



PSS Guidance Evaluation & Monitoring



1.0 Introduction to Monitoring and evaluation

This factsheet provides a guide to monitoring and evaluation of PSS activities. It provides links to more in-depth information and the different tools available through Natural England and elsewhere.

Monitoring:

- systematic and routine collection of information, tracking progress against set objectives.

Evaluation:

- assessing the performance or impact of a project or phase of a project.

Evaluating PSS activities will help determine what is working well and what could be improved to assist delivery against intended outcomes. It can help make informed decisions about how and what to change to maximise the impact of PSS on nature recovery. A well-designed evaluation can also provide evidence for making the case for future funding and resource allocation prior to the end of project funding.

The rest of this article follows the structure of PLAN, DO, REVIEW, in line with other Natural England training material. In-depth guides to each of the stages of evaluation can be found on our SharePoint.

→ [Evaluation Training](#)



2.0 Plan

2.1 Scoping

2.1.1 A note about phases and timelines

Developing and implementing a PSS can be thought of as distinct processes. Indicators of success will be different for each. Consider adopting an appropriate evaluation timeline (and associated theory of change) for each phase of activity. Evaluating the development process may be best kept separate from evaluating the implementation of the Strategy itself.

2.1.2 Developing a theory of change (and logic model)

Knowing where to begin might seem challenging especially given that a PSS is likely to be a complex and multi-faceted change programme. In an ideal world, evaluation should be built in at the project planning stage. However, as projects as complex as a PSS development hardly ever pan out as originally intended, it is highly likely that any plan for evaluation will need to be adapted as objectives and project plans evolve.

Establishing a theory of change (ToC) and expressing this diagrammatically in a logic model is a useful first step in the process of designing an evaluation.

Theory of Change (ToC): a description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context.

Logic Model: a graphic which represents the theory of change [see example on following page].

A ToC will clarify understanding of what the PSS is trying to achieve and how by setting out the following:

- The rationale for the intervention – the problems the PSS is attempting to address
- The impacts the PSS is ultimately setting out to achieve
- The more immediate and specific outcomes the PSS is aiming for
- The activities which are thought to help deliver outcomes and
- The resources needed to deliver activities.

There is no single template or best model for designing a ToC but there are some good principles to adopt. It is important to take a collaborative approach to developing the ToC and, as programmes evolve in implementation, to revisit and update it at regular intervals.

There are multiple tools available that can help in designing a ToC/logic model:

→ [Theory of Change templates 24.pptx](#)

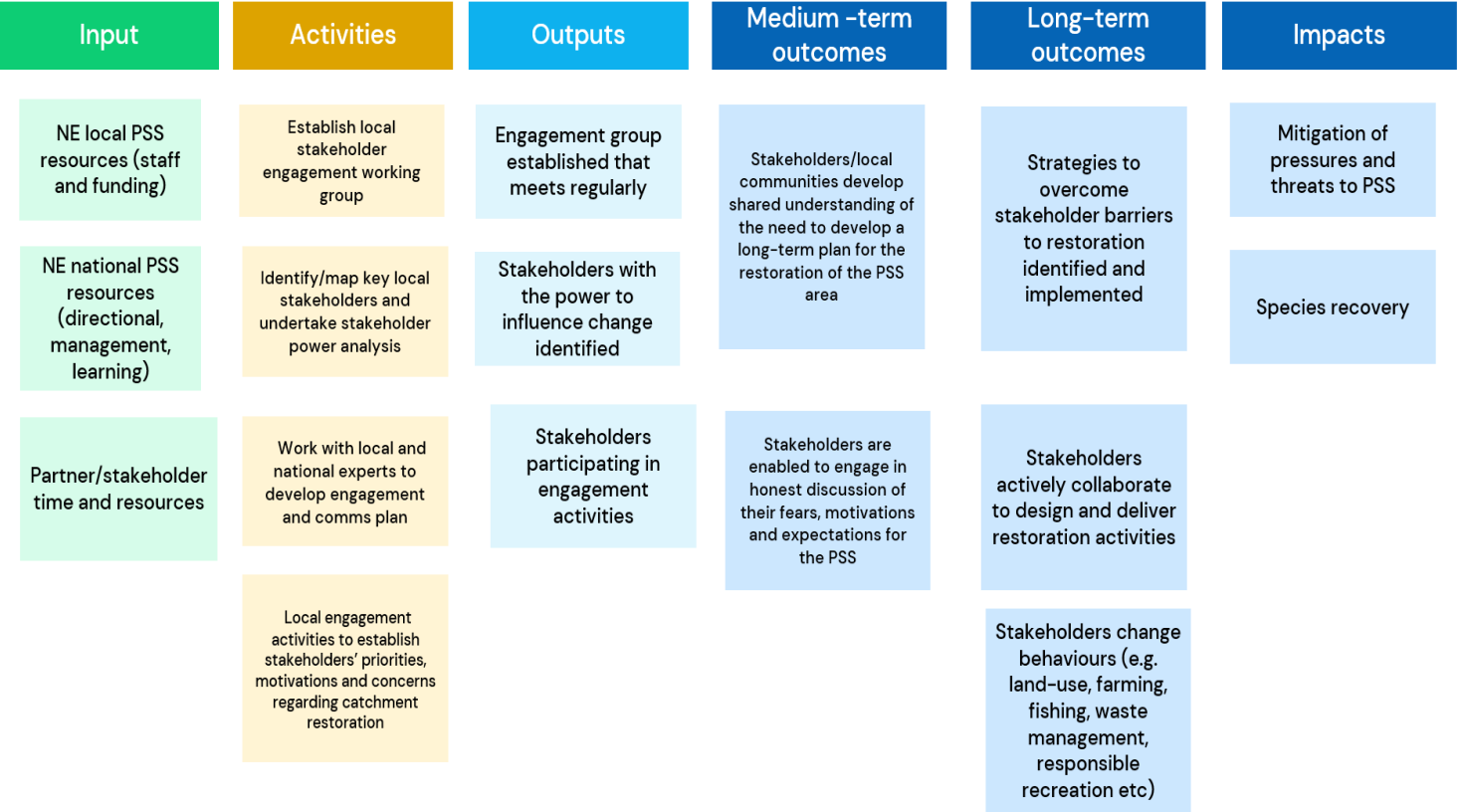
- The DEFRA ToC guidance contains a walkthrough of how to conduct a ToC. The toolkit also contains a template for a ToC narrative which can be used as a tool to draw out detail from a visualised ToC.

→ [Defra Toc Toolkit](#)

- Using PowerPoint or a collaboration software such as MURAL or MIRO can help constructing ToC with stakeholders remotely. DEFRA and its Arms Length Bodies (ALBs) have a corporate account for Mural.

→ [Work better together with Mural's visual work platform | Mural](#)

Example Logic Model – Stakeholder Engagement Workstream – Imaginary PSS



2.1.3 Planning the way forward: building a monitoring and evaluation framework

A monitoring and evaluation framework will provide an overall strategy for evaluating a PSS, and help link together evaluation questions, logic models, metrics, data sources, and data collection methods.

A monitoring and evaluation plan should set out the following:

- Evaluation aims, objectives, and the questions to find answers to.
- Programme ToC and accompanying logic models - established at the outset and reviewed iteratively.
- A plan for programme monitoring: i.e. the data/information to collect about what the activity is doing - for example the number of stakeholders who regularly attend partnership meetings, the number of air quality monitoring kits installed etc.
- An evaluation plan including:
 - Indicators that will be used to measure achievement of outcomes
 - What data sources will be used,
 - The timeframe for data collection,
 - Who will be responsible for data collection, and
 - Any ethical considerations such as gaining informed consent from participants.
- How it is intending to analyse and report findings including detail of the intended audience and how evaluation findings will be used.

2.1.4 Evaluation aims, objectives and questions

It will be impossible to evaluate every aspect of the PSS process. It is important to establish priorities and identify key evaluation aims and the questions that most need to be answered. Involving relevant partners and stakeholders in the process will help ensure ownership and support on-going engagement in the evaluation.

Evaluation questions should be guided by the ToC. For example, based on the above ToC, research questions might include the following:

- What are the range of fears and concerns that key stakeholders have in relation to planned actions for nature recovery in the PSS site?
- What strategies are most effective in addressing these concerns?
- Which concerns are proving most difficult to address? How might these be overcome?

Qualitative vs quantitative research questions

- Quantitative research questions – need quantification to be meaningful: how much, how often, how many etc
 - How many pig farmers *in PSS area* are aware of the impacts of pig waste on local air quality?
 - How often do kayakers land on *name of beach* where there are ground nesting birds?
- Qualitative research questions – are commonly explanatory: ‘why’ and ‘how’ but also look for the meaning different stakeholders attach to events and experiences
 - Which communication and engagement activities have been most successful in facilitating landowner changes in attitudes towards restoration of the PSS site?
 - How has learning from the PSS been shared with other restoration projects/programmes? Has this learning helped shaped these interventions and if so, how?

2.2 Managing monitoring and evaluation activities

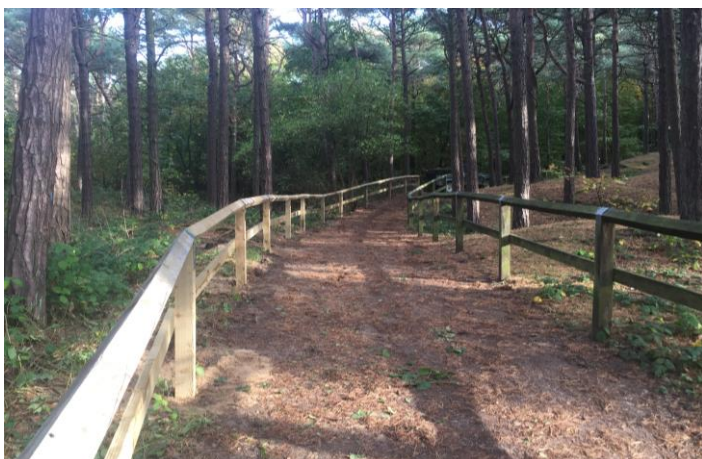
At the outset, it will be important to identify how monitoring and evaluation will be managed, delivered and by whom.

2.2.1 Evaluation management and governance

Setting up an evaluation steering group to help guide the process is an important first step. This should include a range of stakeholders who bring different expertise and perspectives. Ideally, the steering group should meet at key stages of the evaluation to help quality assure the process, provide technical expertise, monitor progress, trouble shoot and manage risks to the evaluation.

Issues to consider here include:

- Setting up a Steering Group for the evaluation and its membership. (Terms of Reference will be required)
- Having an effective project team, with the resources to drive the evaluation efficiently
- The use of Shared drives /Teams channels, which are increasingly being used to share and store documentation relevant to evaluation delivery
- Risk management and procedures for escalating risk
- Sign-off arrangements if necessary (e.g. for QA, reports, etc)
- Upward reporting (e.g. to Portfolio Boards and other senior level governance structures)
- Maintaining regular and collaborative dialogue with contractors.



2.2.2 Key information to request from external suppliers of evaluation services

The evaluation might be carried out internally or commissioned externally by an independent organisation. If externally, work on procurement should start early in the scoping phase to determine the needs and scope of an evaluation contract, secure a budget and follow NE procurement processes.

The following is useful information to request from external suppliers:

- Setting up a Steering Group for the evaluation and its membership. (Terms of Reference will be required)
- An understanding of how the supplier will approach the evaluation, key strengths and weaknesses of their approach. Be specific in the approach requested but also consider whether constraints limit evaluation options.
- An understanding of their experience in the topic area and type of evaluation (e.g. if evaluation is with vulnerable people, prior experience with that group or similar groups is required). Consider the appropriate balance of senior and junior researchers to work on it to ensure quality.
- The level and type of reporting required, including how many rounds of revisions, will be needed.
- An outline of back-up options/risk management strategies (e.g. if X isn't true, what will the supplier do?).
- Data processing and ethics requirements. For example, whether the supplier will be the processor or controller of data and whether the evaluation requires the process of personal data may influence responses. Think carefully who plays which role and discuss implications with legal team early.
- Bonus: if a policy team is soliciting service providers to run the programme, try to incorporate elements needed for the evaluation into programme Invitations to Tender (ITTs) as well so monitoring and evaluation data is captured

3.0 Do

3.1 Evaluation ethics, data protection and GDPR

Natural England's Research Ethics Committee (NEREC) helps to ensure research ethics is practiced across the organisation. Research ethics are the moral principles and actions guiding and shaping research. The ethicality of the evaluation should be considered for the protection of participants/subjects and to enhance the quality of the evaluation and its outputs.

NEREC can discuss best practice with researchers during the design stages and point towards wider guidance and resources. NEREC provide ethical review for all research involving human participants. NEREC aims to complement the work of researchers and mitigate against risks by adding an extra layer of support and checks.

- It is important that all NE-led projects that involve doing or commissioning research with people—meaning collecting data from or about people (e.g., interviews, surveys)—undergo ethical review. To decide if this applies and what level of review is needed, use the instruction below:

→ [Research ethics](#)

Ethical review through NEREC should still be consulted where appropriate even when working with a supplier

3.2 Data collection: choosing the right approach and methods for monitoring and evaluation

Evaluation helps us to both **prove** (that PSS is making a difference) and **improve** (the implementation/effectiveness of the PSS).

Proving that the initiative has made a difference means demonstrating that the PSS has achieved or made significant progress towards achieving some (or all) of the outcomes set out in the ToC. This type of evaluation is called an impact evaluation and can involve both quantitative and qualitative methods. The most robust form of impact evaluation involves a counterfactual where the outcomes of the group or area subject to an intervention are compared to a matched comparator group or area that has not received the intervention. This is unlikely to be possible for a PSS, but the evaluation can be designed to test the ToC and collect qualitative evidence of achievement of, or progress towards, the outcomes described there.

An evaluation designed to help the delivery of PSS and support adaptive delivery involves asking questions about how the programme is being implemented (from multiple perspectives) including, for example, examination of the contextual factors that act as enablers, any challenges faced and how these have been overcome. This form of evaluation is called a process evaluation. A process evaluation can provide valuable learning to feed into how PSS develops.

Consider the following key points when deciding how to collect data/evidence for the evaluation:

- Chose the method most appropriate to the research questions
- Consider data collection at multiple points to capture changes over time.
 - Beginning at project start point will give a baseline position against which to assess progress.
 - Data collection could/should then be followed at an interim timepoint and towards project close.
- Don't rely too heavily on single data sources – triangulate evidence from different sources e.g. interviews, surveys, document review, monitoring information etc. Make use of information that is already available/being collected.
- If time permits, consider piloting data collection approach to ensure research tools are fit for purpose.

Table X: Impact vs process evaluation

Type of evaluation	Questions	Methods
Impact evaluation	Did the intervention deliver the outcomes we expected? What would have happened in the absence of the intervention?	Surveys, random controlled trials (RCT) quasi-experimental design (QED), qualitative comparative analysis
Process evaluation: often qualitative, benefits from a ToC/intervention logic.	Assess the how and why of implementation. Helps identify the quality, strengths and weaknesses of implementation to improve delivery	Stakeholder/participant interviews/focus groups/workshops, documentary analysis, observation, surveys, monitoring data analysis

Table X: Quantitative vs qualitative methods

	Interviews, focus groups	Case studies	Surveys	Quantitative Counterfactual QED RCT
Aim	To explore and understand a range of perspectives/ experiences/ drivers and influences	To gain an in-depth understanding of an intervention within a particular context	To measure prevalence of opinions/ experiences and measure associations	To establish a causal link between an intervention and observed outcomes
Sample size	Small (typically 15-40)	Small (could be a single case but typically 5-15). Within case sample sizes depend on methods employed (could be both quant and qual)	Large (often 1,000 and over)	Needs to be large enough to detect the intervention effect – sample sizes are determined through statistical methods
Output	Themes, categories, description, explanations, policy solutions	Holistic and contextualised description and explanation of phenomena based on triangulation of different forms of evidence	Averages, measures of dispersion, statistical association	Statistical evidence of correlation between observed outcomes and intervention

3.3 Analysing and reporting information

Data analysis will depend on the methods and tools chosen. Here are some links to further resources to help guide thinking on this.

→ [Aqua Book](#)

It will be important to identify different audiences and adapt reporting and dissemination accordingly. For example, a technical report might be appropriate for some audiences but not for others.

Writing an evaluation report is one way of sharing key findings and what has been learnt with the people involved with the PSS as well as those with an interest elsewhere in the organisation. Findings should be presented clearly and convincingly with transparency around data collection and analysis methods and any limitations to these.

A typical evaluation report is structured in the following way:

- Executive summary
- Description of the intervention evaluated
- Outline of the evaluation method including numbers surveyed/interviewed etc
- Theory of Change (possibly as an annex)
- Any limitations to the evaluation
- Detail of the findings
- Discussion of findings, key learning and conclusion

Natural England have a ready-made report template here:

→ [Evaluation Report template_formatted.docx](#)

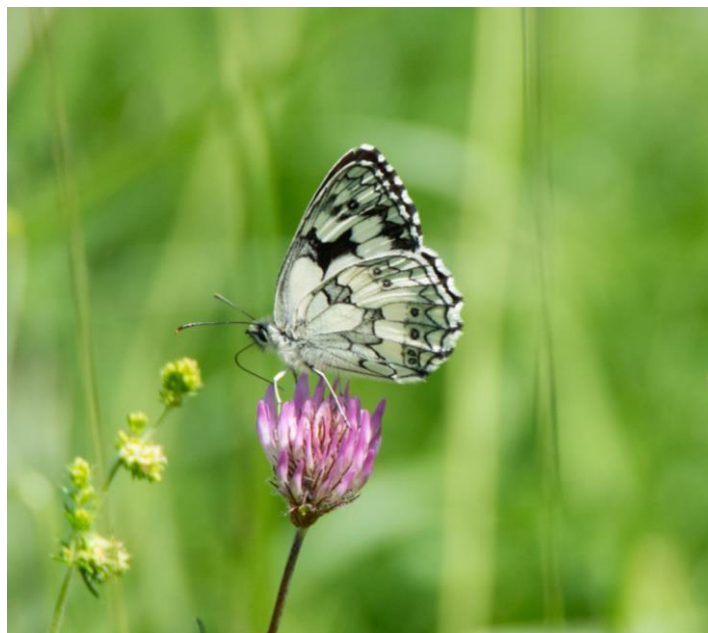
Findings may also be communicated in other formats – for example through shorter more accessible communications such as slide packs, newsletters or via workshops and presentations.

4.0 Review

4.1 Embedding learning

Issues to consider include:

- Make sense of the findings and agree a plan of actions for dissemination
- Who is the audience for the evaluation?
- For different audiences (e.g. non-technical audiences, senior leadership groups, peer groups, etc)?
- Development of a communications plan
- How and where will data be stored and how they will be made accessible?



One of the most important aspects of any evaluation is how to get from a report (and communications of its findings) to a position where the findings are being acted on and embedded in the organisation. It is vital that the costs of evaluation can be justified, and findings seen to be acted on.

As well as final review of the evaluation and final QA, there are other things we can do to review the evaluation and gain/share new learning. These include:

- Publication. The default for all evaluations should be publication on the Access to Evidence catalogue. This is now entirely the responsibility of the project team and can take significant resource (which must be included at the scoping stage). Not all evaluations should be published (e.g. where there is sensitivity over the intervention, where confidentiality could not be assured or where the results are of no public relevance)
- Reviewing the processes – how did the evaluation go? What learning have we gained that improves our overall evaluation offer in Natural England?
- What next? Do the findings indicate that we need to do more evaluation?
- How does this evaluation sit alongside other evaluations of a similar nature? Could it, for example, sit within a meta-evaluation that would add value?