

CECAN Webinar:

Evaluating government spending: Findings and recommendations from the latest National Audit Office report

Tuesday 15th March 2022, 13:00 – 14:00 GMT

Presenter: Phil Bradburn, National Audit Office (hosted by Nigel Gilbert)

Welcome to our **CECAN Webinar**.

All participants are muted. Only the Presenter & CECAN Host can speak. The webinar will start at **13:00 GMT**.

Phil will speak for around 45 minutes and will answer questions at the end.

Please submit your questions at any point during the webinar via the Q&A box in the Zoom webinar control panel.

Today's webinar will be recorded and made available on the CECAN website.

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National Audit Office

Evaluating government spending

National Audit Office

March 2022

An introduction to the National Audit Office

**The UK's independent public
spending watchdog.**

**We support Parliament in holding
government to account and help
improve public services through
our high-quality audits**

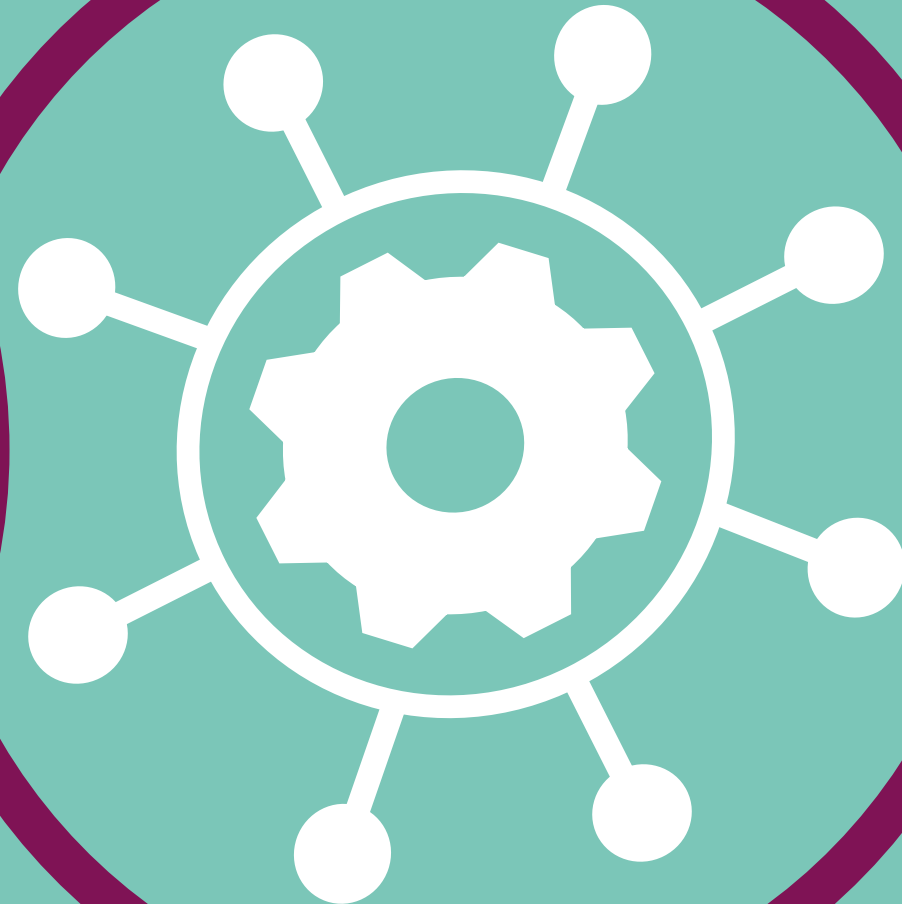


Sharing our insights



National Audit Office

We share our unique insights on challenges facing government to make it easier for others to understand and apply the lessons from our work



Key areas of cross-cutting expertise

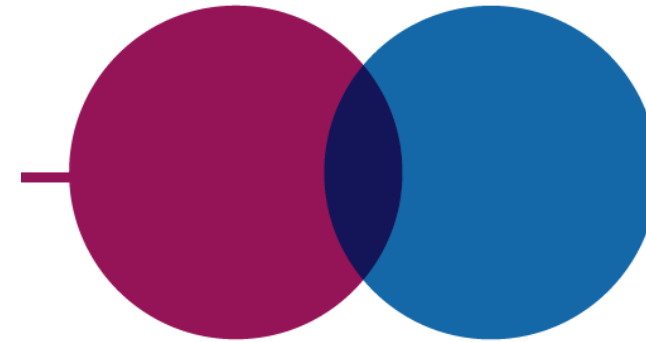


Evaluating government spending



Scope

- Examines the government's progress in developing the provision and use of evaluation evidence across government since our 2013 report *Evaluation in government*
- Primarily focuses on the role of the centre of government (i.e. HM Treasury, Cabinet Office and the Analysis Function) in setting out requirements, incentives and oversight arrangements for departments
- Considers the government's progress in addressing systemic barriers to the provision of evaluation and use of evaluation evidence



Evaluating government spending

HM Treasury, Cabinet Office

REPORT
by the Comptroller
and Auditor General

SESSION 2021-22
2 DECEMBER 2021
HC 860

Poll 1

What share of planned expenditure on the Government Major Projects Portfolio had robust evaluation plans in place?

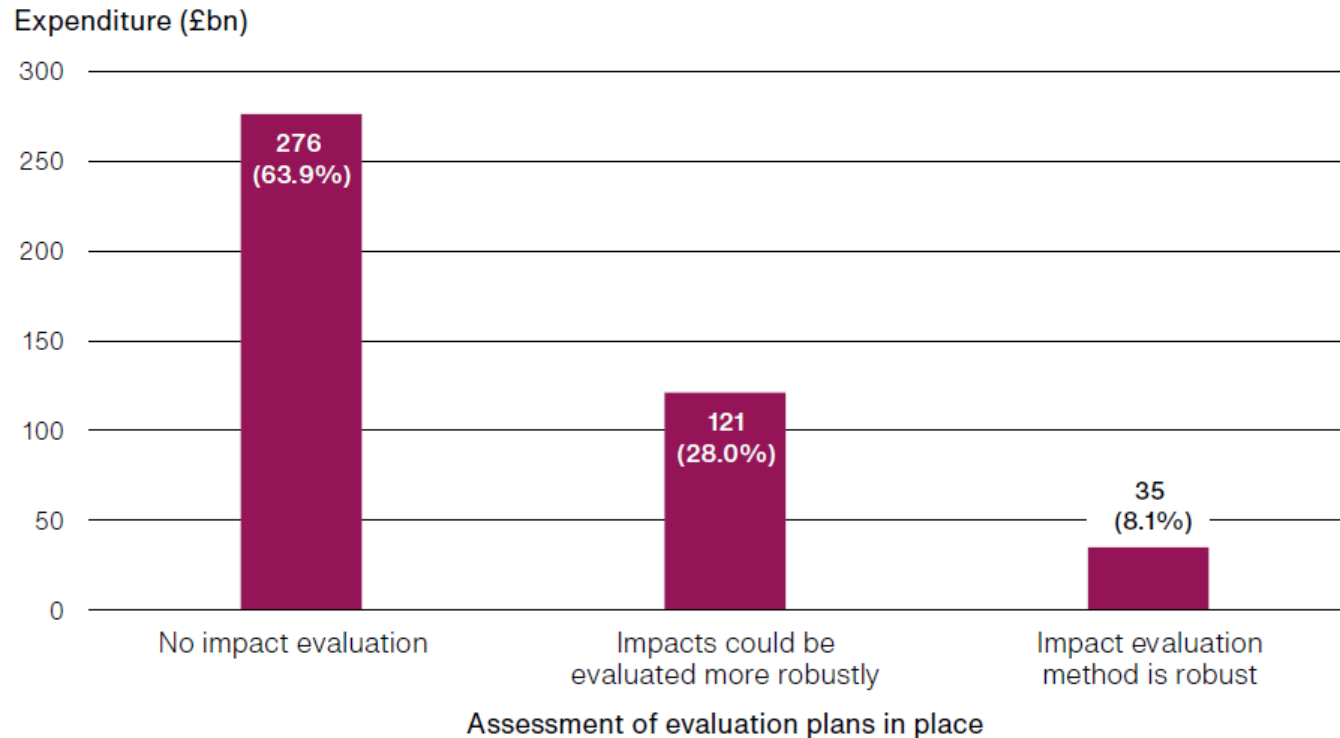
- a. Less than 10%
- b. 10% to 30%
- c. 31% to 60%
- d. 61% to 90%
- e. More than 90%

Much government activity is poorly evaluated or not at all

Figure 2

Evaluation gap across the Government Major Projects Portfolio, December 2019

In 2019, the Prime Minister's Implementation Unit's assessment found that only 8% of £432 billion planned expenditure on the Government Major Projects Portfolio had plans for a sufficiently robust impact evaluation

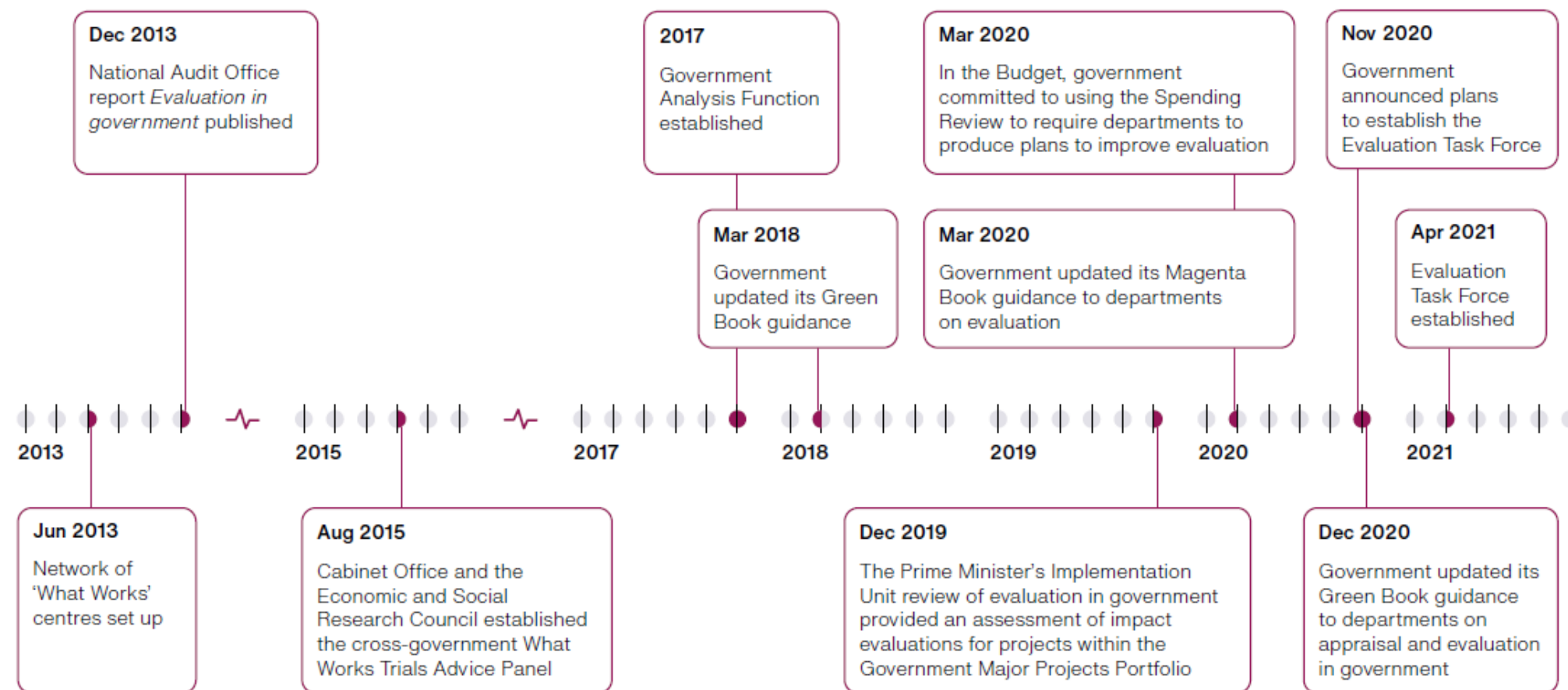


What's happened since our report in 2013?

Figure 3

Timeline of important evaluation-related developments since 2013

Since 2020, the centre of government has been increasingly proactive in providing leadership and strategic direction for evaluation activities across government



Poll 2

What are the two most common barriers to using evaluation to inform decision making in government departments?

- a. Opportunities to learn are not adequately built into policy design and delivery
- b. Lack of pressure/ demand from senior policy colleagues in support of evaluation evidence
- c. The knowledge base of evaluation evidence is difficult to access to find out what works
- d. Insufficient capacity of analysts to help policy-makers understand evaluation evidence
- e. Evaluation evidence is not available when it is needed
- f. Evaluation evidence is not understood enough by policy-makers

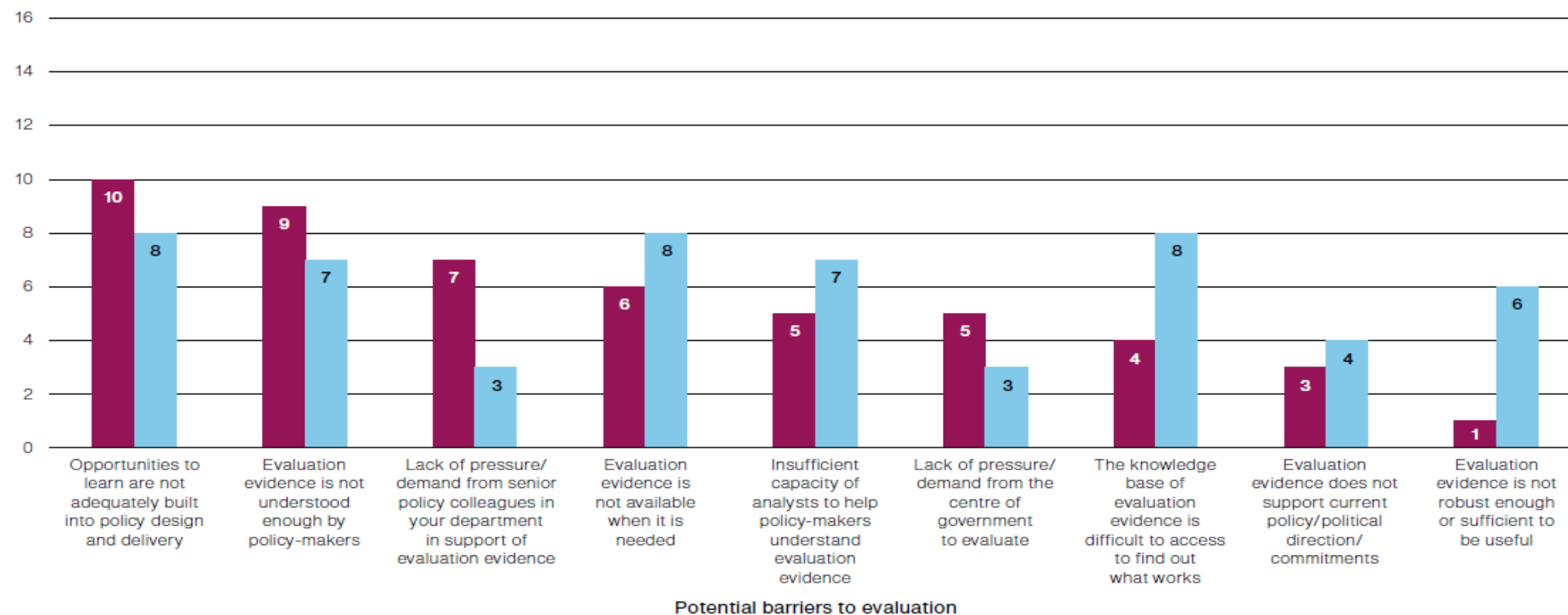
We found persistent barriers to using evaluation evidence

Figure 6

Barriers to using evaluation evidence to inform decision-making in government departments

Our surveys of chief analysts and heads of policy profession found that they had different views on the most commonly selected barriers to using evaluation to inform decision-making

Count of views strongly agreeing or agreeing



■ Chief analysts
■ Heads of policy profession

Poll 3

How many departments (out of 16) have an evaluation strategy covering their whole department?

- a. 3 or fewer
- b. 4 - 8
- c. 9 - 12
- d. 13 or more

We found limitations in the current evaluation system...

Taking a more strategic approach to evaluation



Clarity on roles and responsibilities

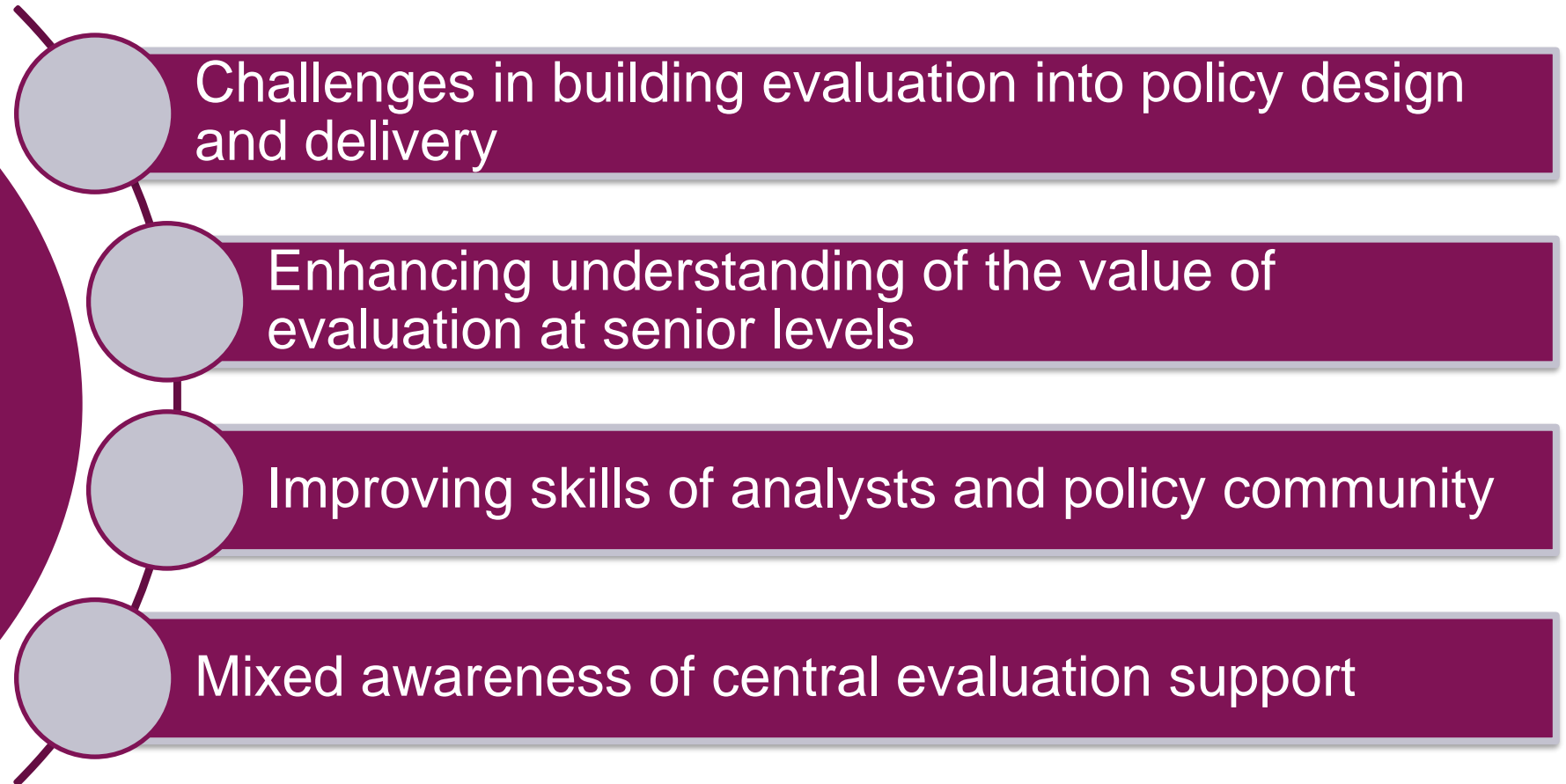
Oversight from the centre of government

Gaps in departments' evaluation strategies

Understanding of evaluation spend/staff

...and gaps in actions on policy design, skills and understanding at senior levels

Areas to improve



Bridging the gap between policy and evaluation

We saw evidence of actions taken to better embed evaluation in policy-making in our case study departments



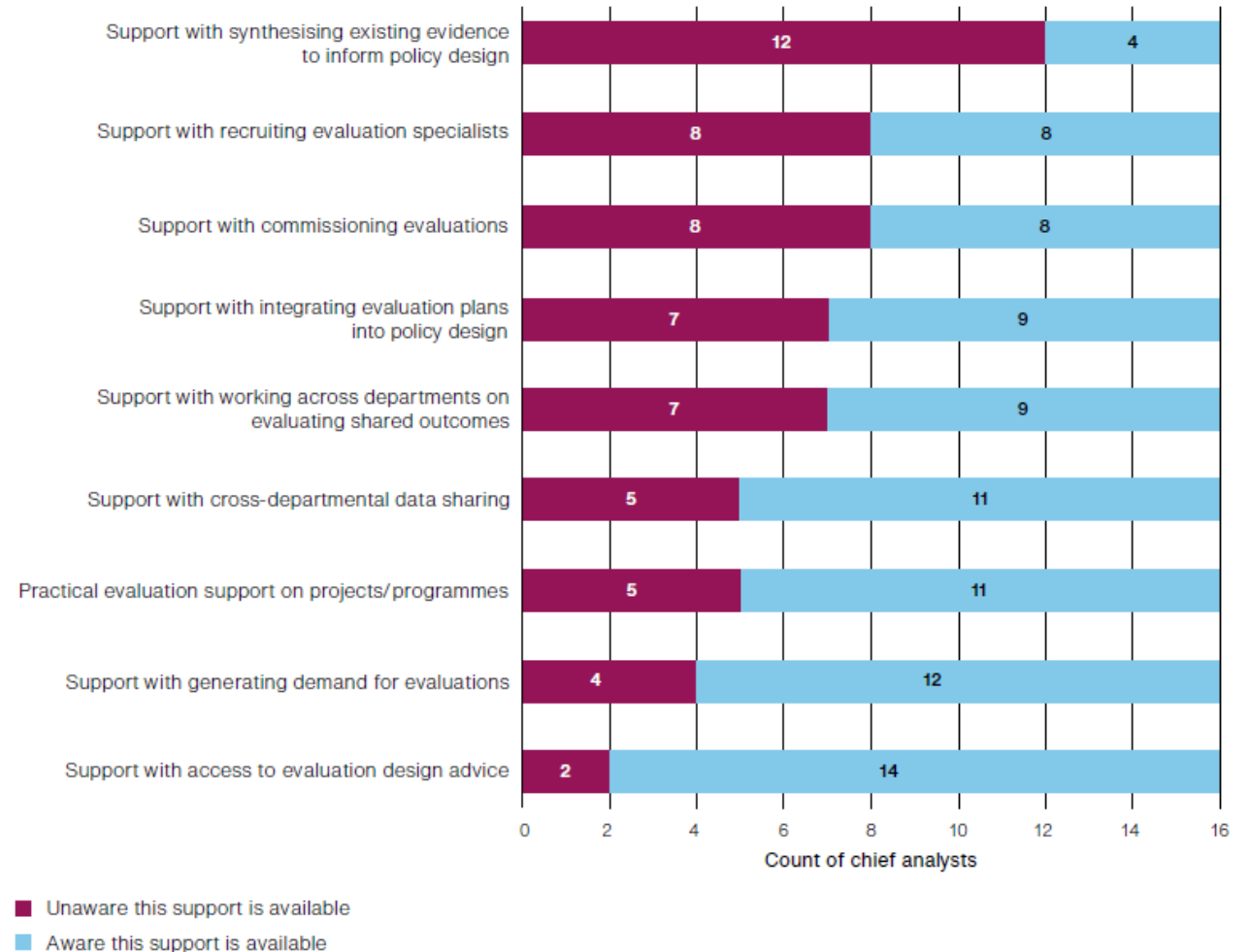
Awareness of support is mixed...

Figure 7

Chief analysts' awareness of evaluation support provided by the centre of government

Our survey of chief analysts found that there was substantial variation in awareness of different types of evaluation support

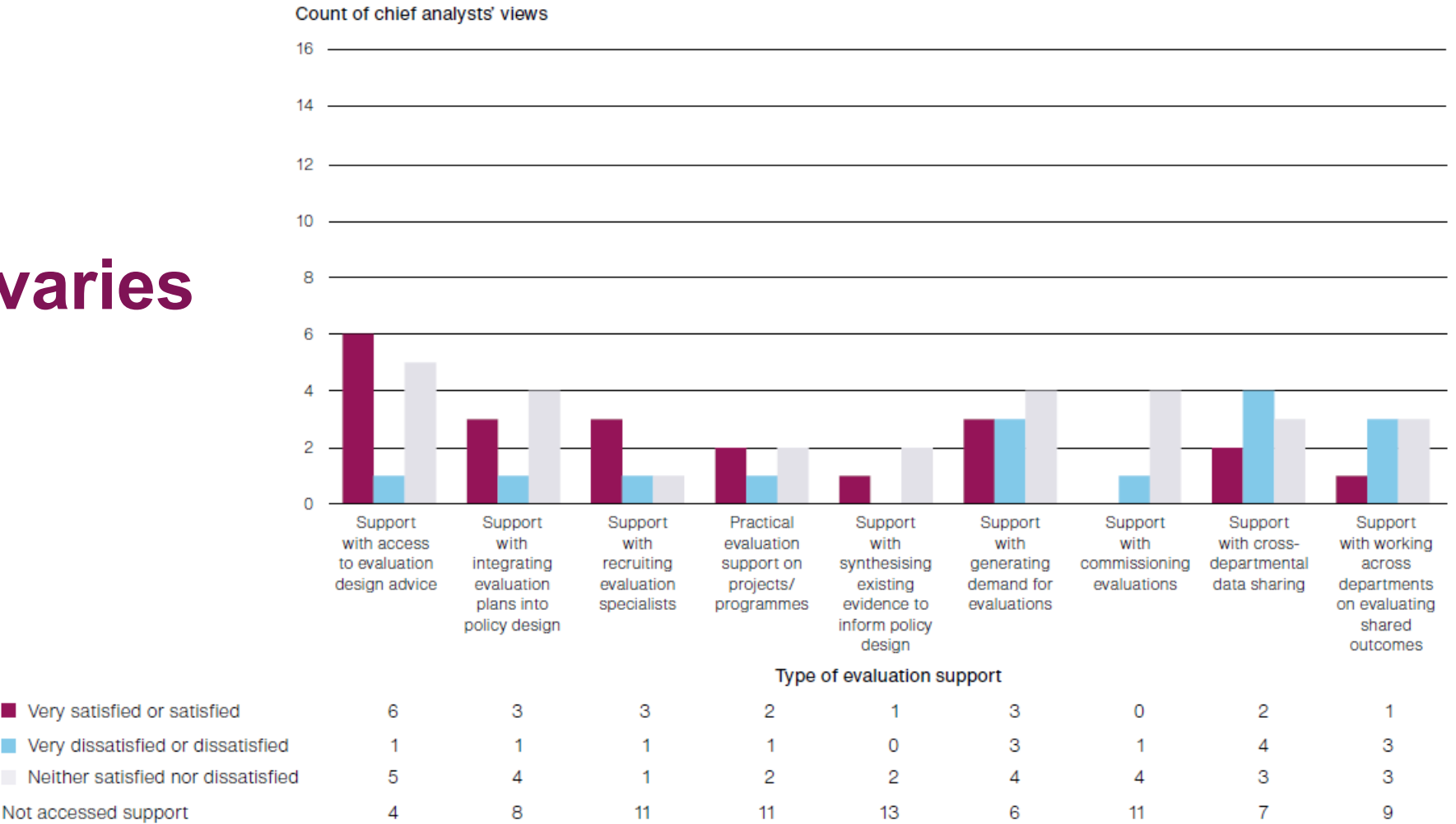
Type of support



... satisfaction varies

Figure 8
Chief analysts' satisfaction with the evaluation support accessed by their departments

Our survey of chief analysts found a mixed picture of their satisfaction with evaluation support provided by the centre of government. They were most satisfied with support on access to evaluation design and least satisfied with support on cross-departmental data-sharing



Embedding change and using evaluation findings

Areas to improve



Transparency and publication

Managing knowledge and using it widely

Capturing and publicising improved outcomes due to evaluation

Conclusion

While individual departments have **undertaken initiatives** to improve evaluation, the use of evaluation continues to be **variable and inconsistent**, and government has been **slow to address the known barriers** to improvement. As a result government cannot have confidence its spending in many policy areas is making a difference. Government has recently **committed to improve evaluations**, included requirements relating to evaluation in some spending decisions, and strengthened capacity through the creation of the Analysis Function and a central Evaluation Task Force. **These interventions will take time to mature**. Nevertheless, this renewed focus on evaluation is a welcome step to using evidence better and improving value for money.

Government needs to **clarify responsibilities**, **oversight** and **communication** of evaluation evidence. Building on the reforms it has made, and the efforts of individual departments, government will have to **do more to address the systemic barriers** to effective evaluation and the **application of evaluation evidence to policy-making**. Otherwise it will not be able to ensure evaluations drive improved outcomes.



National Audit Office

Thank you

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