

Foresight

Making the future work for you

Towards more sustainable decisions



Environmental
Appraisal
Task Force

The Foresight Programme

The UK Foresight programme brings together the voices of business, government, the science base and others to look at what might happen in the future and what we need to do now to secure long-term competitive advantage and enhanced quality of life for all.

The programme was launched in 1993 following the Government White Paper on science, engineering and technology, *Realising our Potential*. It has a panel-based structure and operates on a five-year cycle. The current round of Foresight began in April 1999 and work has been carried forward through three thematic and ten sectoral panels.

Each Foresight panel looks at the future for a particular area, identifying the challenges and opportunities that the country is likely to face over the next ten to twenty years and beyond. In doing so, Foresight aims to bring about a culture change for the better in the way organisations relate to each other and to the future.

All panels consider the implications of their conclusions for education, skills and training and sustainable development.

This report - and those of the other panels - represent the culmination of over a year's intensive research, debate and discussion. They provide the basis from which panels and others will work to help turn the recommendations into action.

Foresight panels:

- Ageing Population
- Crime Prevention
- Manufacturing 2020
- Built Environment & Transport
- Chemicals
- Defence, Aerospace & Systems
- Energy & Natural Environment
- Financial Services
- Food Chain & Crops for Industry
- Healthcare
- Information, Communications & Media
- Materials
- Retail & Consumer Services

A further industry-led panel is looking at Marine issues and there is a task force addressing the impact of E-commerce on business processes and supply chains.

Copies of the full reports for all panels are available from the Foresight web site at **www.foresight.gov.uk** or by sending a fax to the Office of Science and Technology on: 020 7215 6715.

Foresight also supports an ever-increasing programme of activities for younger people. Further details can be obtained via the fax number above or at **www.youngforesight.org** and **www.visionsonline.org**

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The views expressed in this report are the personal opinions of panel and task force members and do not represent the official views of the organisations they represent, the Office of Science and Technology or the Department of Trade and Industry.

This report is intended to spark discussion and debate and readers should not rely on the information reported to make investment decisions.

1 Environmental Appraisal: The new challenges

Human activity is intrinsically linked to the environment. Choices made individually and collectively, by citizens, companies and public organisations, can have profound effects on nature. In turn, the quality of people's lives is critically dependent on the built environment, the natural resources which sustain it and the natural world which enriches it.

Foresight is about being ready for the future. Emerging environmental challenges such as climate change make it clear that the choices we make here and now have consequences that will be felt for decades to come, perhaps in distant parts of the globe. Environmental Appraisal is about understanding these consequences and the complex chains of cause and effect that underlie them. Environmental Appraisal is intrinsic to the Foresight process.

The Task Force adopted the following working definition:

“Environmental appraisal refers to the systematic analysis and evaluation of the environmental effects and implications of human activities. It is driven by the need to inform decision makers of the likely environmental consequences of an activity and to choose between competing options.”

The box opposite defines a number of terms widely used within the policy appraisal/environmental assessment communities.†

Decisions, whether taken at the strategic or project level, need to be informed by high quality, scientifically based analysis. At the same time, the environmental, social and economic consequences of decisions will have varying implications for different groups within society. Environmental appraisal is therefore more than a technical exercise it must also communicate to the affected groups and to the decision makers. It is inseparable from the decision-making process itself and must be designed to meet the needs of decision-makers and those whose interests are at stake. Best practice approaches should not only expedite decision-making, but also enhance the legitimacy of the decision that is finally taken.

The drive for more holistic policy-making set out in the *Modernising Government* White Paper poses challenges and opportunities for environmental appraisal. The pursuit of sustainable development requires the environmental, social and economic consequences of decisions to be appraised simultaneously. Some consider that this means *extending* environmental appraisal to take into account the social and economic dimensions. But the consensus of the Task Force is that what is required is integration. Environmental appraisal needs to be *integrated* with social and economic factors and contribute to wider sustainability appraisal.

† A number of terms commonly used in relation to policy appraisal and environmental assessment have quite specific meanings for different professional communities. The Box 1 is not intended to be definitive, but simply sets out how the Task Force has used these terms.

A SHORTER DICTIONARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL APPRAISAL

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA): A process for systematically identifying, predicting and determining the significance of the environmental effects of development proposals in order to aid the decision making process. For many types of project, this is a formal legal requirement under EU Directive 97/11.

Environmental Report: A statutory document prepared to fulfil the requirements of the EC Directive of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment.

Evaluation: The ex-post process of assessing the success of a policy or measure in bringing about the changes originally intended.

Non-Technical Summary: A document summarising the environmental statement or other environmental appraisal report for wide circulation to the general public.

Plan: A set of co-ordinated and timed measures for the implementation of a policy.

Policy: A statement of aims and ideals that will guide and determine present and future decisions. It sets a definitive course or method of action selected from alternatives so as to influence future actions at an early stage. Policies may be laid down by means of laws, guidelines, ministerial circulars, bulletins, manuals, etc.

Programme: An outline of the means by which the intentions of the policy be brought into operation.

Project: A planned undertaking or a detailed development proposal.

Scoping: An activity to determine the nature and potential scale of the environmental consequences of a proposed action through consultation in order to facilitate an efficient environmental appraisal process.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA): A systematic process for the evaluation of the environmental effects of a policy, plan or programme

Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive: The European Union Draft Directive on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment.

Strategy: A generalised approach comprising either policies or generic measures seeking to address area-wide issues.

Sustainability Appraisal: An appraisal of the potential impacts of different strategic options in order to integrate sustainable development into the formulation of policies.

The challenges for environmental appraisal

Environmental appraisal has become a mature and professionally recognised activity. Project-level environmental impact assessment (EIA) has a decades-long history. But the incremental development of existing tools and techniques is no longer enough. The Task Force initially identified three leading edge challenges in environmental appraisal which were confirmed in the consultation process:

High level environmental appraisal: We need to develop tools, techniques and processes which will assist with the appraisal of policies, plans and programmes. We must also develop approaches for tiering environmental appraisals conducted at different levels, i.e. policy appraisal at the highest level, the strategic assessment of plans and programmes (commonly known as SEA), and project-level environmental impact assessment.

the integration with social and economic factors: We need to learn how to integrate social and economic factors alongside environmental factors in the context of wider sustainability appraisal. The close alignment of sustainable development with quality of life demands that environmental appraisal be firmly anchored in the wider social context.

monitoring and evaluation over time: 'Evidence-based policy' as espoused in the *Modernising Government* White Paper demands that policies, programmes, plans and projects be rigorously monitored and evaluated to assess the effectiveness of different approaches. Appraisal techniques themselves must be evaluated and their effectiveness in predicting the outcomes of particular decisions put to the test. Only in this way will the quality and utility of environmental appraisal be improved.

To be '**fit for purpose**', environmental appraisal must also meet the following criteria.

social legitimacy: The time when people simply accepted decisions made by companies or even democratically constituted bodies is long past. Decision-making and the appraisal processes that inform them must take due account of the aspirations and needs of all those who will be affected. Processes need to be socially inclusive and accessible to those who have legitimate standing.

scientific rigour: Although processes must be socially inclusive, they should not result in those who can voice their concerns most loudly or most articulately wielding greater influence. Appraisal techniques must be based on the highest scientific standards for data and analysis so that competing claims can be assessed fairly.

timely decision-making: The complexity of decision-making can lead to very lengthy deliberative processes. There is a need to expedite decision-making, though not at the expense of public legitimacy. Well designed, usable appraisal techniques and processes may not remove conflict, but they can contribute to building consensus where this is possible, and pinpointing areas of unavoidable conflict for the decision process to resolve.

Following an initial meeting in February 2000, the Task Force held an 'issues and opportunities' workshop in April. The issues emerging from that workshop formed the basis for the consultation document *Making Sustainability Count* which appeared in August. A total of 67 responses were received to the consultation document. A list of those that responded can be found at Annex A while Annex B summarises the key messages from the consultation. The full responses can be found on the Foresight website at www.foresight.gov.uk.

The main report now goes on to highlight the more specific actions that must be taken if the complex challenges of environmental appraisal in the context of sustainable development are to be met.

2 What needs to be done?

Building on the input from the consultation exercise, the Task Force has developed a set of recommendations for all those involved in environmental or sustainability appraisal.

This includes:

- **government**, at all levels from central through regional and local;
- **professionals** and professional organisations, including consultants, engaged in the practice of environmental appraisal;
- the **business** sector;
- **non-governmental organisations (NGOs)** and the **voluntary sector**;
- **the research community**, including research councils and other funding agencies; and
- those involved with **training and education**.

The recommendations that follow are specific to each of these sectors. However, it must be emphasised that close collaboration across sectors is critical to making progress. Each sector needs to take into account the four generic conclusions:

- **the environmental, social and economic strands of appraisal must be brought together to inform decisions. These may need to be assessed separately, but must be reported together for the decision process.**
- **social appraisal techniques need further development and should take better account of the distribution of impacts on different sections of the community.**
- **appraisal has to move up the decision-making ladder to the strategic levels of policies, plans and programmes. To the extent that the responsibility for conducting appraisals moves to officials rather than professionals in the assessment community, there will need to be much more emphasis on simple approaches backed up by suitable training and awareness.**
- **Evidence-based policy making means that there will need to be more emphasis on monitoring and evaluation throughout and after the life of a project or programme. Indicators and targets will need to be built in right from the beginning.**

Finally, the ultimate beneficiary of effective environmental appraisal is society as a whole. All those involved in environmental appraisal and decision-making need to move forwards in ways that will facilitate and encourage greater public involvement.

Government

Government has a critical role to play in environmental and sustainability appraisal. Central government develops overall policies and strategies, interprets EU obligations and provides guidance for agencies and other levels of governments. The devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales have an increasing role to play. Local and regional authorities set the framework for development in their own areas.

Government plays a pivotal role in the sense that it co-ordinates the actions of other actors including business. It needs to maintain a good dialogue with the professional communities to ensure that capacity is available to conduct the appraisal, monitoring and evaluation exercises implied by its policy aims and programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- government at all levels needs to be transparent about the ways in which appraisals enter into the policy process and influence actual decisions.
- government needs to further develop processes of consultation and consider when and how deeper public participation in decision-making might be appropriate and how best to make its influence visible so that contributors know that they have been heard.
- policies, plans and programmes should be designed from the start to include appropriate targets and indicators. This will allow outcomes to be evaluated and will facilitate policy learning.
- government should work together with the professional community to develop and promulgate best practice approaches to environmental and sustainability appraisals. This guidance should be clear but not prescriptive and set out what is expected and the appropriate level of assessment. This role needs to be well understood by all groups and suitable resources made available.
- in designing and implementing regulatory regimes in the environmental and economic domains (e.g. integrated pollution prevention and control, or water industry regulation), government and agencies should take into account the broader strategy of sustainable development so that advances in appraisal and decision-making are not frustrated by narrowly focused and inappropriate regulatory constraints.

Professionals

The UK has a well-developed professional community in environmental appraisal, which is among the world leaders. This provides an excellent platform for UK consultants to compete in global markets for appraisal services. Much of that expertise lies in project-level environmental impact assessment. Strategic environmental assessment and the move towards wider sustainability appraisal pose some fundamental challenges. Professional organisations such as IEMA (Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment) and Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) are well placed to enhance practice and to highlight research and training needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- the professional community needs to be aware of the ways in which appraisal influences decisions and should work with decision-makers to facilitate this crucial link.
- existing skills and competencies in the professional community need to be supplemented. Skills and insights from the social sciences for example need to be introduced. Capacity building is required, as is engagement with different disciplines.
- common information sources and databases should be developed to improve the comparability of appraisals and make the process more efficient: quality standards for appraisal methods and data sources are required.
- the transfer of knowledge within the appraisal community, including exchange of case studies and best practice examples, needs to be accelerated. Existing professional associations should take on this role.
- to work with Government to develop best practice guidance

Business

While much of the debate about environmental appraisal relates to public investment and infrastructure projects, UK business has some particular interests. Global perspectives may drive the business approach rather than national or even European concerns. These concerns fall into two classes. First, the environmental consequences of business activities may be experienced at the global level (e.g. climate change). Second, such companies may operate in global markets with production activities and customers in a diverse set of locations.

Advances in environmental reporting and target setting are having a significant effect on business. The move away from environmental appraisal to wider sustainability appraisal will have a significant effect on business in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- the credibility and effectiveness of environmental appraisal will be enhanced if companies are seen to use it as well as become more transparent about their operations and their impacts. The growth of environmental reporting incorporating quantitative indicators and targets is a welcome development and one that needs to be extended more widely in the corporate sector.
- business needs to consider how sustainability issues - environmental, social and economic - can be brought into strategic level decision-making.
- companies, like government, need to consider means of consulting stakeholders about key decisions and, where appropriate, engaging them in the decision-making process.
- global companies should develop and communicate clear values and standards that will underpin all of their decisions, while remaining sensitive to the particular circumstances in which they operate. Environmental appraisal, and even more so social appraisal, needs to take account of local context.

The Voluntary Sector

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the voluntary sector play a unique role within environmental policy. They usually enjoy a far greater degree of public trust than do government or business. They also help to focus public opinion and are a powerful channel for wider concerns. NGOs have sometimes stood back from the environmental appraisal process, but could make a new contribution if the will and the resources are in place.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- environmental NGOs and community groups have a vital role to play in improving the quality and legitimacy of environmental appraisal and decision-making. They should seek to participate wherever feasible.
- NGOs and voluntary groups should be encouraged to become users of appraisal tools and techniques as well as advocating the interests of those they represent.
- the resources available to NGOs are often limited and consideration should be given to a degree of financial support for their participation in environmental appraisal processes.

The Research Community

The research community is widely dispersed and comprises funding agencies (including research councils and foundations), universities, public agencies and the consultancy sector. The community faces two main challenges with respect to environmental and sustainability appraisal. First, it must strive to develop appraisal techniques and processes which are workable, usable and meet the needs of practitioners. Second, because sustainability appraisal is intrinsically interdisciplinary, there is an urgent need for the research councils and others to work together in order to bring expertise from the natural and social sciences together to address common problems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- there is an acute need to build bridges between research and practice so that appraisal tools and techniques are usable and generate understandable, readily accessible information for decision-makers. Alliances with consultants and businesses who apply appraisal techniques in practice would help in this respect.
- the need for the development of appraisal techniques is most pressing in the field of social appraisal.
- the research community should develop, test and validate participatory approaches to environmental appraisal and SEA
- the research community should work to improve the measurement of environmental and other impacts to improve appraisal and subsequent monitoring and evaluation.
- there is a need for work on targets, indicators and, where appropriate, weighting and scoring techniques, which can be used to address trade-offs explicitly and facilitate links between appraisal and decision-making
- information on environmental resources needs to be more accessible, and methods for predicting the significance of impacts of human activity over time need to be made available to the appraisal community along with techniques for post appraisal monitoring and evaluation.

Training and Education

Education and training is vital if high-quality environmental appraisal is to be supported in the long-term. It covers both undergraduate and post-graduate training in the university sector and wider continuing professional development. Education and training activities for overseas students and professionals is an economic opportunity in its own right.

Education and training is not only for practitioners. The latest developments in strategic environmental assessment means that training is a key requirement for a number of groups: users and decision makers including Ministers, Councillors and NGO officers, the public (which often wants more detailed information that strategic appraisals cannot deliver); and statutory organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- training and guidance is needed for officials conducting evaluations within Government departments. The emphasis should be on continuing professional development, covering both methodologies and “designing in” evaluation requirements into policies and programmes
- professionals may need more training in the production of technical information written in lay language to facilitate greater public involvement and the use of innovative multi-criteria approaches. Decision-makers also need to be trained in techniques for involving the public in environmental appraisal.
- scientific and technical experts need to be made aware of the implications of social impact assessment and trained in its practice.
- interdisciplinary training at the higher education level will help to educate future practitioners.

3 Moving Forward

We are faced by new scientific and technological advances on a daily basis. The work of the Task Force and the feedback from the consultation exercise have made it clear that important challenges lie ahead for both decision-makers and those involved with the environmental, social and economic appraisal of options. Appraisal cannot be divorced from the decision-making process itself.

The biggest challenge now is to locate environmental appraisal within the wider context of sustainable development. It will no longer be enough to assess environmental impacts independently of social and economic consequences. Hence, the well-established environmental appraisal community needs to work alongside other professional groups to develop rounded 'sustainability appraisals'.

The Energy and Natural Environment (ENE) Panel intends to take forward the work of the Task Force by promoting the implementation of the recommendations contained in this report. A seminar to be held in early 2001 will provide an opportunity to debate the merits of various options for moving ahead with a wider group.

One option is to set up a small implementation group consisting of a number of members of the Environmental Appraisal Task Force together with some co-opted members. This group would have the task of meeting, over the next few months, with various organisations identified in this report to promote the findings. Another option is to organise a conference to highlight the recommendations and promulgate the recommendations to a wider community.

Whatever the implementation mechanism, the pertinence and urgency of the recommendations set out in this report cannot be over-stated.

Annex A

Consultation Responses: Breakdown by type of respondent

67 responses were received. Five respondents requested confidentiality; the rest were posted on the Foresight web site and are listed below. Some organisations could be allocated to more than one category and we have made the judgement where these are placed.

Individual: 6%

Business: 35%

Learned bodies / societies / institutions: 11%

Academia / research including the Research Councils: 12 %

Government (including Agencies and Local): 29%

NGO / VO: 1%

Regulator: 5%

Trade Associations: 1%

List of respondents

Tanya Bailey
(London Underground)

Duncan Bayliss
(University of West England)

Pete Black

Arnold Cohen

Steven Durno
(Law Society)

Nicolas Falk
(URBED)

Dr Feest
(Bristol University)

Ian Godfrey
(East Hampshire District
Council)

Dr Colin Green
(Middlesex University)

Anthony Harrington
(Yorkshire Water)

Peter Harris
(Maunsell Ltd)

Mike Holland
(AEA Technology)

Dr Alan Keeling
(Harper Adams University)

Helen King
(Renewable Energy Systems Ltd)

J C Lavin
(Bullen Consultants)

Barbara Le Pelley
(Island Development
Committee)

Dr Derek Lohmann

Dave Luddington

N P McChesney
(City Development Directorate)

Lee Melin
(The Landscape Partnership)

Dr Richard Pagett

James Rainbird

Susheel Rao
(BRE)

Nathan Richardson
(Posford Duvivier)

Neil Scales
(Merseytravel)

Andrew Stirling
(University of Sussex)

Reg Sell

Helen Sisman
(English Nature)

Clare Springett
(Steer Davies Gleave)

Michael Steele
(Babtie Group)

Mark Taylor
(Crayford Town Hall)

Riki Therivel

Sian Thornthwaite
(Derbyshire County Council)

Andy Tomczynoki
(Thames Water)

Jonathan Tyler
(Passenger Transport Networks)

Mark West

Dr White
(Proctor and Gamble)

British Airways

The Coal Authority

Council for British Archeology

Countryside Council

Enviros Aspinwall

Environment Agency

Environment and Society

Research Unit (University
College, London)

The Geological Society of
London

Industrial Research &
Technology Unit

The Institute of Logistics and
Transport

The Joint Committee on
Mobility of Blind and Partially
Sighted People

Law Society

Local Government Association

Mersey Travel

Northern Ireland Housing
Executive

Northumbria Water

OFWAT

Royal Institution of Chartered
Surveyors

Royal Town Planning Institute

SEPA

Severn Trent Water

Thames Water

Water UK

Yorkshire Water

Annex B

Analysis of consultation responses to “Making sustainability count”

A short summary of the responses received from individuals and organisations to the Task Force’s consultation document is given below. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Task Force.

The majority of respondents felt that the main challenges - the appraisal of policies, plans and programmes; the integration of social and economic factors; and monitoring and evaluation over time - were correctly identified by the Task Force. Respondents focused less on two cross-cutting issues highlighted in the consultation document - the ‘tiering’ of project/programme assessments and the global context in which business operates.

About a third of those who responded said that the most important issue was the integration of social and economic issues with environmental issues and that we should concentrate, in future, on producing sustainability appraisals. However, four respondents made the comment that the appraisal of the three issues should be undertaken separately with the challenge being to maximise the information available to decision-makers. It was acknowledged that whether or not there is integration, the appraisal of social factors lags behind those developed for environmental and economic factors and requires new techniques.

One respondent identified a further challenge which was explaining to organisations and businesses the value of such work and building support for its use.

In terms of the developments of Environmental Appraisal required in the future most suggestions were based around the following: -

- data - what is needed, where to find it, developing methods and techniques which are not data hungry
- involving the public in the process whilst avoiding consultation fatigue
- developing techniques for handling international and/or global implications
- using scoping to highlight key issues, areas of research and stakeholders at earliest opportunity.
- reducing the costs of Environmental Appraisal
- development of standards for Environmental Appraisal

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

In addition to the challenges for SEA set out in the consultation document the following were also identified by a number of respondents:

- tools so that strategic goals can be interpreted at a local level
- being able to handle divergent views and dissent as well as consensus
- explicitly handling uncertainty
- requirements for SEA should be flexible enough to allow different techniques to be applied to different types of plans and programmes within a common framework.

The majority of respondents felt that there were some aspects of the experience of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) that could be used to meet some of the challenges of SEA. These included the overall principles of EIA such as stakeholder inclusion, transparency, systematic approach to assessment and the use of experienced professionals. The comment was also made that EIA at the project level has involved the collection of detailed environmental data and this could be used for SEAs. Another respondent said that many programmes and some plans are in effect groups of projects. Where these are fairly location-specific EIA techniques can provide the basis for an appraisal. A final comment was made that encouraging private sector innovation in the development of SEA will be crucial (as happened in UK with EIAs).

Many respondents felt that reconciling SEA with narrowly focused regulatory systems was not possible at present, although one respondent felt that the planning system already does this to some extent. Other comments made on this subject included:

- the regulatory system may need to change to incorporate SEA successfully
- SEA must take account of specific regulatory system but regulation must not be the driving force.
- reconciling the two may limit scope of application and reduce the value of carrying out SEAs
- SEA provides an opportunity to transcend the fragmentation of specific regulatory systems and lead to a more holistic approach
- specific regulatory systems can be reconciled if the SEA methods that are developed and applied are standardised, robust and transparent.
- SEA should determine the regulatory role

Most respondents thought that usual methods such as seminars, guidance (from DETR and Professional bodies), case studies and journals could be used to share experience of SEA amongst practitioners. A SEA newsletter was suggested by one responder (TRL already produce one for transportation). The use of the web was also suggested by a number of respondents with others taking this further to suggest this could be an interactive web based database containing baseline data derived from SEAs and EIAs, techniques for data analysis, impact prediction models, environmental statements and reports, evaluation of assessments.

There was general agreement with what had been proposed in the consultation document for research, education and training on SEA with particular emphasis on :-

- best practice guidance and practical courses
- techniques for comparative assessment and for handling uncertainties
- piloting of SEAs using existing techniques then evaluate to see what development of specific techniques is required.
- comparing predictions of Environmental Appraisal with outcomes

The Social Dimension

There was acknowledgement from most respondents that social issues were poorly addressed at present. There was a difference of opinion as to whether they should be integrated with the environmental appraisal (and economic) or kept separate. One comment made several times was the need to ensure that there is no 'double counting' when separate assessments are made across the different dimensions of sustainability.

Many of those who responded felt that tools already existed to assess social impacts of policies, plans and projects. The key is to work with social scientists that are already familiar with such techniques. It was suggested that a study is needed to see what is required, what is available and how to close the gap.

In terms of public participation a number of examples were provided of effective public participation in Environmental Appraisal. Some of the lessons learnt were:

- earlier more informed consultation may be more productive.
- the process is enhanced by public involvement, commitment and support at a local level even where a development is controversial.
- developers are often afraid of public consultation and are reluctant to apply more than limited resources.
- the lesson of Agenda21 is that when local, cross-sectoral groups look into even the most confrontational issues, they can reach a consensus concerning a sensible way to proceed
- effective participation needs resourcing (including time), and must provide recipients with real options.
- a too lengthy or bureaucratic process will increase apathy and consultation fatigue
- the key issue is the timing of consultation and ensuring all key stakeholders are represented.

In terms of research, education and training there was broad agreement with what was in the consultation document. Other suggestions included:

- research to see how effective participation has been
- more research on reaching those who are excluded from society by social, physical and organisational reasons
- an agreed focus for discussing and confirming best practice, and for agreeing the content and funding of research education and training
- a guidance document
- more interaction among appraisal specialists

Evaluation over Time

There were differences of opinion on the implications of more frequent evaluations (ex-post) for the design of policies and programmes. Some felt that there would be positive benefits such as producing more robust and clearly defined policies and programmes. Others thought that this might mean that only policies with outcomes which could be measured would be monitored. Another view was it would only be useful if the evaluation leads into review and revision of the policies, plans and programmes. A final point made was that although there will be time and cost implications of more frequent evaluations, they would lead to a more transparent decision making process and more sustainable and effective policies in the long term.

Generally it was felt that not much could be learnt from evaluation methodologies from other sectors, such as education and health, as each sector has its own problems and concerns which limits read across benefits.

A number of responders felt that core indicators can be used for measuring/monitoring improvements and could be incorporated into the assessments and appraisal via a checklist. They would also provide useful target/thresholds that are readily available and have been consulted on. However, difficulties were highlighted including proving the project led to the upward or downward trend. They would also be less useful at a local level.

There was no overall consensus among respondents about who should undertake evaluations. There was support for professional, responsible officials, both or either. An alternative view was that it should not matter who undertakes the evaluation if the evaluation process is open, accountable and consistently applied and the person is capable.

In terms of the research required most responses were based around providing guidance and case study information including cost savings/implications of proper evaluation, and standard reporting formats to allow comparison and benchmarking of good practice. Education and training are also required in emerging techniques which need to be integrated into existing courses and continuing professional development (CPD) for practitioners.

Tiering

Generally most respondents agreed that there would be advantages to tiering appraisals such as improved consistency, but also difficulties such as the introduction of delays.

Other comments received were:

- case studies are needed to demonstrate the benefits
- tiering will work when the links between different spatial scales are fairly obvious, e.g. in the transport sector
- tiering would provide explicit linkages between national, regional, local and community level of activity. Linkages would be enhanced by common approaches to data assembly, collection and evaluation.
- need to recognise that techniques and information needs are different at different levels of appraisal.
- tiering should be used as a means of screening proposals, so that damaging ones are weeded out. It can also be used to scoping assessments.

Although some people did not believe that there were examples of good practice in tiering in the UK, others suggested a number of positive examples including:

- the building regulation process
- land use and transport
- aviation policy.
- the System of granting exploration licenses for oil and gas
- the development plan process
- the EU water framework directive
- DETR/Highways Agency multi-modal studies
- EA flood defence strategies

In terms of where to introduce effective tiering there was no overall consensus amongst the respondents. Many thought that tiering would only happen through direction/legislation by Government. Whilst others thought that it might happen if guidance and information on best practice were provided. It was suggested that some sort of demonstration of the benefits of tiered appraisal through achieved results and transfer of best practice is needed. Others thought that this was already happening (town and country planning)

The majority of those who responded felt that well-defined procedures for higher level appraisal would not speed up the assessment of individual projects. However, a number felt that it would bring other benefits such as

- reducing consultation and public inquiry time
- allowing the project to gain credence.
- clear and accessible information on higher level aims could help to focus attention on relevant effects of projects to establish measuring systems and indicators for their effects.

Some did believe that higher level appraisal could speed up assessment of individual projects and more importantly make the assessment process more effective at identifying environmental risks earlier. One way forward suggested by one respondent was to use case studies to provide fundamental retrospective lessons on what is practically needed at different levels of appraisal to produce better project outcomes

The Global Dimension

There was no overall consensus from respondents on the likely future global standards for Environmental Appraisal. There was support for international law, local regulations and company standards, as well as combinations of the three. Other comments were:

- it is not possible to have a unified standard based on experience in many countries
- globalisation will lead to pressures to undertake a consistent standard of appraisal, commensurate with level and quality of information that is available and the standards of the decision making protocols that exist
- the most stringent standards encounter in any one market place should be applied to all other markets.

Finally a number of suggestions were made as to how to companies could integrate environmental, social and economic considerations into operational decision making. These included:

- having an active and authoritative ethics and environment committee of the main (plc) board is good start
- having a sustainability management system based on ISO 14001
- company reporting

Panel and Task Force members

ENVIRONMENTAL APPRAISAL TASK FORCE

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Policy Studies Institute

Dr Andrew Brookes
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Yvette de Garis
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⁺ Until September 2000

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