focus groups • Case studies |

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| Broad evaluation questions | Specific evaluation questions | Key stakeholders | Source of data | Methodology |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| INPUTS | | | | |
| 11. Have the inputs to the A2N programme and projects been adequate to ensure the delivery of an effective and efficient programme? | 11a) Have the human resources devoted to the management and delivery of the A2N programme been sufficient? 11b) Have the financial resources devoted to the management and delivery of the A2N programme been sufficient? 11c) What changes to the human or financial investment into the programme should or could be made and why? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A2N Project Board • A2N Project Team • Regional advisers • Independent Grants Panel • Project stakeholders • Big Lottery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports from the project team • Case study evidence • Interview/focus group evidence • On line survey evidence • NE internal audit reports | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk top research • On line surveys • Telephone interviews • Focus groups • Case studies |
| CONTEXT | | | | |
| 12. What influence, if any, have internal or external contextual factors had on the management and delivery of the A2N programme? | 12a) Have there been any significant internal contextual factors that have influenced the management and delivery of the A2N programme? 12b) Have there been any significant external contextual factors that have influenced the management and delivery of the A2N programme? 12c) In what ways has the programme been affected and what difference has this made to the impact on the vision, outcomes and related targets of the A2N programme? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A2N Project Board • A2N Project Team • Regional advisers • Independent Grants Panel • Big Lottery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports from the project team • Case study evidence • Interview/focus group evidence • On line survey evidence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk top research • On line surveys • Telephone interviews • Focus groups • Case studies |