

► Ireland

Evaluation and Audit Section, Irish Aid

Mandate

The Evaluation and Audit Section of Irish Aid is charged to identify evaluation topics; plan, co-ordinate and manage evaluation activities (including “Value for Money” exercises); provide quality assurance of evaluations; actively disseminate key findings and publish reports; ensure that key findings feed into the appropriate policy, strategy, planning and appraisal cycles; and, manage a database of reports and recommendations. The Section also spends about 20% of its time providing guidance, training and support to evaluations undertaken by business units, Irish Embassies, and other partners. These evaluations are funded directly from programme costs.

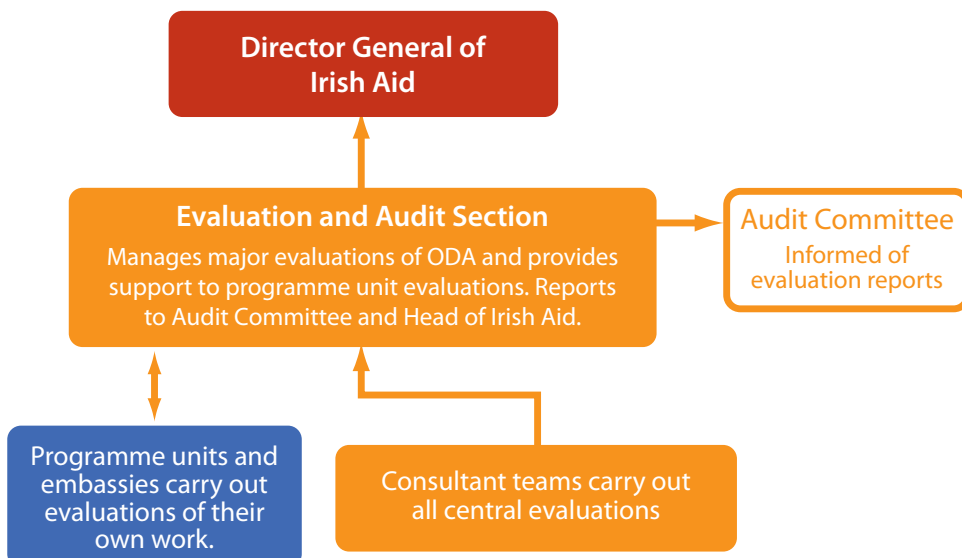
The Section’s mandate covers evaluation of ODA funds administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs but not expenditure administered by other Departments. Multilateral assistance is covered by multilaterals’ own systems and through joint evaluations as possible.

Independence and reporting

Evaluations are conducted by external, independent consultants who are recruited through an open tendering process in accordance with Irish Government procurement procedures. Consultant teams are typically a mixture of international and local consultants from partner countries.

The Department of Foreign Affairs Audit Committee provides an independent perspective on Irish Aid’s audit and evaluation arrangements and reviews the Evaluation and Audit Section’s annual work plans. The committee includes six independent members (four from the private sector and two retired civil servants) and meets six to seven times a year to review all audits and evaluations. It reports to the Secretary General of the Department and its annual reports are publicly available.

Summary of reporting lines and institutional set-up



The Evaluation and Audit Section reports to the Director-General of Irish Aid. All evaluations produced by the Section are submitted directly to the Projects Appraisal and Evaluation Group. They are also given to the Department's independent Audit Committee and published on the website.

Quality

In the interests of increased co-ordination of approaches to evaluation, Irish Aid has adopted the Swedish International Development Agency evaluation manual "Looking back, moving forward" (2004) as its core reference document for the management of evaluation assignments. The Section works to build-in quality through a number of methods including use of the DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation. All evaluations are managed by the Section and supervised by a steering committee or reference group, involving at least one stakeholder from outside Irish Aid (typically from another Irish institution or other experienced individual), representatives of the Section being examined and the Evaluation Section itself.

Planning

The Evaluation and Audit Section's annual operational work plans are framed within a three-year rolling work plan, updated each year. The evaluation plan is not publically available but is shared regularly with the DAC Network. The plan covers strategic evaluations across the entire development programme and is informed by a number of specific criteria for topics, including policy relevance, usefulness, risk, and feasibility. The Section has sought to improve the planning process by moving towards a risk-based approach.

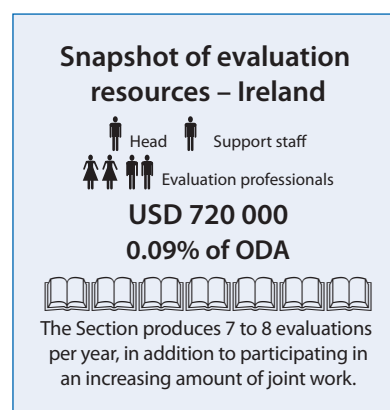
The Head of the Evaluation Section has a major role in proposing the work plan, following extensive consultations with other Sections in Irish Aid, field missions and other Divisions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Plans are then presented to senior management and the independent Audit Committee. The Senior Management Committee does not necessarily accept all the proposals by the Section. The Department of Finance can also have an influence on the plan, particularly for Value for Money and Policy Reviews.

Use of Country Systems and Alignment

The Section welcomes, in principle, the concept of partner-led evaluation and uses local consultants where possible, but has not so far involved partners in lead roles. The degree of involvement varies greatly depending on the type of evaluation. The Section also takes into consideration the situation in the partner country, including the potential for an evaluation to create a burden on that country.

Management Response

To ensure that the findings and recommendations of evaluations are properly taken into account by the operational departments concerned, a management response is formally documented as an "action plan" and published together with the evaluation. This



identifies the actions necessary to improve the quality of the intervention or to rectify problems. When recommendations are rejected by the Division/Section concerned, the reasons for rejection are clearly stated in the management response.

Distribution and use

Evaluation reports are presented in clear and accessible formats for dissemination to stakeholders including via the Irish Aid official website, and formal publications where appropriate. A plan for dissemination of the report, its findings, conclusions and main lessons is created as part of the planning process of an evaluation. Dissemination often includes formal and informal workshops and briefings, and the targeted distribution of reports and abbreviated summaries to different interested groups. Press Releases are prepared for Value-for-Money reviews and other major evaluations. External interest in evaluation, even among NGOs, has been somewhat limited to date. There are occasionally newspaper reports on evaluations, but, in general, public and Parliamentary attention has been low (in contrast to audit reports which typically get more coverage).