



Truth in numbers speaks—

Policies weighed, lessons learned,

Clarity takes root.

A haiku on the impact of the Evaluation Task Force
Author: Microsoft Copilot

New Government, New Approach to Evaluation?

Evaluating in 'Interesting' Times – A Provider's Perspective



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These are interesting times for those engaged in finding out what works in public policy

ICF applies the full suite of methodologies, from qualitative research to large scale RCTs, to evaluate a broad spectrum of policies for departments and ALBs across government.

Our support ranges in scale from small sub-national studies to management of Defra's MEL facility (Lots 1-4) – the largest service contract for evaluation and related support in the UK.

A 30-year history of evaluating UK public policies provides perspective on today's context.

We believe the next four years has the potential to be a transformative period for the practice of evaluation and the impact it has on policy-making, if we collectively choose to make that happen.



The evaluation imperative is unarguable, and essential to the delivering on that electoral promise of 'change'

The number, scale, complexity and immediacy of the challenges the UK faces, and the scarcity of resources available to address them, reinforces the imperative to evaluate, learn fast, iterate and improve.

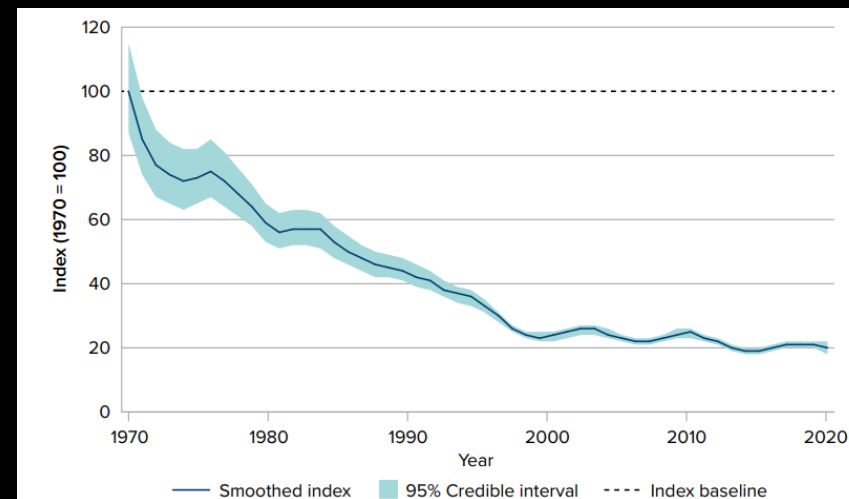
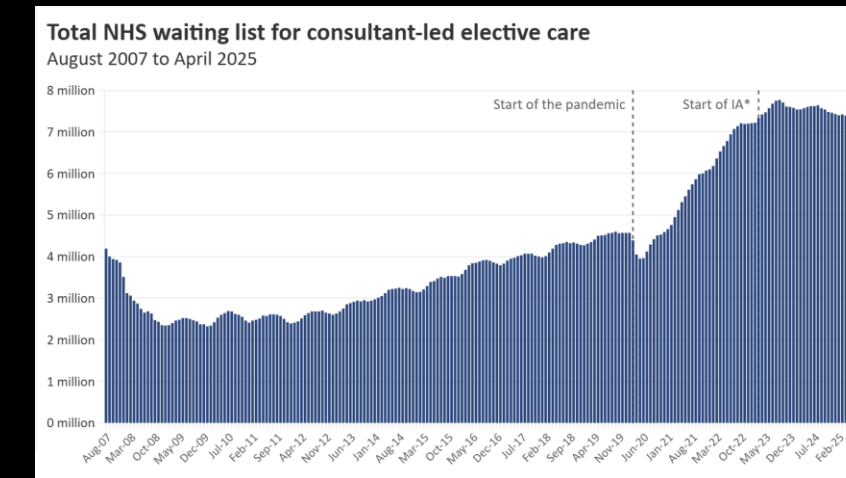
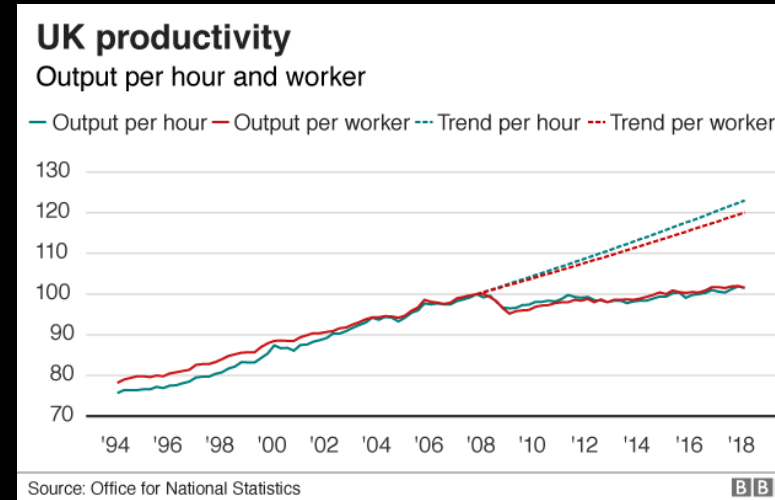
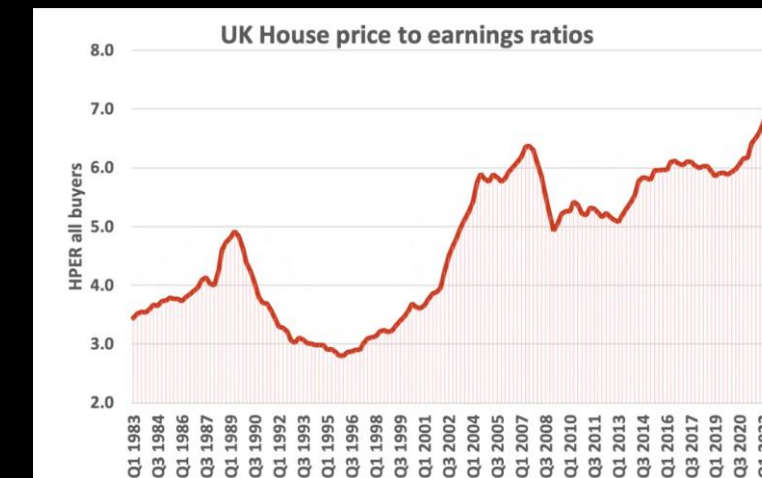


Figure 2.1. Long-term changes in 153 priority species trends in England, 1970 to 2021.⁴¹ The relative abundance measure comprises birds (44), butterflies (21), mammals (7) and moths (81).



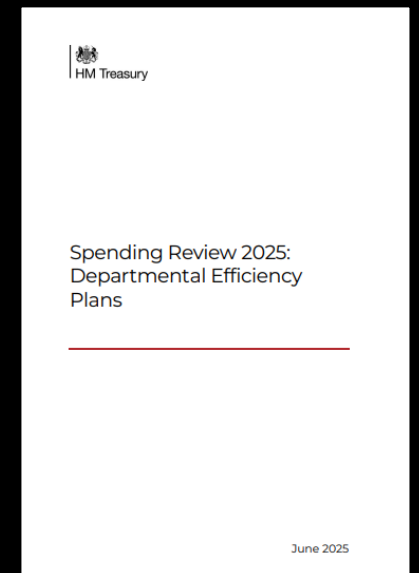
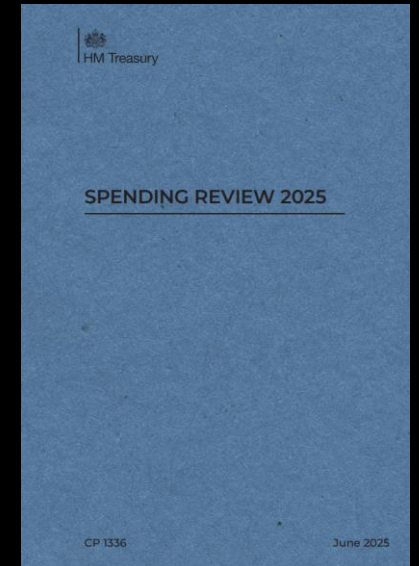
Efforts to build a more robust and impactful evaluation system are having a positive effect, but there's more to do

Recent years have seen positive changes in the attention given to evaluation, the robustness of evidence and willingness to consider unfamiliar methodologies

Consistent messaging from Treasury about the need for robust evaluative evidence to support spending proposals, and the efforts of the Evaluation Task Force, have been important contributory factors.

The UK's approach benefits from being less prescriptive and providing more space for innovation than that used in Brussels on EU policies.

But there's still some way to go before robust, timely, appropriate evaluation is the universal norm.



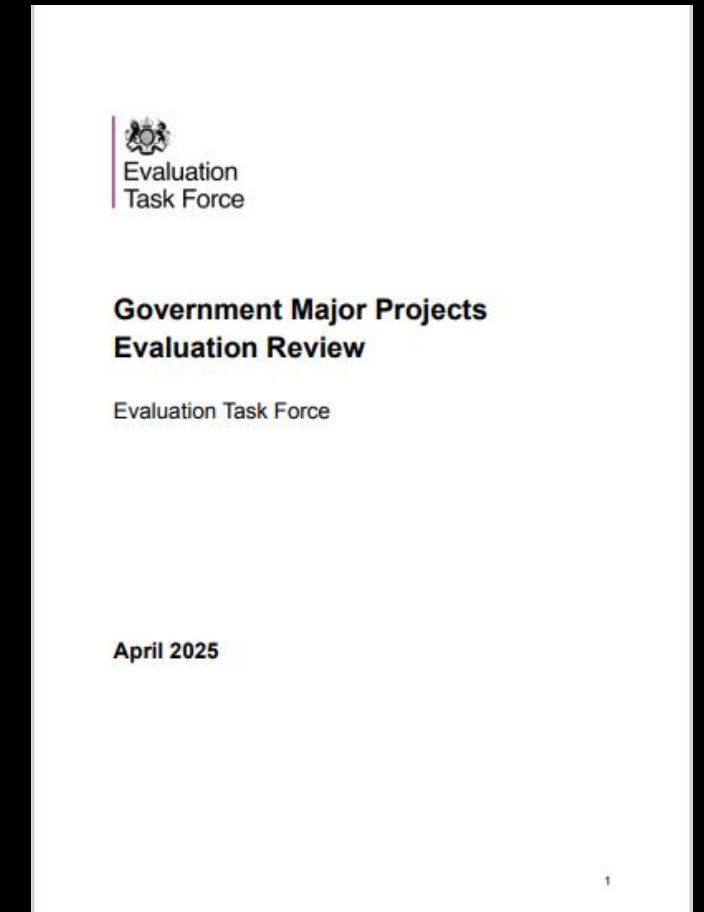
Though we might not need a 'new approach to evaluation for the new government' there is work to be done on efficacy, impact and value

Four priorities:

1. Evolve evaluation design and delivery to fit contemporary models of policy management and programme delivery – e.g. more agile, more systems thinking
2. Address the need for an increased focus on **value for money** – as a research objective, and in design/delivery of evaluation strategies
3. Exploit the potential of new tools and technologies to generate and communicate evaluative insights, and improve value for money of investments in evaluation
4. Organise the system to
 - get the most from the practitioner / providers community's capacity to support change
 - Integrate evaluation results with organisational strategies for knowledge management and programme delivery

1 – Approaches to evaluation design and delivery will need to evolve to fit the changing mix of programme models and evaluation subjects

- The 'design-and-deploy' approach to evaluation does not work for programmes that have active, ongoing change and/or are deliberately taking an 'agile' approach. As these are getting more common we need models that support adapt management while evidencing long term impact.
- As evaluations of digital transformation and other major capital programmes become more common, evaluators and their programme counterparts are going to need to learn each other's languages, tools and methods
- There are likely to be opportunities for innovation, integration and better outcomes, at the PPM / evaluation interface



2– We expect value for money questions to have increased prominence in evaluation design, delivery and procurement decisions

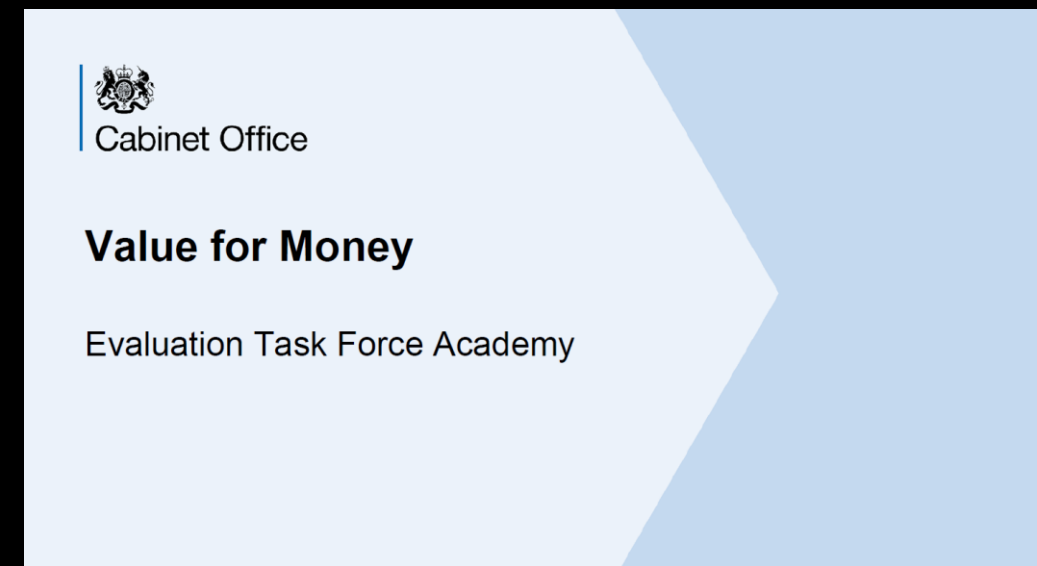
Historically, value-for-money has often been given less emphasis than impact and process. That will need to change

We need to build demand/supply side capability to find practical ways of addressing VfM questions in the context of complexity, non-monetised benefits, data gaps...

Smart evaluation strategies can increase VfM of portfolio investments (template frameworks, shared data systems, ToC libraries)

An organisation's evaluation procurement strategy and its model for managing knowledge on 'what works' need to align to maximise the VfM of investment in evaluative evidence

Technology has a role in VfM achieved on evaluation investments – in data capture, analysis and
visualisation/impact



3 – Data science, AI and data visualisation technologies have an important role to play, but we need to ensure risks are well managed

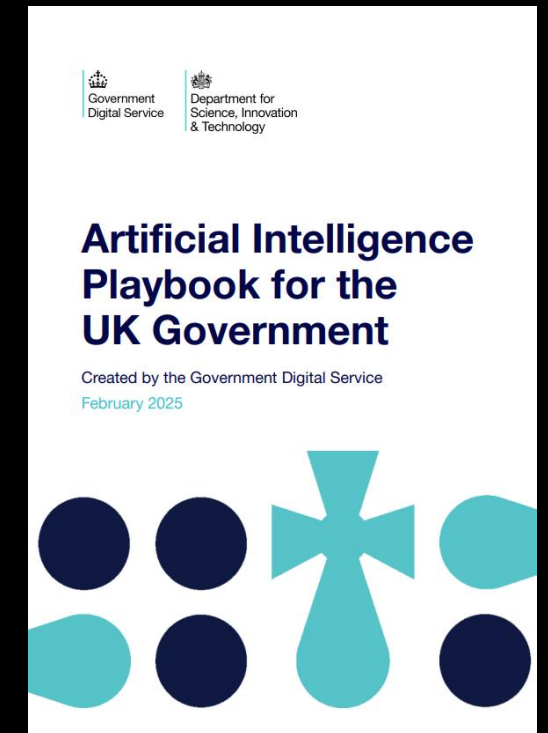
Technological change, especially in generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is rapidly transforming the practice of data....

- capture (e.g. OCR+, web-scraping, automated transcription)
- analysis (e.g. use of LLM-based tools to interrogate survey results, interview data, literature, programme documents);
- reporting; and
- visualisation (e.g. online dashboards).

These tools and technologies potentially offer significant benefits in additional insights and/or improved value for money.

But there are also risks to be managed, and a need to keep the 'human in the loop' and ensure transparency of process.

As yet, there's no guidance on use of AI in evaluation and we experience variation in how commissioners view these solutions

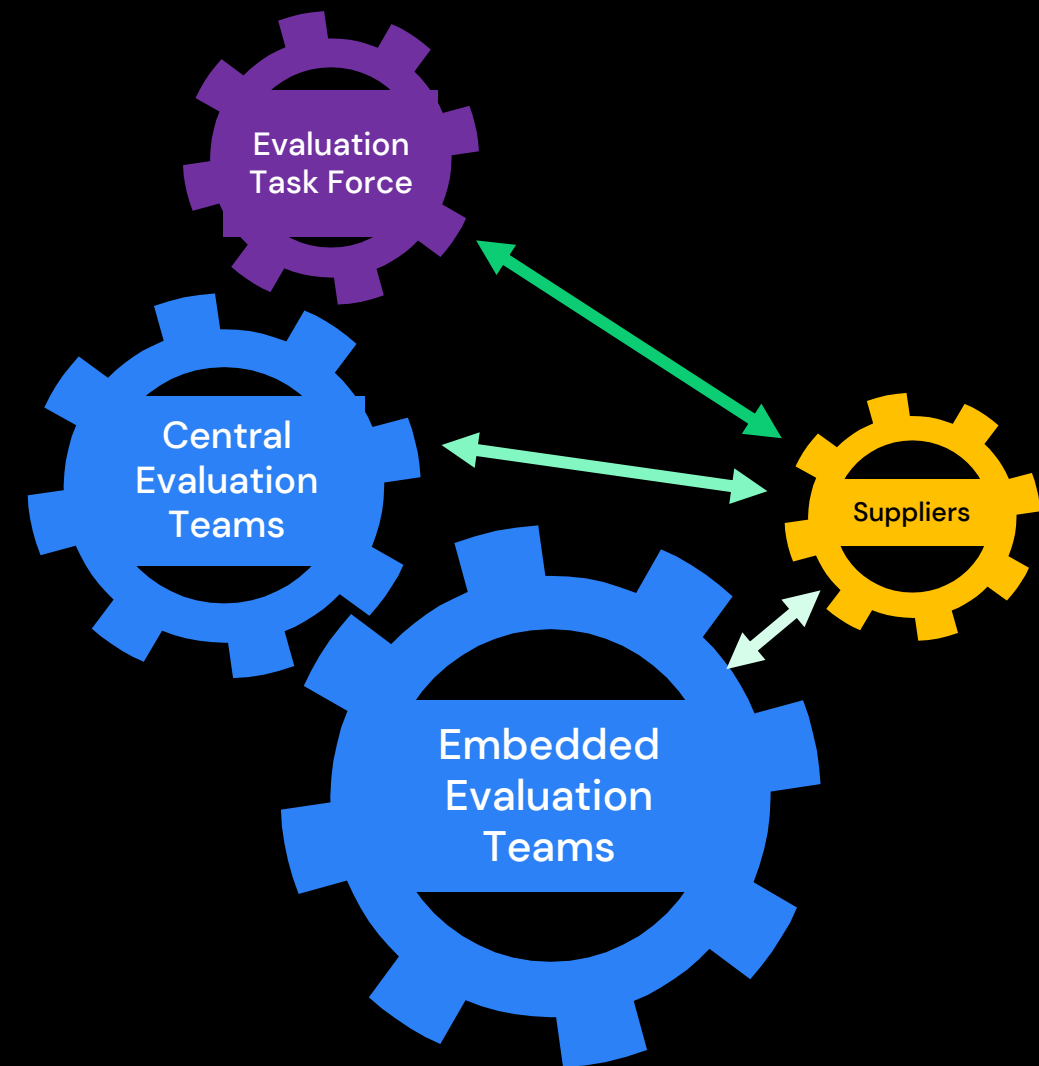


4 – In building our evaluation system we should look at how to get the most from the supplier community's capacity to support and accelerate the change required

Suppliers can be engaged as agents of change that can – given the right prompts – help implement the evaluation strategy, support learning and build capacity

Contractual mechanisms can be used to amplify learning outcomes at individual and framework contract levels – departmental procurement strategies shape whether and how this works. There's also an important interface with knowledge management strategies.

Scaling efforts to share training and resources will also help





Discussion time!



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