

Meta-Evaluation

A Synthesis of Evaluation Studies
2005 – 2016

December 2016



The Commonwealth

EVALUATION SERIES NO. 104

Meta-Evaluation

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Contents

Acronyms	v
1. Executive Summary	1
2. Introduction	3
2.1 Background	3
2.2 Purpose and scope	4
2.3 Structure of report	4
3. Methodology	5
3.1 Introduction	5
3.2 Desk review	5
3.3 Recommendation tracking	5
3.4 Quality assessment	6
3.5 Interviews	6
3.6 Dissemination seminar	7
3.7 Limitations and constraints	7
4. Findings	8
4.1 Overview of evaluation reports reviewed	8
4.2 Recommendation tracking and synthesis	8
4.3 Synthesis of key learning and recommendations	10
4.4 Quality assessment	15
4.5 Secretariat evaluation and learning processes	20
5. Key Factors Influencing Lack of Utilisation of Evaluation Products at the Secretariat	23
5.1 Introduction	23
5.2 Quality factors	23
5.3 Relational factors	24
5.4 Organisational factors	24

6. Conclusions and Recommendations	26
6.1 Conclusions	26
6.2 Recommendations for improving the uptake of evaluation products within the Secretariat	26
6.3 Recommendations for Strategic planning	28
6.4 Following up on recommendations from this study	29
7. Annexes	30
7.1 Terms of Reference for Meta-Evaluation	30
7.2 Evaluation Framework	33
7.3 List of evaluations and other documents reviewed	35
7.4 Quality Assessment Tool	37
7.5 Interview guide	42
7.6 List of Secretariat staff interviewed	44

Acronyms

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
CFTC	Commonwealth Fund for Technical Assistance
CMDF	Commonwealth Media Development Fund
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DACO	Development Assistance Cooperation Office
KM	Knowledge Management
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCP	Primary Contact Point
PMIS	Programme Management Information System
QAT	Quality Assessment Tool
RBM	Results-based management
SCP	Singapore Cooperation Programme
Secretariat	Commonwealth Secretariat
SPED	Strategic Planning and Evaluation Division
TACOS	Terms and Conditions of Service
TAU	Technical Assistance Unit
ToR	Terms of Reference

1. Executive Summary

This meta-evaluation reviewed 30 evaluation reports across an 11-year period from June 2005 to June 2016. The purpose of the study was:

- to provide an overall synthesis of learning and recommendations generated by the evaluations;
- to assess the quality of evaluations conducted and the follow-up and implementation of recommendations.

Specifically, the study was expected to provide two sets of recommendations. First, recommendations on how the evaluation function can be improved within the Secretariat. Second, a set of broader recommendations – drawn from the synthesis exercise – which have direct implications for the design of the next Strategic Plan.

The core finding of this study is that the Secretariat is not yet utilising evaluations strategically for decision-making and organisational learning and does not have the institutional learning mechanisms in place to support this. The study found some key factors that are impeding the utilisation of evaluations at the Secretariat. They are as follows:

- **Quality of processes and products.** The study revealed clear pockets of strength in the Secretariat's evaluation function; however, the lack of clarity around intended use and primary users of the evaluations and the lack of meaningful and consistent engagement with those users, in addition to the lack of systematic follow-up mechanisms, significantly impede the uptake of evaluation findings and recommendations.
- **Knowledge management systems.** Due to the Secretariat's rotation policy along with frequent restructuring, robust knowledge management systems are crucial, yet knowledge management systems at the Secretariat continue to be weak and fragmented. Therefore evaluation findings and recommendations are not systematically stored or easily accessible for utilisation.

- **Role of the Evaluation Section.** Although documented processes relating to the evaluation function do exist, they are not widely known about or understood outside of the Strategic Planning and Evaluation Division and they are not necessarily followed. There is also the perception of a lack of transparency around how the evaluation function operates. All of this can ultimately lead to disengagement with evaluation processes and products.
- **Location of the Evaluation Section.** Engaging with the evaluation function is strongly affected by the level of credibility that is placed on it and the positioning of the Evaluation Section within the organisation. There is a perception that the Evaluation Section lacks impartiality due to its positioning within the organisational structure, with personnel having to navigate between many layers of influence and pressures between the Evaluation Section and the Board of Governors.
- **Resourcing of the Evaluation Section.** It was clear from the process of undertaking this study that the Evaluation Section is not adequately resourced either in terms of financial or human capacity. This puts a strain on the section's ability to carry out day-to-day work effectively and indeed to overcome the obstacles stated above.

In response to the above findings, recommendations¹ for strengthening the evaluation function have been made as follows:

1. Define and clarify roles in relation to the evaluation function by:
 - a. finalising the draft Evaluation Policy; and
 - b. revising and strengthening the Evaluation Guidelines.
2. Relocate and elevate Evaluation Section to an independent unit in the organisation.

¹ Some of these recommendations are written here in an edited form. They can be found in full in the 'Conclusions and recommendations' section at the end of the report.

3. Establish peer review committees to oversee evaluations.
4. Improve quality of the Evaluation Section's processes and products by:
 - a. clearer and precise definition and targeting of evaluation end-users;
 - b. revision of the guidance on evaluation ToRs;
 - c. incorporation of gender mainstreaming into the Evaluation Guidelines;
 - d. defining what 'value for money' means for the Secretariat;
 - e. agreeing minimum thresholds for evaluation budgets;
 - f. implementation of mechanism for tracking of recommendation uptake;
 - g. incorporation of regular annual meta-evaluation; and
 - h. development of a capacity building plan for the evaluation function.
5. Develop an evaluation Knowledge Management Strategy and system.
6. Develop a Communication Strategy for the evaluation function.
7. Conduct regular and systematic synthesis of evaluation reports.
8. Invest sufficient time, finance and human resources in the Evaluation Section.

In terms of strategic planning more broadly, there was much repetition of similar findings and recommendations across the evaluations reviewed. The synthesis exercise generated recommendations for strategic planning purposes as follows:

1. Continue to pay attention to and implement the recommendations from the Training Evaluation that was undertaken in 2010.
2. Develop a Secretariat-wide approach to coordination across Divisions, within Divisions, with Primary Contact Points (PCPs) and with external stakeholders, in order to improve effectiveness and maximise the impact of the Secretariat's work.
3. Develop a Secretariat-wide approach for exploring, developing and maintaining strategic partnerships in order to maximise resources and impact.
4. The Secretariat should identify opportunities and invest in raising the visibility and awareness of the Secretariat, its comparative advantages and its work.
5. Commit to and invest in development of an organisational-wide knowledge management strategy and system.
6. Human resources and senior management to engage with evaluation findings and ensure a review of key policies in relation to how the Secretariat engages with consultants.
7. Continue to conduct proper scoping missions and needs assessment and abstain from activities unless it is clear that an enabling environment exists.
8. Continue to invest time and resources in order to fully operationalise the gender mainstreaming strategy.

2. Introduction

2.1 Background

The Commonwealth Secretariat is the principal governing body of the Commonwealth. In response to the evolving development context and demands of member countries, the Secretariat has adopted an increasingly results-oriented approach since 2008. This is evidenced in the current Strategic Plan (2013/14–2016/17), as well as by: the streamlining of results-based management (RBM) across the Secretariat; the adoption of increasingly robust evaluation frameworks; and the quality and depth of reports of organisational results, which have been well received by the Board.

The Secretariat's evaluation function is managed by the Evaluation Section in the Strategic Planning and Evaluation Division (SPED). The Evaluation Section was established in 1993 with the objective of promoting transparency and accountability, by facilitating the systematic and objective review of the Secretariat's portfolio of projects. Since the establishment of the section, a total of 103 evaluations have been conducted.

In 2003, the Secretariat commissioned a study on *The Commonwealth Secretariat's Follow-up and Utilization of Evaluation Findings* to assess the extent and quality of follow-up on recommendations arising from the evaluation processes and the degree to which evaluations had been utilised for decision-making and organisational learning. The study reviewed a sample of 30 evaluations managed and conducted by the Evaluation Section from 1995 to 2003. An analysis of recommendation quality, endorsement status and implementation was conducted. Further analysis was conducted on the evaluation processes and systems that contribute to utilisation, including organisational learning and performance measurement.

The main conclusions of the 2003 study were as follows:

- *Analysis of the evaluation recommendation inventory revealed that the overall quality of recommendations and their success rate for endorsement and/or implementation in the Secretariat was only moderate to fair.*
- *Regarding evaluation systems and processes, past and existing procedures for planning, design, management, reporting and dissemination were found to have both strengths and weaknesses, with extensive room for improvement.*
- *The organisational context for evaluation was found to be a positive but challenging one. The introduction of RBM provides the basis for defining a much more strategic and performance-oriented role for evaluation; however, there are significant weaknesses in organisational learning processes and in feedback loops for M&E that need to be remedied in the short-term by SPED, senior management and all programming staff.*

Furthermore, as part of the strategic planning process in 2013, a synthesis study of 15 evaluations conducted between 2003 and 2010 was undertaken internally by the Evaluation Section. The study assessed all recommendations and highlighted ten recommendations for consideration in the strategic planning process. These findings were used as part of the planning for the current Strategic Plan (2013/14–2016/17).

The major conclusion of the internal study in 2013 was as follows:

- *On a strategic, macro-organisational level there is a breakdown between evaluation function and both strategic planning and programmatic work. The fact that the same evaluation recommendations migrate from one decade to another, and across several studies, indicates a definite disconnect in the feedback loop.*

In recent years there has been a change in approach in evaluations, with greater focus now being given to thematic and country evaluations, as well as impact assessments. This approach has proved to be more cost-effective, given the limited size and resource base of the Secretariat's programmes. All Secretariat evaluations are expected to include a strong examination of processes, particularly design and delivery, which are critical aspects that contribute to programme effectiveness. In order to define the focus and scope of future work, the evaluations should also have a strong strategic

focus that examines the changing developmental landscape and priorities.

2.2 Purpose and scope

The purpose of the meta-evaluation was to provide an overall assessment and synthesis of the learning and recommendations generated by the evaluation reports. In addition, the study set out to assess the quality of evaluations conducted, level of follow-up and implementation of recommendations and nature of lessons learnt over the period, making broader recommendations from both the strategic and operational perspectives that will directly input into the next strategic planning process (Strategic Plan, 2017/18–2021/22). (See Terms of Reference at Annex 7.1.)

The specific objectives of this meta-evaluation were as follows:

- to assess the quality of evaluations conducted, including the quality and applicability of the lessons and recommendations, against agreed international standards;
- to assess the level of implementation of recommendations, aggregate key recommendations not yet implemented and propose tracking mechanisms;
- to propose mechanisms for improving utilisation of the recommendations and the lessons learnt moving forward;
- to provide recommendations on how the evaluation function can be improved within the Secretariat; and
- to identify issues, challenges and lessons learnt and make recommendations for the design of the next Strategic Plan (2017/18–2021/22).

The key focus of this study was not to compare the evaluations or programmes against each other, but to assess the overall quality of the evaluations that took place across the set period, and to synthesise the key learning and recommendations – from both the strategic and operational perspectives – that have direct implications on the next part of the strategic planning process.

The intended primary users of the meta-evaluation are internal to the Secretariat, with the final report being submitted to the Board. The aim is that the end-product be used both to inform strategic planning and

to strengthen the systems and processes that form the evaluation function within the Secretariat.

The following broad evaluation questions were agreed between the consultant and SPED:

1. What are the major strengths and weaknesses of the evaluations and what factors contribute to their quality?
2. To what extent are evaluations utilised for decision-making and organisational learning?
3. How can the evaluation function strengthen its contribution towards organisational learning?
4. What are the key lessons and recommendations that can be extracted, distilled, and synthesised for input into the next strategic planning process?

Part way through the study, it was mutually agreed between the consultant and SPED that the scope of the aspect of the study that involved tracking the implementation status of recommendations should be narrowed. Initial plans involved tracking the status of every recommendation from all 30 evaluation reports. However, given the capacity issues within SPED, it was acknowledged that this was not a realistic target within the set timeframe. Recommendation status tracking was therefore reduced to only five select evaluations for the purposes of this study.

2.3 Structure of report

The remainder of this report is set out as follows. Section 3 covers the meta-evaluation methodology and approach, including constraints that were encountered while undertaking the study, and the effects that they had on the findings of the evaluation. Section 4 gives an overview of the reports that were reviewed as part of the study, and then goes on to present the findings across the four key areas of the study: recommendation tracking, synthesis of learning and recommendations, quality assessment, and evaluation and learning processes. Section 5 presents a framework of factors affecting utilisation of evaluations, and reviews the core findings across all elements of the study against that framework. Finally section 6 includes conclusions drawn from all areas of the findings as well as a clear list of recommendations, split into those aimed at strengthening the evaluation function and those intended for incorporation into the strategic planning process.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Scriven coined the term 'meta-evaluation' nearly 50 years ago, defining it simply as an 'evaluation of evaluations'.² More recently Stufflebeam (2001) stated that meta-evaluations 'help audiences see an evaluation's strengths and weaknesses, and judge its merit and worth'.³ The term 'meta-evaluation' can also sometimes be interpreted to mean the synthesis of findings from individual evaluation studies. This study combines elements of both of the aforementioned approaches.

By its nature, meta-evaluation methodology is largely reliant on the use of secondary data.

Therefore, this study was primarily desk-based, with the key sources of data being the evaluation reports themselves. However there was also an element of primary data collection in the form of small-group interviews with internal stakeholders in order to gain better understanding of the factors affecting the quality and utilisation of the evaluations.

Small-group interviews were considered to be the most effective method for obtaining information from staff at a range of levels of seniority within a short period of time. They were also designed to combat institutional memory loss to a certain extent by involving staff who had been at the Secretariat for varying amounts of time. A potential weakness of interviews is that respondents can attempt to shape responses to fit with what they think the interviewer wishes to hear. In order to mitigate such responses, it was arranged that only the consultant conducted that part of the data collection with nobody from Evaluation Section in attendance. In relation to the synthesis of findings, it needs to be emphasised that data used for this part of the study was secondary, solely relying upon the findings as presented in the evaluation reports themselves. There were no opportunities to triangulate or verify assumptions against other sources.

In order to construct the most relevant framework for undertaking this study, a range of evaluation standards and meta-evaluation methodologies

were reviewed. The resulting framework was developed with particular reference to the Quality Proforma for ALNAP (the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action) (2005),⁴ the OECD-DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation (2010),⁵ and the previous *Universalia Study on the Commonwealth Secretariat's Follow-up and Utilization of Evaluation Findings* (2003). (See Annex 7.2 for full Evaluation Framework.)

This study was undertaken jointly by an independent consultant and the internal SPED team. The planning and design stage of the study was fully transparent and participatory.

3.2 Desk review

For the first phase of the study, an in-depth review of each of the 30 evaluation reports was carried out by the internal SPED team. (See Annex 7.3 for comprehensive list of evaluations reviewed.) This process involved summarising key findings, as well as synthesising lessons and recommendations at individual evaluation level. For each evaluation, a summary template was completed. In addition, feedback presentation and discussion sessions were held regularly between the SPED team, which provided an early opportunity for clarification of any issues.

The consultant then worked with the resulting data to synthesise key learning and recommendations – from both the operational and strategic perspectives – that have direct implications for the next strategic planning process.

3.3 Recommendation tracking

As stated above, 100 per cent (30) of the evaluations were reviewed for the purposes of extrapolating and distilling recommendations. While undertaking the desk review, all recommendations were transferred into a recommendation-tracking spreadsheet. All recommendations in the inventory were tagged to one of the following six recommendation types:

2 Scriven, 'An introduction to meta-evaluation', Educational Products Report, 1969.
3 D. Stufflebeam, 'The Metaevaluation Imperative', American Journal of Evaluation, 2001. <http://aje.sagepub.com/content/22/2/183.abstract>

4 <http://www.alnap.org/resource/5320>

5 <https://www.oecd.org/development/evaluation/qualitystandards.pdf>

- strategic;
- project/programme;
- human resources;
- financial management;
- external relations; and
- communications.

The recommendation-tracking spreadsheet also provides an opportunity to record whether the project or programme is active or closed, as well as the implementation status of each recommendation. Each recommendation was then reviewed and prioritised in terms of the level of follow-up required.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the scope of this section of the work was significantly narrowed due to capacity issues within SPED. Therefore, only five evaluations were selected by SPED for tracking the implementation status of the recommendations. They were selected on the basis that as far as possible they span, and represent evaluations across, the strategic and enabling outcome areas. For these selected evaluations, SPED liaised directly with the relevant Divisions for comprehensive updates on implementation status of the recommendations.

3.4 Quality assessment

A quality assessment exercise was carried out using the Quality Assessment Tool (QAT), which was developed by the consultant.⁶ (See Annex 7.4 for QAT.) The QAT consists of five key sections:

- assessing the Terms of Reference (ToR)
- assessing evaluation methods, practice and constraints
- appropriate application of OECD-DAC criteria
- assessing the evaluation report; and
- gender mainstreaming.

A sample of 50 per cent (15) of the evaluations was assessed using the QAT, with the weighting of internal versus external evaluations in the sample being representative of the whole set. This process was conducted by both SPED team members and the consultant, with the consultant focusing on internal evaluations to avoid any bias or conflict of interest. On the same note, quality assessments were not carried out by staff members who were working in the Evaluation Section when the evaluation was undertaken or had any other involvement in the process of that evaluation.

3.5 Interviews

The final phase of the study involved a series of group and individual interviews with internal Secretariat stakeholders. The main purpose of these interviews was to uncover the processes and other factors that either enabled or inhibited the effective use of findings, learning and recommendations by Secretariat staff.

The interviews were semi-structured around the following areas of enquiry (see Annex 7.5 for comprehensive Interview Guide):

- planning of evaluations;
- design of evaluations;
- management of evaluations;
- reporting and dissemination of evaluations;
- response and follow-up of evaluations; and
- utilisation of evaluations.

Staff were selected for interview based on their team's association with one or more of the five evaluations chosen for more in-depth recommendation tracking. Whole teams were invited to participate as it was deemed important to hear from both staff who had already been involved in evaluations and those who had not yet been involved with the evaluation function. It was also crucial to extend the invitation widely in order to mitigate issues around institutional memory loss and instances where specific staff might have had involvement with only distinct aspects of an evaluation. Interviews were conducted by the consultant with a total of 20 Secretariat staff. (A list of Secretariat staff interviewed can be found at Annex 7.6).

6 The Quality Assessment Tool draws heavily on the ALNAP Quality Proforma (2005) (<http://www.alnap.org/resource/5320>), with particular reference to the DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation (2010) (<https://www.oecd.org/development/evaluation/qualitystandards.pdf>).

3.6 Dissemination seminar

The consultant will present the findings at a dissemination seminar with key stakeholders (including members of senior management) after receiving initial written feedback on the draft report. This meeting will be an opportunity to validate the report findings, conclusions and recommendations, as well as providing a platform for SPED to engage with other staff for the purposes of action planning and follow-up in response to the report.

3.7 Limitations and constraints

This section of the report flags limitations and constraints that were encountered while carrying out the study:

- The broad scope of the study (an assessment of quality and utilisation, as well as synthesis, over more than a decade) coupled with SPED's capacity issues affected the extent and depth of data collection and analysis. This was particularly problematic in relation to assessing the implementation of recommendations. Nevertheless, the study has resulted in the development of a recommendation-tracking spreadsheet and has successfully kick-started the process of tracking recommendation utilisation. It is hoped that SPED will endeavour to follow-up on the backlog in the near future.
- Systematic technical support and quality assurance was due to be carried out within SPED but due to time pressures and shifting priorities this did not happen as systematically as planned. The level and consistency of analysis and synthesis carried out in the desk review was crucial as this generated the data that the consultant then worked with to extrapolate themes and develop broader recommendations. In addition, application of the QAT required a certain level of evaluation expertise. After identifying errors and inconsistencies within some of the QATs, an experienced evaluator within SPED carried out quality assurance on all relevant QATs. In addition, internal SPED feedback meetings were used as a way to resolve some issues and seek clarification on the results of the desk reviews.
- Unfortunately, the moderation sessions for the quality assessments also did not take place, for the same reasons. Moderation is an important element of the QAT, particularly as it had not undergone rigorous piloting (due to a tight start schedule). Efforts were made by the consultant to moderate by reviewing all QATs, cross-referencing the comments against the ratings and checking in with the relevant assessor where there were any areas of concern. All areas of concern were noted and it is hoped that they will be used to strengthen the tool for further use post-study. In any case, moderation sessions are always advised.
- As envisaged at inception stage, it was not possible to carry out any financial analysis, even at a high level, due to being unable to access the relevant data. Data were requested on the evaluation summary templates; but, in any case, it is arguable that such analysis falls outside of the remit of the ToR.
- A limitation to the synthesis of findings and recommendations is that due to a change in scope of recommendation tracking, the consultant had only limited access to information pertaining to whether recommendations had already been implemented at the time of writing, and therefore this may affect the relevance of some of the points that have been extrapolated.

4. Findings

4.1 Overview of evaluation reports reviewed

This study has reviewed all 30 evaluations managed by SPED across an 11-year period, from June 2005 until June 2016. Those 30 evaluations consist of both internal evaluations conducted by SPED (30 per cent) and externally commissioned evaluations (70 per cent). There was also a broad mixture of evaluation types, including: programme evaluations; country evaluations; thematic evaluations; and impact studies. The full list of evaluations is presented in Annex 7.3.

The findings will be presented under three key areas: recommendation tracking and synthesis, quality assessment, and evaluation and learning processes.

4.2 Recommendation tracking and synthesis

After completing the full desk review, the recommendation-tracking spreadsheet contained 291 recommendations in total taken from all of the evaluations. By far the most frequent recommendation type (coming in at 50 per cent of the total) are those tagged as 'project/programme' level – providing specific advice on project or programme design; implementation, monitoring and evaluation, reviews, reporting (quality and content). Next, at 22 per cent, are

the 'strategic' recommendations – those having broad strategic, operational or policy applicability across the Secretariat and the Commonwealth – covering strategic and programme direction; planning, corporate and operational policies; internal governance and prioritisation. Following that by order of frequency come 'external relations', 'human resources', 'communications' and 'financial management'.

The objective of this part of the study was to assess the extent to which recommendations are being implemented.⁷ However, due to time pressures and shifting priorities within SPED, it was not possible to assess the uptake of recommendations across the set. As an alternative, five evaluations were selected by SPED as a focus for this phase of the study. They were selected on the basis that they span and represent evaluations across the strategic and enabling outcome areas as far as is possible. This can be seen in Box 4.1.

The five evaluations contained a total of 96 recommendations, 70 per cent (67) of which have already been implemented or are in the process of being implemented. This can be seen in the graph at Figure 4.2.

Of those that were reported as 'not implemented', over half (56 per cent) were described by Divisions

⁷ Further analysis of recommendation implementation was not required on the ToR and was, in any case, not possible due to lack of data.

Figure 4.1 Recommendations by category and frequency across all evaluations reviewed

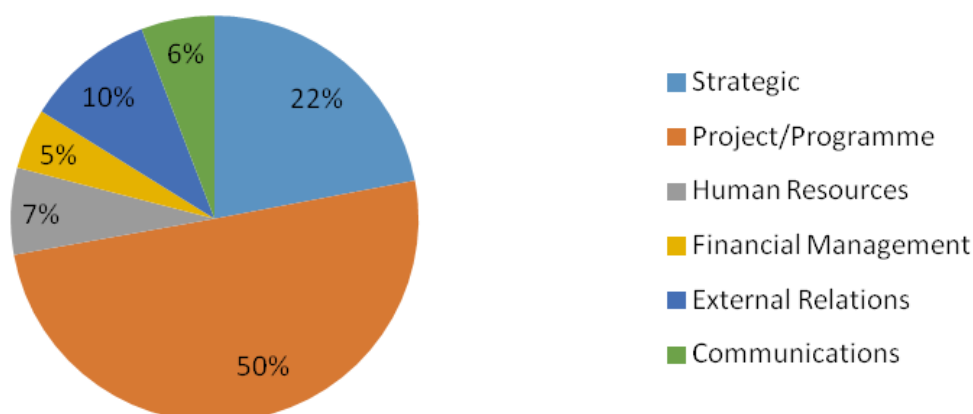
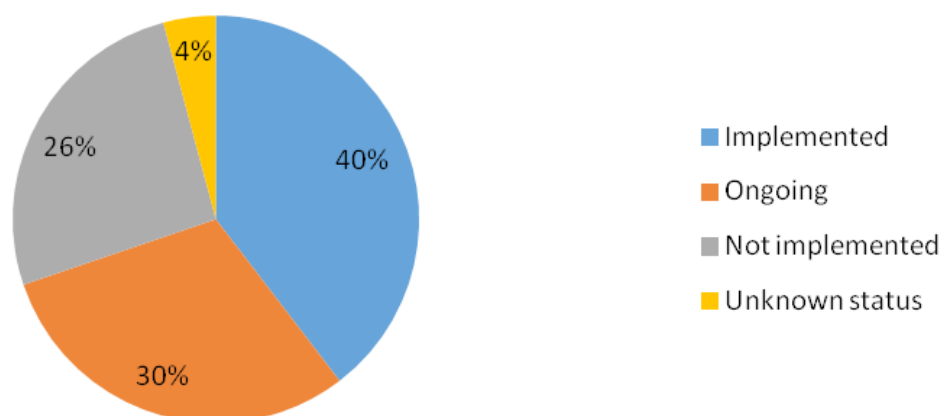


Figure 4.2 Recommendations (of five selected evaluations) by implementation status



as either not feasible, not relevant or not endorsed. It is not clear however, how many of these were either formally rejected or formally endorsed at the follow-up meeting. The recommendation-tracking spreadsheet needs to be amended to include this information. Another 20 per cent were reported as having been overtaken by events and no longer relevant. Out of the remaining 24 per cent, half of them were reported as requiring additional resources (human and financial) and half of them were reported as still due to be implemented.

Only four recommendations remained with an 'unknown' status once SPED had liaised with Divisions to complete the recommendation-tracking spreadsheet. This indicates that despite there being no central recommendation tracking mechanism at this point in time, Divisions are able to provide the answers and it therefore should not be too difficult to track the backlog and complete a comprehensive 'live' tracking spreadsheet.

It is notable that most (three) of those that remained as 'unknown' are recommendations that were targeted at a level that was beyond the scope of utilisation for some of the intended end-users. For example, Technical Assistance Unit (TAU) was tasked by SPED with completing recommendation status updates for the *Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Assistance to Member States in Legislative Drafting* (2015) which happened to include a number of recommendations that fell outside of the scope of TAU's utilisation. For example:

'Designate a staff member responsible for co-ordinating all Secretariat assistance to each member country.'

This recommendation falls outside of the remit of TAU in terms of implementation as TAU does not have mandate over 'all Secretariat assistance to each member country', and this would need to be escalated to the Office of the Deputy Secretary-

Box 4.1. Evaluations selected for recommendation tracking

- Evaluation of the Strategic Gap Filling Programme of the Commonwealth Secretariat (2007)
- Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat Debt Management Programme (2010)
- Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Programme of Technical Assistance on Maritime Boundary Delimitation (2010)
- Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Assistance to Member States in Legislative Drafting (2015)
- End Term Review of Commonwealth Gender Plan of Action for Gender Equality (2016)

General. Ownership of recommendations needs to be carefully managed at the follow-up meeting and recorded again on the spreadsheet.

4.3 Synthesis of key learning and recommendations

The findings, lessons and recommendations of the 30 evaluation reports reviewed as part of this study were permeated by a number of commonly recurring themes that are deemed to have direct implications for the next strategic planning process. A synthesis⁸ of the key lessons and recommendations, organised around those themes, can be found below. Findings from the recommendation tracking of the five selected evaluations and the internal interviews have also been incorporated where relevant.

4.3.1 Training and capacity building

The *Evaluation of Secretariat's Training Programme* that was undertaken in 2010, found that despite the commitment and motivation to build capacity in a range of thematic areas in member countries, the likelihood of the Secretariat making a sustainable impact was seriously hampered by a general lack of understanding of best practice approaches in capacity development. The evaluation report made clear and strong recommendations in this regard:

- 'A Commonwealth Secretariat-wide approach to capacity development, including the role of training in capacity development, is adopted based on recognised best practice and current best practice within the Commonwealth Secretariat.'
- 'Training takes place only as part of a wider capacity development programme which supports an enabling environment with the institutional and technical capacity to implement.'

These recommendations have been reinforced time and time again in numerous evaluations that have taken place since the aforementioned *Evaluation of Secretariat's Training Programme* (2010). For example,

⁸ A limitation to this synthesis is that due to change in scope of recommendation tracking, the consultant only had limited access to information pertaining to whether recommendations have already been implemented at the time of writing, and this may affect the relevance of some of the points that have been extrapolated.

- 'Delivery of training programmes should be overhauled in line with the recommendations of a recent evaluation of the Secretariat's training and with best international practices in the area.' (*Mid-Term Review, The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment, 2007–15*, (2015))
- 'As the Secretariat embarks on the implementation of its new Strategic Plan, it needs to immediately develop an organisation wide capacity building strategy and seriously consider the implementation of the Training Evaluation Recommendations. This will bring value for money and increase the effectiveness and impact of its work.' (*Country Evaluation of The Solomon Islands*, 2014)

The 2013 meta-evaluation conducted by SPED found the same – that short, one-off training events are a major factor contributing to the unsustainability of programmes and organisational deficiency. Therefore, the recommendation from the internal meta-evaluation of 2013 still holds:

- 'Adopt a structured approach to training based on recognised best practices. Do training only as part of a wider capacity development programme with needs assessment at all levels carried out prior to the intervention.'

4.3.2 Results-based management and monitoring & evaluation (M&E)

This study found high numbers of recommendations related to the need to strengthen planning, monitoring and evaluation as well as promote results-based management, throughout the whole period of the evaluations reviewed. These findings are consistent with those of the Universalia study, which was carried out in 2003. The organisational transition towards results-based management (RBM) has clearly resulted in improvements in these areas, for example, the following recommendations have been implemented:

- 'Integrate M&E fully into projects.' (*Development of a Strategic Framework for the Commonwealth Secretariat to Support the Tourism Sector*, 2006)
- 'Senior management including the Secretary-General and Deputy Secretaries General should actively promote RBM and compel compliance with it.' (*Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Assistance to Member Countries on Criminal Law*, 2013)

- 'The Secretariat should invest more time and resources in building staff capacity on good project design and management in line with RBM philosophy and principles so that projects have clear, realistic, measurable and time bound outcomes and indicators supported by an integral project monitoring and evaluation plan.' (*Country Evaluation of the Solomon Islands*, 2014)
- 'Establish work plans that support monitoring and reporting on results.' (*Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Assistance to Member States in Legislative Drafting*, 2015)

The above advancements are positive for the Secretariat. However, ongoing findings from evaluations have a consistent message: that the Secretariat should continue to invest sufficient time and resources in building staff capacity on RBM philosophy and principles. In addition, the Secretariat should build on examples of good practice in order to improve what currently exists. For example,

- 'Build cost effective impact evaluation into the design of the capacity development programme i.e. through documenting progress during the process of supporting implementation or through an impact study.' (*Evaluation of Secretariat's Training Programme*, 2010)
- 'Strengthen project design through rigorous needs assessments to establish baselines.' (*Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Assistance to Member States in Legislative Drafting*, 2015)
- 'Adapt and use the Commonwealth Secretariat's new software system (from December 2015) which is much more flexible and may even capture the disaggregation of data for the regular monitoring and evaluation (accountability) of the implementation of post-2015 Commonwealth gender equality and women's empowerment strategies.' (*End Term Review of Gender Plan of Action*, 2016)

It is important to acknowledge that full internalisation of a results-based approach to programme management requires not only massive organisational change, but also continuous follow-up and coaching over several years to reinforce the systems once they are put in place. To

some extent, this takes us back to the Universalia recommendation that was made prior to the period included in this study:

- 'SPED's role as a knowledge broker and clearing house for M&E information, resources and capacity building across the Secretariat needs to be strengthened intensively.' (*Study on the Commonwealth Secretariat's Follow-up and Utilization of Evaluation Findings*, 2003)

4.3.3 Coordination

The need for the Secretariat to strengthen coordination, both internally and externally, comes up repeatedly across the entire period studied – from the first evaluation in the set, to the last. It was also highlighted as a high frequency recommendation theme in the Universalia study of 2003.

Some of the recommendations are focused on improving coordination within the Secretariat itself:

- 'Take a Secretariat-wide joined-up approach to improve effectiveness and maximise impact through inter-divisional coordination.' (*Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Assistance to Member States in Legislative Drafting*, 2015)
- 'Initiate and encourage, via formal mechanisms, inter-divisional and inter-unit collaboration in the development and implementation of gender equality, women's empowerment and gender-mainstreaming initiatives.' (*End Term Review of Gender Plan of Action*, 2016)
- Many of them refer specifically to improving coordination with Primary Contact Points (PCPs) to ensure that assistance has maximum effectiveness. The Sri Lanka evaluation found that despite clear recommendations on coordinating all assistance through the office of the PCPs, the Secretariat continued to approach the line ministries directly without providing any information to the PCPs.
- 'The Secretariat should improve communication and coordination across the Secretariat divisions, within divisions, between advisers and Primary Contact Points and Points of Contacts in Capitals.' (*Country Evaluation of Sri Lanka*, 2013)

There was some focus on coordination with other external stakeholders; for example, the Iwokrama Evaluation highlighted the lack of linkages with other similar donor efforts as a key weakness, while the Debt Management evaluation emphasised the importance of ensuring that training is complementary to that offered by other providers of debt management assistance.

The question of how country-level work is coordinated and aligned with the national plan is also raised as a common theme across country evaluations. For example:

- 'The Secretariat should report its direct assistance to Sierra Leone to the country's Development Assistance Cooperation Office (DACO), and consider working with the office to develop a system to capture information on all technical assistance co-operation from all donors.' (*Sierra Leone Evaluation Study*, 2007)
- 'It is recommended that all future Secretariat's assistance to the country is directed through the office of the Primary Contact Point (PCP). This will prevent any lost opportunities for collaboration and cost sharing as well as duplication of activities and promote a more coordinated approach to country assistance that demonstrates impact.' (*Country Evaluation of The Solomon Islands*, 2014)
- 'It is recommended that all future Secretariat assistance to a member country should, at the design stage, include a thorough review of existing Secretariat projects in the country and efforts should be made to explore opportunities for coordination to enhance the effectiveness of assistance and maximise its impact.' (*Technical Assistance Impact study: Institutional Strengthening of the Credit Union Sector in the Bahamas*, 2015)

4.3.4 Collaboration and partnerships

Another common theme is the importance of exploring potential opportunities for collaboration and engagement in strategic partnerships. A number of similar recommendations with a focus on maximising resources can be found:

- 'Partner with other funding institutes to potentially make use of other organisation or to help develop Trust Fund support money (e.g. software from the UN to assist

in continental shelf submission work).' (*Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Programme of Technical Assistance on Maritime Boundary Delimitation*, 2010)

- 'The Secretariat should explore strategic partnerships with other international development partners active in Sri Lanka to harmonise resources, and to build on each other's comparative advantages to obtain maximum value for money.' (*Country Evaluation of Sri Lanka*, 2013)
- 'Strategic partnerships should continue to be built to supplement efforts and leverage resources. Proactive and sustained engagement with member governments, civil society and other Commonwealth organisations should be pursued on the delivery of programmes and initiatives.' (*The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment: 2007–15. Mid-Term Review*, 2015)
- 'Explore strategic partnerships with media organisations and international development agencies working to develop capacity within the media, to leverage resources and achieve better value for money.' (*Commonwealth Media Development Fund – Review and Renew*, 2016)

There is a clear lesson that in order for the Secretariat to build and improve on what it already does well while achieving good value for money, it is crucial for them to develop and maintain strategic partnerships.

4.3.5 Visibility

A key lesson from the evaluations was that better promotion and communication of the Secretariat's work is needed, particularly the showcasing of its achievements and successes within the Commonwealth. For example, the *Evaluation of the Commonwealth Singapore Third Country Training Programme 2015*, found that the partnership between the Secretariat and the Singaporean Ministry of Foreign Affairs has positively raised the profile of the Secretariat, whose logo has been prominently displayed on the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) brochure and at the Civil Service College.

However, there needs to be increased and continued effort made in this regard. Back in 2007, the *Review of the Commonwealth Education Good*

Practice Awards highlighted limitations in terms of awareness of awards, expressing that more could have been done to raise awareness about them, and to emphasise innovation and interesting work in education. In recent years the same recommendations are repeated, with a common thread throughout the country evaluations:

- 'The Secretariat should identify opportunities and invest in raising the visibility and awareness of the Commonwealth, its comparative advantages and work.' (*Country Evaluation – Sri Lanka, 2013*)

The most recent study of 2016, the *End Term Review of Gender Plan of Action*, found that the plan was virtually invisible to most people involved in gender work in Commonwealth member countries.

4.3.6 Knowledge management

Knowledge management is a recurring theme, throughout both the evaluations studied, and this meta-evaluation itself. The lack of information on the status of recommendation implementation speaks for itself. Even back in 2003, prior to the period included in this study, the *Universalia* report made recommendations related to knowledge management. For example:

- 'Senior managers to work with SPED to improve the quality of and linkages between various knowledge and information management systems so that evaluation information can be better collected, organised and accessed.'

Since then, there have been repeated recommendations on the same theme, targeted at various levels across the Secretariat. For example:

- 'Set out a Secretariat-wide policy for records management and review design and management procedures.' (*Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat Development Assistance in the Area of Corporate Governance, 2005*)
- 'Accelerate existing initiatives to consolidate records management at least at the divisional level.' (*Evaluation of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation, 2008*)
- 'Internal Commonwealth Secretariat knowledge management systems are improved to facilitate institutional memory and shared lesson learning within and across

Divisions.' (*Evaluation of Commonwealth Singapore Third Country Training Programme, 2015*)

In the internal interviews with Divisions it was evident that knowledge management continues to be a distinct weakness within the Secretariat. The need to establish robust knowledge management systems came out strongly.

4.3.7 Consultants

Intermittent human resource recommendations were made, in relation to how the Secretariat engages with consultants in various contexts. It was a common thread throughout the country-level evaluations, which among other things made recommendations on reviewing the terms of service for Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC) experts:

- 'In order to be competitive and be able to retain high calibre international experts, the Commonwealth Secretariat should review the Terms and Conditions of Service (TACOS) for its CFTC Experts to align them with other similar Regional and International Organisations.' (*Country Evaluation – Solomon Islands, 2013* and *Impact study: Institutional Strengthening of the Credit Union Sector in The Bahamas, 2015*)

Other evaluations made recommendations on developing new policies and approaches on the recruitment of consultants:

- 'The Secretariat develop a policy on use of *pro bono* experts which includes a requirement of open advertising of positions, development of specific terms of reference, and a risk assessment.' (*Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Assistance to Member Countries on Criminal Law, 2013*)
- 'Develop standardised approach for the recruitment of facilitators or training institutions and for monitoring and maintenance of quality.' (*Evaluation of Secretariat's Training Programme, 2010*)

Issues around how the Secretariat engages with consultants were flagged back in 2003 in the *Universalia*, which found that the process for identifying evaluation consultants was unclear. The report subsequently made a recommendation that SPED introduce transparent and competitive

systems, which has now been implemented. It also found that the rates paid by the Secretariat to evaluation consultants were typically lower than those paid by other similar regional and international organisations, which had a negative effect in that SPED was not always able to secure the highest expertise. This is in line with the recent recommendations from country evaluations that terms and conditions need to be reviewed and aligned with other similar organisations.

4.3.8 Scoping missions

Another useful lesson is the importance of undertaking proper scoping missions and needs assessments – a common thread in the country evaluations:

- 'Undertake, where possible, preliminary scoping missions to minimise risks by establishing a better understanding of the proposed project and its implications; the type of assistance involved; establishing any key outstanding issues that remained to be addressed; and clarifying with the government requirements for potential follow-up work.' (*Country Evaluation – Kenya, 2013*)
- 'Abstain from undertaking activities unless it is clear that the requesting government/agency is showing the necessary level of committed support, and generally that the appropriate enabling environment is in place.' (*Country Evaluation – Belize, 2013*)

The *Evaluation of Support to Member Countries on Legislative Drafting (2014)* evaluation provided good lessons on the same issue, specifically in terms of training; how assistance is provided and how demand is defined. Demand cannot be demonstrated by a minister sending a letter. There needs to be the right enabling environment in a country in order to move from outputs to outcomes.

Amongst others, the *Training Evaluation (2010)* and the *Meta-Evaluation (2013)* both made the same point:

- 'A rigorous needs assessment supports more holistic and cohesive approaches to capacity development and provides the opportunity for a longer term approach and greater interaction across Commonwealth Secretariat divisions.' (*Meta-Evaluation, 2013*)

4.3.9 Gender

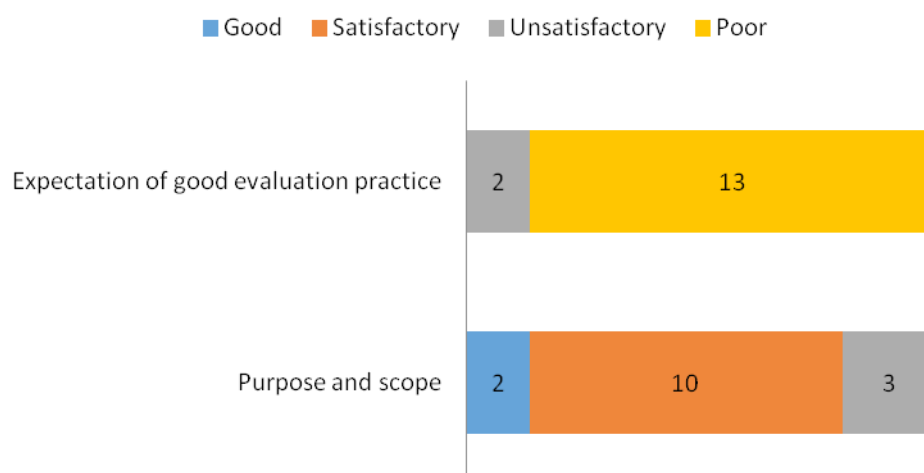
With the exception of the mid- and end-term evaluations of the *Gender Plan of Action*, gender was not a theme that recurred commonly in the evaluation reports. This is not entirely surprising given that, in most cases, consideration of gender issues was not a requirement on the ToRs (as noted in the findings of the quality assessment). Notably, the first evaluation of the set – *Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat Development Assistance in the Area of Corporate Governance, 2005* – highlighted that gender was not addressed as a specific or separate issue in corporate governance work and that enhancements should be made to training courses and targeting of training better reflect gender issues in development, yet this was not translated into a recommendation.

However, the findings and recommendations of the two gender-focused evaluations along with three other evaluations (and the results of the quality assessment) made it clear that this is an area that should be regarded as a priority for the Secretariat. The most recent evaluation included in this study – *End Term Review of Gender Plan of Action, 2016* – makes a number of strategic recommendations. For example,

- 'Outline the Commonwealth's post-2015 gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives within subsequent Commonwealth Secretariat strategic plans. The strategic plans should also include gender mainstreaming under the Commonwealth Secretariat's Gender Equality Policy and analysis of activities undertaken through the Gender Equality Policy's implementation and reporting framework'.
- 'Initiate and encourage, via formal mechanisms, inter-divisional and inter-unit collaboration in the development and implementation of gender equality, women's empowerment and gender-mainstreaming initiatives'.

It also recommends that 'adequate financial, staffing, training and technical resources' be allocated for the implementation of a post-2015 strategy.

Figure 4.3 Terms of Reference



4.4 Quality assessment

4.4.1 Introduction

This section presents the results of the Quality Assessment Tool (QAT) under its five main sections, which are as follows:

- assessing the Terms of Reference (ToRs);
- assessing evaluation methods, practice and constraints;
- appropriate application of OECD-DAC criteria;
- assessing the evaluation report'; and
- gender mainstreaming.

Each section of the QAT constitutes a number of criteria, which are graded at either:

- A – Good
- B – Satisfactory
- C – Unsatisfactory
- D – Poor
- Z – Not applicable

In order to identify and highlight the strengths and weaknesses across the set of evaluations, gradings were aggregated for each point in the QAT (see Figures 4.3–4.7), however, analysis was primarily qualitative, with strong reference to the assessors' comments. It was not considered appropriate to give an overall quantitative rating for the evaluations (individually or as a set), as endeavouring to calculate some mean score could have involved, for example, combining a 'good' rating for one

distinct section of the tool with an 'unsatisfactory' rating for another section, producing a potentially meaningless average score.

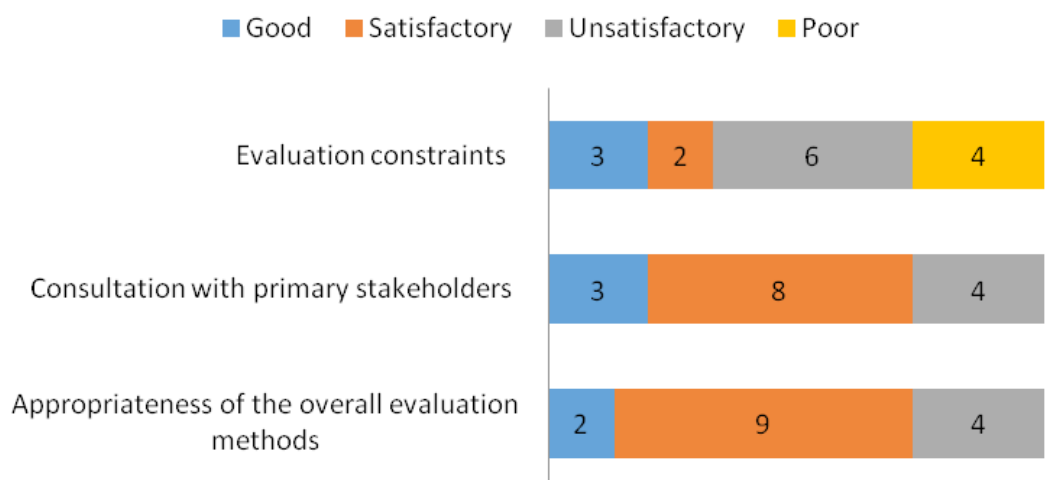
4.4.2 Assessing the Terms of Reference

Assessment of the ToRs resulted in a substantial majority (80 per cent) of them being rated as satisfactory or above for 'purpose and scope'. On the flip side, however, none of them was rated as satisfactory or above for 'expectation of good evaluation practice'. (See Figure 4.3.)

This is clearly a positive result under 'purpose and scope', yet there is still room for improvement to boost scores up from a rating of satisfactory to good. While the majority of the ToRs clearly described the purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluations, there were cases noted where the scope was considered to be too broad. In addition, there was a distinct lack of clarity around the identity of key stakeholders and users, and the intended use of the end-product of the evaluation. In many cases, it was noted by assessors that the ToR could have been clearer about agency i.e. by whom the evaluation was mandated, and who would be receiving and acting on report recommendations and findings.

In relation to the 'expectation of good evaluation practice', the results are worrying (although not entirely surprising as the *SPED Evaluation Guidelines, 2015* do not stipulate such practice as a requirement of ToR design). The focus of this point in the quality tool is on the clarity of the Secretariat's expectation of good evaluation practice by the evaluator, for example, application of OECD-DAC criteria and/or reference to international

Figure 4.4 Assessing Evaluation Methods, Practice and Constraints



standards, including international law. Although many of the ToRs included use of the individual terms – relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability – that make up the OECD-DAC criteria, there was no explicit reference to the set of criteria as a whole or to the terms’ associated definitions. Therefore, rather than complying with the OECD-DAC guidance, the evaluator is left to use their own judgement as to the definition and application of each term. In short, none of the ToRs explicitly stated what would constitute good practice or a specific quality standard that should be referred to. The absence of clarity in this regard came out as the weakest single point assessed against the quality tool.

During the assessment of ToRs, it was noted that for the purposes of internally commissioned evaluations, the ToRs have not necessarily been as robust as those that were commissioned externally, and they have also not been included as an appendix to the final report as a matter of course. For country evaluations in particular, key weaknesses were noted. For example, a single generic ToR was being used, which inevitably results in a very broad scope, plus the intended use and users (outside of SPED) are not clear.

4.4.3 Assessing evaluation methods, practice and constraints

Out of 15 reports, nine were rated as ‘satisfactory’ in relation to the ‘appropriateness of the overall evaluation methods’, while only two of them were rated as good. (See Figure 4.4.) While the evaluation methods were generally considered to be well

outlined and relevant to the evaluation’s primary purpose, there was scant discussion around the appropriateness and, in particular, the strengths and weaknesses of the methods used.

Although 11 of the reports were deemed good enough to receive ratings of satisfactory or above, in relation to the assessment of the nature and scope of ‘consultation with primary stakeholders’, the data generated here was rather patchy.⁹ The main targets of consultations in many of the evaluations were institutional partners but there were instances where it proved difficult for the assessor to identify who the primary stakeholders were.

As per the lack of discussion around methodological strengths and weaknesses (mentioned above), there was also minimal acknowledgement of any constraints to carrying out the evaluations more generally. This area of the quality assessment came out as particularly weak, with only one-third of the evaluations assessed being rated as satisfactory or good on this issue. Few of the reports had a separate section outlining constraints, and even where limitations were acknowledged or implied, there was little or no elaboration on whether any of the said factors affected the end-product of the evaluation. The recent *Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat support to Member Countries on Legislative Drafting* (2015) had a clear section on limitations in the Methodology and Approach chapter. See Box 4.2 for an example:

⁹ The findings indicate that it may be useful to review this section of the QAT.

Box 4.2. Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat support to Member Countries on legislative Drafting, 2015

The report included discussion around the following limitations and the effect that they had on the evaluation:

- No baseline data
- Limited budget for field visits
- Gaps in documentation
- Difficulty contacting previous beneficiaries
- Number of consultancy days available

4.4.4 Assessing appropriate application of OECD-DAC criteria

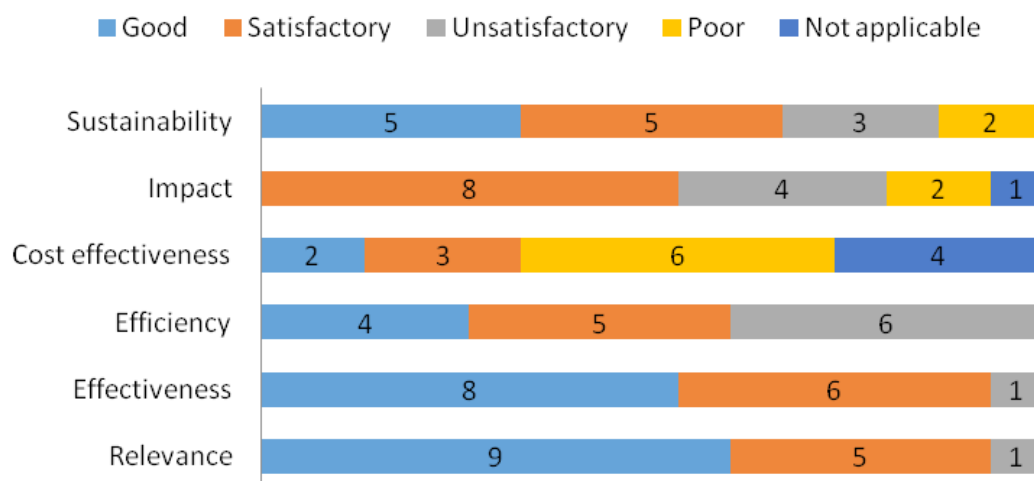
Despite the consistently weak ratings for the expectation of good evaluation practice on the ToRs, this section on the application of the OECD-DAC criteria received mixed ratings (both positive and negative) across the six listed criteria of: relevance; effectiveness; efficiency; cost-effectiveness; impact; and sustainability. (See Figure 4.5.) Notably, 14 out of 15 reports were rated as satisfactory or above for adequate and appropriate application of 'relevance', which is concerned with whether the programme is in line with local needs and priorities. This is perhaps not surprising given that the assistance provided by the Secretariat is demand-led. Similarly, 14 out of 15 reports were rated as satisfactory or above for adequate and appropriate application of 'effectiveness', which

measures the extent to which the programme achieves its purpose or whether this can be expected to happen on the basis of its output.

Ratings for the assessment of 'efficiency' – whether the most efficient process has been used – were not impressive, with less than two-thirds of the evaluations being rated as good or satisfactory. It was often found that while efficiency was assessed in theory, it was not done in line with the DAC guidance for this criterion.

Cost-effectiveness was rated as the weakest criteria in this section of the quality assessment. The assessors' comments were similar to those for 'efficiency', in that it appeared that the intended meaning of the term was often misunderstood.

Figure 4.5 Appropriate application of OECD-DAC criteria



The term was always used loosely and was never really defined, and there was little application of the term as defined in the guidance note.

In relation to the assessment of 'impact', only just over half of the evaluations were rated as satisfactory in relation to the assessment of impact, with none being given a rating of good for this criteria. This is perhaps unsurprising given the lack of baseline data and adequate M&E systems that evaluators often find. The findings showed that although impact may be assessed, it was often an area of the report that was under-developed and it did not drill down far enough, beyond institutions to individuals, communities or demographic groupings of these. On a number of occasions the impact discussion seemed to be merely an extension of the discussion on effectiveness. Finally, while sustainability only scored satisfactory or above for two-thirds (10) of the reports, it is positive to note that five of those were rated as good.

Pockets of poor performance in this section must be partly attributed to the weakness of the ToR in stipulating the expectation of good evaluation practice, as noted in the Terms of Reference section 4.4.2.

4.4.5 Assessing the Evaluation Report

Of the evaluation reports that were assessed, report legibility and accessibility were rated as particularly strong. All 15 of the reports were rated as satisfactory or above, with seven of the evaluation reports being rated as satisfactory and eight being rated as good. The reports were well

written with minimal grammatical and spelling errors. In most cases, they were clearly laid out, making it easy to identify and extrapolate conclusions and recommendations. It was not clear, however, whether reports had been heavily edited by the Secretariat.

The section on coverage of the report was rated relatively high, with only three reports being rated as unsatisfactory and none being rated as poor. The weaknesses in this area included not adequately addressing impact, gender issues or value for money where required by ToRs; this is in line with the findings in other sections of the quality assessment. The strategic focus of the reports – the extent to which they examined the changing developmental landscape and priorities (making reference to international standards and law where applicable) – also received mixed ratings.

On a positive note, the section on findings, conclusions and recommendations came out well, with only one report in the set scoring unsatisfactory. Findings were generally supported by evidence, with conclusions and recommendations that flowed logically from them. However, there is still plenty of room to move from satisfactory to good in this area.

Lessons learnt were rated as particularly weak, with only seven of the reports scoring satisfactory or above (although it is worth noting that for two of them, lessons learnt were not requested on the ToR). The common comment of assessors was that lessons were not in a separate section, nor easily distinguishable from findings and conclusions.

Figure 4.6 Assessing the Evaluation Report

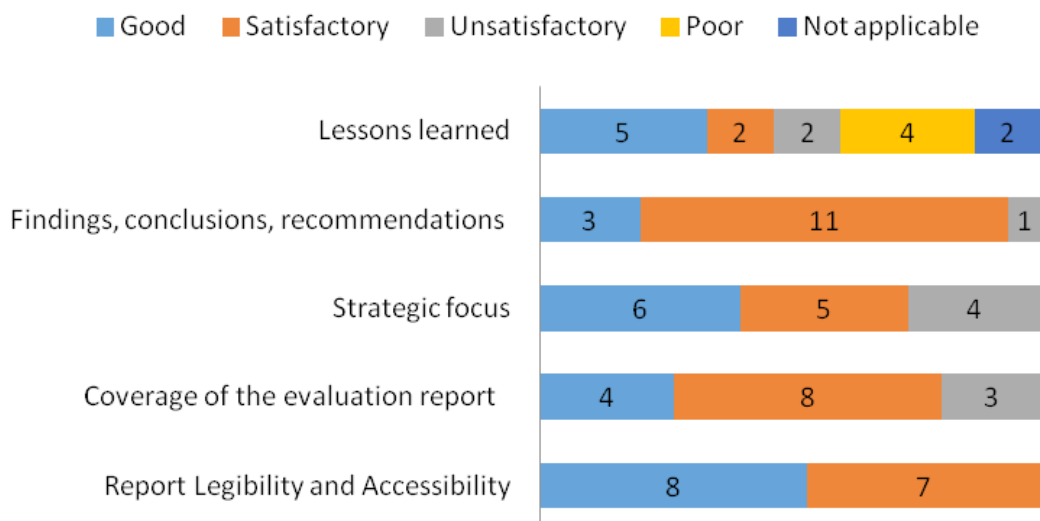
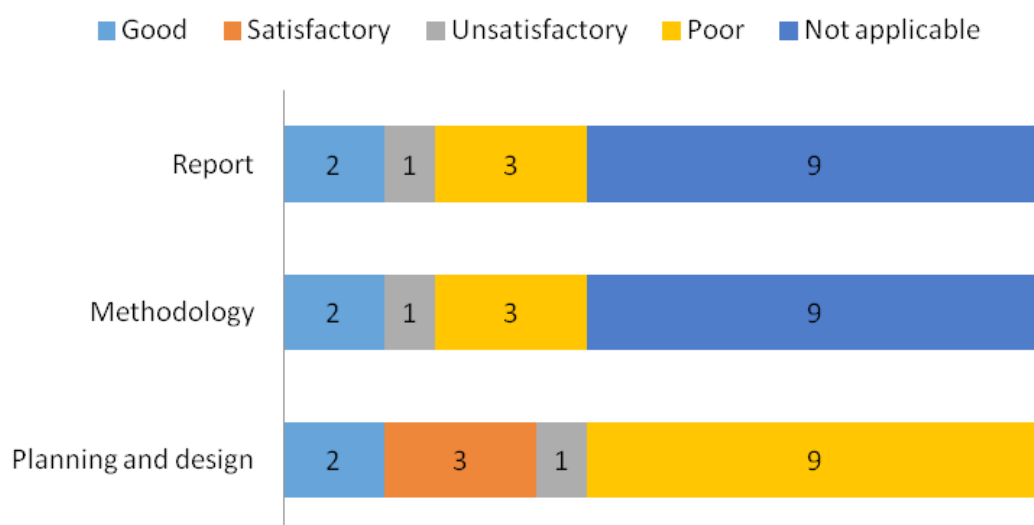


Figure 4.7 Gender mainstreaming



4.4.6 Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming was by far the weakest area across the entire quality assessment exercise. (See Figure 4.7.) Starting from the planning and design of the evaluations, there was little, if any, consideration given to gender issues, with only one-third of the ToRs explicitly requesting gender issues to be part of the evaluation.

There was also rarely any evidence to suggest that technical experts on gender were consulted on many occasions – although this information was not always easy to access. Not surprisingly this meant that when it came to ‘methodology’ and ‘reporting’, the results were even worse, with only two of the evaluations scoring satisfactory or above. A notable exception of good practice is highlighted in Box 4.3. The explicit request to consider gender issues resulted in positive ratings on both methodology and reporting.

4.4.7 Evaluation budget

Although this study lacked the data required for proper financial analysis, top-line figures show that only 0.2 per cent of the overall programme budget is allocated to evaluations at the Secretariat. This is considerably lower than the standard threshold – a minimum 3 to 5 per cent – that is applied by many organisations in the international development sector. Working under constrained budgets is bound to result in a compromise in relation to the quality of both the processes and products of an evaluation.

Box 4.3. Excerpt from the Terms of Reference for the Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Debt Management Programme (2003/4–2007/8)

‘Conduct an analysis of the issues that support or hinder the Secretariat in delivering an effective debt management programme; Examine the relevance of gender issues to the effectiveness of the programme and assess how well gender equality issues were addressed.’

4.4.8 Summary

Across the set of evaluations assessed, the weakest areas of the reports, were as follows:

- the Secretariat's expectation of good evaluation practice being clearly stated on the ToR
- acknowledgement of constraints to carrying out the evaluation
- interpretation of the term 'cost-effectiveness' and appropriate assessment of the cost-effectiveness of the Secretariat's assistance
- identification and formulation of lessons learnt
- application of the Secretariat's Gender Mainstreaming Guidelines

The evaluations were particularly strong on the following:

- adequate and appropriate application of the OECD-DAC criteria of both relevance and effectiveness
- legibility and accessibility of final written reports
- presentation of the evaluation's findings, conclusions and recommendations

4.5 Secretariat evaluation and learning processes

4.5.1 Introduction

The final phase of data collection was targeted at uncovering the processes and other factors that either enabled or inhibited the effective use of evaluation findings, learning and recommendations by the Secretariat. This analysis was based on:

1. Data from the internal interviews, which were structured around the following areas of enquiry:
 - planning of evaluations;
 - design of evaluations;
 - management of evaluations;
 - reporting and dissemination of evaluations;
 - response and follow-up of evaluations;
 - utilisation of evaluations.
2. Review of documentation related to the Secretariat's evaluation and learning processes – the key documentation reviewed was the Evaluation Guidelines (2015) (see Annex 7.7), which outlines the process by which the Secretariat's Evaluation Programme is formulated and managed, and describes the steps and tasks associated with the planning, conduct and review of evaluation studies.

Box 4.4. Excerpt from the Evaluation Guidelines (2015)

The steps and decisions associated with the development, reporting, managing and revision of the Evaluation Programme are broken into six key stages:

- Analysing of priority areas and issues for evaluation.
- Consulting Divisions on plans for evaluation of projects or sub-programme portfolio areas.
- Preparing the draft four-year Evaluation Programme for submission to the Senior Management Committee (SMC).
- Incorporating adjustments from SMC and advising Divisions of Evaluation Programme
- Reporting at six-monthly intervals on progress in implementation of annual programme and incorporating findings and issues in Mid- Term Review (MTR), Annual Progress Report (APR) and other strategic review processes.
- Revise Evaluation Programme annually and whenever revisions are made to the Operational and Strategic Plans.

4.5.2 Planning of evaluations

Although SPED has introduced a rolling four-year Evaluation Programme aligned with the Secretariat's planning and measurement of results (in line with a recommendation from the Universalis study in 2003), this is not widely known.

Despite what is stated in the *Evaluation Guidelines* (see Box 4.4), none of the staff interviewed had been consulted or updated on the Evaluation Programme, which sits alongside the current Strategic Plan. With the exception of the Head of Evaluation, none of the interviewees across various staffing levels was aware of the current Evaluation Programme or the process behind developing it. None of the staff members was able to describe how and why specific themes or programmes are prioritised and selected for evaluation.

There was a distinct perception that it is a process that happens 'behind closed doors', with staff expressing a consistent message that they would like more transparency around such processes, stating that they would find it useful to be involved and, at the least, to be kept in the loop as to what is going to be evaluated, why, and when.

4.5.3 Design of evaluations

When it came to the design of the evaluations, the response was more mixed depending on the individual's previous involvement. Those who had previously been involved with the design of specific evaluations generally reported adequate engagement in terms of input into the approach paper, the ToR, and the selection of the consultant. Amongst those who had not been directly involved in this stage of an evaluation, there was little awareness of how this process is carried out.

In any case, there was a clear expectation across the board that Divisions should be heavily involved in the design of the evaluation. It was emphasised that technical input from experts is key in ensuring that the ToR and the methodology are both relevant and appropriate to the context and objectives of the evaluation. However, this was not always the case, and there was a specific instance where staff felt that SPED had taken the 'upper hand' in this stage of the process, ultimately resulting in the end-user having less confidence in the end-product.

Staff interviewed highlighted the importance of getting the right person to carry out the evaluation as well as getting the methodology right, with a suggestion that the team should consist of both evaluation expertise and technical expertise.

4.5.4 Management of evaluations

Again, there was mixed feedback about this stage of the evaluation process. Those who had been involved in previous evaluations generally reported satisfactory levels of engagement at this stage of the evaluation process, with those who were involved at the design stage also being kept informed while the evaluation was under way. Their involvement included supplying background documentation, identifying stakeholders and conference calls with the consultant. However, in one case there was lack of clarity about the division of roles and responsibilities between the Division and SPED. The team in question felt that they were expected to carry out tasks that they were not responsible for, including much administration and logistics. In addition to that, they were involved in implementation of the evaluation itself, which posed a conflict of interest and compromised the independence of the evaluation. The consensus on this stage was that firm management of the consultant is required and that it needs to be clear who takes that role.

4.5.5 Reporting and dissemination of evaluations

There was consistent feedback reporting that once it reaches the reporting and dissemination stage, the evaluation process becomes significantly more open for input. Many staff reported being sent draft reports for review and feedback as well as experiencing high levels of engagement in dissemination seminars with invitations that were extended widely. The issue here though is whether it 'comes down the chain too late'. There were instances mentioned of draft reports that were circulated with many factual errors – something that could have been avoided if there had been more back-and-forth with the relevant people from the outset.

4.5.6 Response and follow-up

Those who had been involved in evaluations reported attending internal follow-up meetings where the findings of the evaluation were considered, recommendations were endorsed

(or not), and an action plan – with roles and responsibilities assigned for the implementation of the evaluation recommendations – was developed. There was one exception where the follow-up meeting – including any formal endorsement or action planning – had not yet happened as of December 2016. Given that the evaluation was completed in June 2016 this was considered to be rather late, if the evaluation was to be taken seriously, especially for strategic planning purposes.

4.5.7 Utilisation of evaluations

For most interviewees, the internal follow-up meeting is where any formal evaluation follow-up processes stopped. Impressively, one Division stated that evaluation recommendations are incorporated into their individual work plans but this is not a standard approach.

In line with the Evaluation Guidelines, staff felt that it was the responsibility of the Evaluation Section in SPED to track and give feedback on the implementation of recommendations. It is fully acknowledged by SPED that this is not currently taking place. In fact, the recommendation-tracking spreadsheet that was sent out as part of this meta-evaluation process was the first time any of the interviewees had ever seen systematic tracking of recommendations by SPED.

There was a consensus that the recommendation-tracking spreadsheet was a useful way of following up on the status of implementation of recommendations, serving as a reminder or prompt for keeping recommendations 'live'.

The key obstacles that were flagged under this area of enquiry were lack of knowledge management systems and variable quality or usefulness of end-products. Due to the Secretariat's rotation policy coupled with numerous restructures, robust knowledge management systems are crucial; yet by all accounts knowledge management at the Secretariat is weak and fragmented. Staff are keen for the Secretariat to establish a systematic way of tackling this across the organisation.

Finally, it was clear that the end-user's confidence in the quality of the end-product directly affects its level of utilisation. Not surprisingly, staff are less engaged with recommendations where they feel their expert opinions and input were not fully taken on board during the earlier stages of the evaluation. Staff who reported not being consulted or not

listened to at the design stage also reported being dissatisfied with the implementation and quality of the evaluation, and questioned whether those recommendations that were endorsed would have been par for the course in any case.

4.5.8 Summary

There is an apparent disconnect between what is stated in the *Evaluation Guidelines* and what happens in practice. In addition, most of the staff interviewed are not fully aware of the processes outlined in this document.

There is a distinct lack of transparency around the planning and preparation of the Evaluation Programme, which results in a lack of ownership to some degree. Similarly, lack of involvement at the design stage can result in poor end-products and a subsequent lack of engagement further down the line.

At certain levels, staff are involved and engaged in evaluation processes but it is not consistent. It was acknowledged that there might well have been extensive discussions around the planning and design of evaluations with directors who were not present in the interviews. However, there is clearly limited 'trickle-down' to the programmes and technical staff. Frequently, those who have valuable input to give are engaged too late in the process.

There is a strong appetite for clearer communication from SPED on the evaluation process generally – the what, why, when and how – including clarity about the associated roles and responsibilities.

There was also significant discussion around how evaluation lessons and recommendations should be fed into project design, work plans, strategic planning and so on. Although the Evaluation Guidelines state that 'an annual update of the Evaluation Programme will be undertaken at the time of the preparation of the Annual Division Workplans', it does not mention that evaluation products should be used to inform the Divisional Workplans. As mentioned above, one of the Divisions interviewed stated that they incorporate recommendations into individual workplans.

All of the above highlight the importance of early involvement and transparency in order to obtain buy-in later down the line as well as the need for strengthening, renewing and cascading the Secretariat's *Evaluation Guidelines*.

5. Key Factors Influencing Lack of Utilisation of Evaluation Products at the Secretariat

5.1 Introduction

The core finding across all elements of this study is that the Secretariat is not yet utilising evaluations at a strategic level for decision-making and organisational learning.

This section of the report will discuss the key factors that influence the utilisation of evaluation findings and recommendations generally, using a well-respected framework developed by Sandison.¹⁰ Sandison's framework is an adaptation of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) RAPID framework, and is based on findings from many studies on utilisation of evaluations in the international community. She describes a range of factors that influence use. Those factors are grouped into four distinct, though inter-related, categories as outlined in Box 5.1.

Against that framework, the most pertinent findings of this study will be highlighted in order to present a clear picture of the key factors that are impeding utilisation for the Secretariat itself.¹¹

5.2 Quality factors

Of the four categories above, factors related to evaluation quality receive the most attention in the literature on utilisation of evaluations – in relation to both the quality of the end-product, and the quality of the processes themselves. Likewise, this study flagged a number of quality issues as factors impeding utilisation within the Secretariat.

At evaluation design stage, there was found to be a distinct lack of clarity around the intended use and primary users of Secretariat evaluations. Quinn Patton, founder of utilisation-focused evaluation, would argue that in order for evaluations to be

Box 5.1: Factors affecting utilisation

- **Quality factors:** design, participation and ownership, planning, evidence, follow-up mechanisms, and evaluator credibility.
- **Relational factors:** personal and interpersonal; role and influence of evaluation unit; networks, communities of practice.
- **Organisational factors:** culture, structure, and knowledge management
- **External factors:** factors that affect utilisation in ways beyond the influence of the primary stakeholders and the evaluation process.

Sandison (2006)

useful, the first thing to do is to foster intended use by intended users. Patton is insistent on designing evaluations around 'specific, identifiable people, not vague, passive audiences'.¹²

Lack of meaningful and consistent engagement and participation of internal stakeholders within the Secretariat was also a key finding of this study. Sandison states that 'participation is fundamental to ensure that an evaluation's purpose and design are relevant to the users ... It demands meaningful and sustained involvement from those given the potential to make decisions about the evaluation process'. In the Secretariat, although staff at certain levels are engaged in evaluation processes to a certain extent, there is clearly limited 'trickle-down' to the programmes and technical staff, and frequently, those who have valuable input to give are engaged too late in the process.

10 Sandison, 2006, The Utilisation of Evaluations. ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action.

11 While it is acknowledged that external factors probably affect the utilisation of evaluations at the Secretariat, this area was beyond the scope of the present study and therefore will not be addressed in this report.

12 Quinn Patton, 1997, Utilization-Focused Evaluation.

Although it is well known that evaluation follow-up is a key factor affecting utilisation, there is still no systematic mechanism in place for follow-up of recommendations at the Secretariat. Sandison would argue that it is helpful to establish specific follow-up plans at the outset of an evaluation. 'Dedicated follow-up individuals, the clear allocation of responsibility and specific mechanisms for action increase the likelihood of evaluation use, particularly if follow-up was planned from the beginning of the evaluation' (Sandison, 2006).

The credibility of the evaluator – in terms of both competence and reputation – is also a strong determinant of utilisation. It is important that 'the evaluators and evaluation managers understand the political nature of evaluation, facilitate utilisation and manage stakeholders accordingly' (Sandison, 2006). In this study, internal stakeholders emphasised the importance of getting the right person to carry out the evaluation, with a suggestion that the team should consist of both evaluation expertise and technical expertise. It is clear that confidence in the credibility of the evaluator requires meaningful engagement of stakeholders at the planning stage.

5.3 Relational factors

Within this category of relational factors, it is the role and influence of the Evaluation Section at the Secretariat that stand out as problematic. There is a perceived level of opaqueness in terms of the role and purpose of the evaluation function, as well as issues with poor communication. Also, given that the Evaluation Section sits within a Division and is clearly not independent of line management processes and political pressures, questions are raised around the level of impartiality it might exert over decision-making processes. All of this has the potential to lead to feelings of mistrust and ultimately disengagement.

5.4 Organisational factors

It is well known that processes of organisational change are highly complex and that there are many influencing factors; however, Sandison argues that three overarching factors are important in relation to the utilisation of evaluation: structure, knowledge management and culture. In the Secretariat, as in many organisations, all three of these factors contribute to impeding utilisation to some extent.

An evaluation unit should be 'structurally closely linked to senior decision-makers, adequately resourced, and competent' (Sandison, 2006). First, where the evaluation unit sits within an organisation is important, having implications in terms of access to decision-makers as well as leverage in the process of following up on evaluation recommendations. Although the Secretariat's governance arrangement states that evaluation plans and reports should be reviewed by the Board of Governors, there is no direct line of communication and accountability from the Evaluation Section to the Secretary General and the Board; rather there are many layers of potential influence and pressure to navigate between them.

In addition, it is clear from the process of undertaking this study (as well as from feedback from internal stakeholders) that the Evaluation Section is inadequately resourced. Recent increased demands in terms of the numbers of evaluations to be conducted imply that this will only get worse if nothing changes. "The lack of proper resourcing can have damaging effects not only on evaluation units, but the broader culture of learning and the effectiveness of the agency overall' (OECD, 2013).¹³

For an organisational learning culture to be present, 'senior managers promote a culture of learning (openness to scrutiny and change, embedded learning mechanisms, transparency); staff members value evaluation and have some understanding of the process. Attention to performance is integral to working practice, managers actively support staff to learn and the organisation's leaders promote and reward learning' (Sandison, 2006).

13 OECD, 2013, Evaluating Development Activities: providing evidence on results for learning and decision-makers.

As is evident from the findings and discussions above (as well as the Universalis study of 2003 and the 2013 internal meta-evaluation), and despite the shift towards an RBM approach, the Secretariat is yet to acquire the core elements required to promote and sustain such an organisational learning culture. There remains a lack of institutional learning mechanisms, with no clear systems, rewards, or incentives for divisional planning or linking evaluation learning with the broader strategic planning process for the Secretariat as a whole.

Finally, a key factor influencing utilisation of evaluation learning is the institutionalisation of evaluation knowledge management in the organisation's structure and culture. 'High staff turnover and poor knowledge management are well-known impediments to embedding organisational learning in routine working practices' (Sandison, 2006). Due to the Secretariat's rotation policy coupled with frequent restructuring, robust knowledge management systems are crucial; yet by all accounts knowledge management at the Secretariat continues to be distinctly weak and fragmented. The need and desire for robust knowledge management systems to be established came out strongly.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

This study has revealed clear pockets of strengths and weaknesses in the Secretariat's evaluations overall. On the positive side, they are generally well written with accessible and clear findings, conclusions and recommendations. However, despite the aforementioned strengths of the final reports, lessons learnt were often not easily distinguishable from findings and conclusions. The evaluations were also fairly strong in their application of the DAC criteria of 'relevance' and 'effectiveness', but this good practice did not extend far enough into the more complex criteria of 'impact' and 'sustainability'; nor was the concept of 'cost-effectiveness' well understood by evaluators. Gender mainstreaming is not being systematically applied.

Although systems and processes related to the evaluation function do exist in theory (in the form of the *Evaluation Guidelines*), they are not widely known about or understood and they are not necessarily strictly referred to or followed. There is an apparent disconnect between what is stated in the *Evaluation Guidelines* and what happens in practice. There is clearly an appetite from staff outside of SPED for more communication and clarity around the systems, processes and expectations associated with the evaluation function.

The relatively small sample of recommendations that were tracked yielded fairly positive results in terms of implementation status. However, it was not possible in this study to assess whether that had occurred either by 'chance or design', i.e. whether it would have happened anyway. In any case, it is well acknowledged that in terms of capturing and tracking evaluation information, findings or recommendations for purposes of utilisation and learning, there is no systematic mechanism in place (as was also found in the Universalis study of 2003).

The sheer volume of repetition of similar findings and recommendations that occur throughout the ten-year period indicates that the Secretariat is

not yet utilising evaluations at a strategic level for decision-making and organisational learning. The fact that evaluation recommendations are repeated frequently over multiple strategic plan periods shows that the role of the evaluation function in decision-making is weak and that institutional learning mechanisms still need to be established.

Ongoing findings from evaluations (including this one and previous synthesis studies) have a consistent message: that the Secretariat should continue to invest sufficient time and resources in building and promoting the evaluation function. In addition, the Secretariat should build on examples of good practice in order to improve what currently exists, while at the same time acknowledging that a full transition to a results-based approach requires not only massive organisational change, but also continuous follow-up and capacity building over an extended period of time to reinforce the systems once they have been established.

6.2 Recommendations for improving the uptake of evaluation products within the Secretariat

The following recommendations focus on strengthening the Evaluation Section's contribution towards organisational learning:

1. **Define and clarify roles in relation to the evaluation function by:**
 - a. **Re-drafting draft evaluation policy in line with the findings of this study, and clearly setting out the role of the Evaluation Section.** Both the quality of, and engagement in, the evaluation function will be strengthened if decision-makers, management and staff properly understand the role evaluation plays in the Secretariat's work.

- b. **Revising and strengthening the Evaluation Guidelines ensuring that roles and responsibilities are interwoven and clarified throughout the document.** The guidelines should be updated in line with the following recommendations and general RBM principles.
2. **Relocate Evaluation Section to an independent unit in the organisational structure to ensure that it is free from undue influence and bias.** The Secretariat should use the current restructuring context as an opportunity to relocate and redefine the Evaluation Section so that it operates independently from other management functions, with a direct line of accountability to the Board of Governors.
3. **Establish peer review committees to oversee evaluations in order to improve quality and preserve the principle of independence.** The Secretariat should move ahead with plans to establish peer review committees to oversee and assess the quality of all evaluations. The governing protocols and processes as well as the function of these committees should be well documented and visible, and clearly stated on evaluation ToRs. The core committee should include an external presence and a gender expert. (This is not a recommendation that the gender expert should be sourced from within the Gender Section of the Secretariat as this may not be manageable in terms of capacity.)
4. **Improve quality of the Evaluation Section's processes and products:**
- a. **By providing clearer and more precise advance definition and targeting of evaluation end-users.** Starting at the planning stage, the Evaluation Section should engage end-users more, ensuring that evaluation function and processes are transparent and that end-users are aware of their roles and responsibilities in these processes. The ToRs should be clearer and more specific about who the end-users are and the intended use of the end-product. (Although the Evaluation Guidelines do outline accountabilities and responsibilities in design, management and dissemination of the evaluation, they do not go into any detail about end-users and responsibilities for utilisation of the end-product.)
- b. **By revising the guidance on evaluation ToRs. Guidance on developing ToRs** should be revised to stipulate: clarity about the Secretariat's expectation of use of good evaluation practice with clear reference to the OECD-DAC criteria and guidance; clarity about reporting requirements (including sections on constraints and lessons learnt); clarity about the use and users of the end-product.
- c. **By incorporating gender mainstreaming into the Evaluation Guidelines as a compulsory element of the evaluation function.** An element of gender expertise should be systematically brought into the evaluation function. One option is to do this through the peer review mechanism.
- d. **By defining what 'value for money' (cost-effectiveness) means for the Secretariat** – possibly adapting the common '3Es' definition¹⁴ of economy, efficiency, effectiveness (or the '4Es' definition¹⁵ which adds equity).
- e. **agreeing and developing guidance based upon minimum thresholds for evaluation budgets** – this should be in line with the broadly accepted development sector threshold of 3–5 per cent proportion of programme budget, and also take into account the scope of the evaluation.
- f. **implementation of mechanism for tracking of recommendation uptake status.** Following this study, the Evaluation Section should commence the backlog of recommendation tracking through use of the recommendation spreadsheet. Moving forward, recommendation tracking should be incorporated into the six-monthly reporting process. Evaluation Section to produce status reports for

14 Definition of the UK Department for International Development.

15 Definition of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact.

circulation and call review meetings with peer review committee when significant barriers to utilisation become apparent;

- g. **incorporation of regular annual meta-evaluation (quality aspect).** The Evaluation Section should review and strengthen the Quality Assessment Tool (QAT) (in line with their needs) following its use in this study. The QAT should only be used by those who have been trained in it and moderation sessions should always be carried out;
- h. **development of a capacity building plan for the evaluation function.** Evaluation Section to design and deliver targeted capacity building sessions on evaluation and learning processes in the Secretariat. For example: Evaluation Guidelines; QAT; Peer Review Committee protocols.

5. **Develop an evaluation knowledge management strategy and system.**

An easily accessible and user-friendly database for storing evaluation lessons and recommendations should be developed, either linked to or within the existing Programme Management Information System (PMIS). The database should be centrally managed by the Evaluation Section with access for other Divisions. The Evaluation Section should encourage utilisation of the database and provide guidance as to how this knowledge can be accessed and utilised for planning and design purposes at project, programme and strategic levels. This system should be linked into a broader organisational knowledge management strategy to improve the evidence-base for programmes and policy designs.

- 6. **Develop and implement a Communication Strategy for the evaluation function.** The strategy should include how to share, for example: the Evaluation Policy; the Evaluation Programme; the Evaluation Guidelines; the synthesis briefings; and the recommendation status reports. The strategy should aim to tackle: the perception that there is a lack of transparency with regards to certain elements of evaluation function and the lack of trickle-down (in relation to both engagement in and knowledge of the evaluation function) to all levels of staff.

- 7. **Conduct regular and systematic synthesis of evaluation findings, learning and recommendations.** Evaluation Section to review and analyse findings from all evaluations on an annual basis to identify systemic or significant trends and issues. Evaluation Section to prepare briefings on the synthesis results to be disseminated (including to the Board of Governors) for purposes of decision-making and planning. It might be useful to set up cross-Secretariat seminars to discuss common trends and issues.
- 8. **Investment sufficient time, financial and human resources in the Evaluation Section and in building wider staff capacity in theory and application of RBM principles.** In order to effectively implement all of the recommendations above a significant boost in human and financial resources may be required. In addition, senior managers should commit to working jointly with the Evaluation Section in order to support the achievement of these recommendations across the organisation.

6.3 Recommendations for Strategic planning

Below are some key recommendations drawn (and reformulated) from the synthesis exercise.

- 1. **Continue to pay attention to and implement the recommendations from the Training Evaluation that was undertaken in 2010.** In particular, training should only take place as part of a wider structured capacity development programme; with no one-off training events. All aspects of training across the Secretariat should be overhauled and/or designed in line with the recommendations of the 2010 evaluation.
- 2. **Develop a Secretariat-wide approach to coordination across Divisions, within Divisions, with PCPs, and with external stakeholders, in order to improve effectiveness and maximise impact of the Secretariat's work.**

3. **Continue to invest in a Secretariat-wide approach for exploring, developing and maintaining strategic partnerships in order to maximise resources and impact.** Exploring partnerships should be a standard expectation when reviewing or designing projects or programme, and also an ongoing aspect of programme management. Development of a Partnership Strategy could support in promoting this area of work.
4. **The Secretariat should identify opportunities and invest in raising the visibility and awareness of the Secretariat, its comparative advantages, and its work.**
5. **Commit to and invest in development of an organisational-wide knowledge management strategy and system.** Attention should be paid to ensure that the system incorporates and links well with any evaluation KM system that is introduced as well as exploring any existing KM systems that already operating in isolation.
6. **Human Resources senior management to engage with evaluation findings and ensure review of key policies in relation to how the Secretariat engages with consultants.** This includes the potential use of pro bono experts and a review of consultant terms and conditions.
7. **Continue to conduct proper scoping missions and needs assessment and abstain from activities unless it is clear that an enabling environment exists.** This could be informed by any prior knowledge of the success factors required in the enabling environment.
8. **Continue to invest time and resources in order to fully operationalise the Gender Mainstreaming Strategy.** Move ahead with plans to identify gender focal points within Divisions and finalise development of the online course on gender. Identify additional gender expertise within or outside the Secretariat and provide support to the evaluation function where required.

6.4 Following up on recommendations from this study

It is acknowledged that the above recommendations require assigned personnel and clearly stipulated timelines in order to be effectively implemented. Given the broad range of recommendations and the current restructuring context, it was deemed more appropriate for this element of work to be done internally. Therefore, a comprehensive and prompt follow-up meeting is advised, with meaningful engagement from senior management.

7. Annexes

7.1 Terms of Reference for Meta-Evaluation

1 Introduction

The Commonwealth Secretariat is an intergovernmental organisation established in 1965 with 53 member countries across the globe, bringing together 2.2 billion citizens. The organisation promotes democracy, the rule of law, human rights, good governance and social and economic development, and is also a voice for small states and youth empowerment. The Secretariat work is guided by its Charter, which affirms the core commonwealth principles (of consensus and common action, mutual respect, inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, legitimacy and responsiveness) and Strategic Plan.

In response to the evolving development context and demands of member states and other stakeholders, the Secretariat has adopted an increasingly results-oriented approach. This is evidenced in the new Strategic Plan (2013/14–2016/17), the streamlining of results-based management (RBM) across the Secretariat and the adoption of increasingly robust evaluation frameworks.

The Commonwealth Secretariat's evaluation function is managed by the Evaluation Section in the Strategic Planning and Evaluation Division (SPED). The Evaluation Section was established in 1993 with the objective of promoting transparency and accountability by facilitating the systematic and objective review of the Secretariat's portfolio of projects. Since the establishment of the function, a total of 103 evaluations have been conducted.

2 Background

In 2003, the Secretariat conducted a study, *Secretariat's Follow-up and Utilization of Evaluation Findings*, to assess the extent and quality of follow-up on recommendations arising from the evaluation processes and the degree to which evaluations had been utilised for decision-making and organisational learning. The study reviewed a sample of 30 evaluations managed and conducted by the Evaluation Section from 1995 to 2003. An

analysis of recommendation quality, endorsement status and implementation was conducted. Further analysis was conducted on the evaluation processes and systems contributing to the utilisation including the organisational learning and performance measurement.

As part of the strategic planning process, in 2013, a synthesis study of 15 evaluations conducted between 2003 and 2010 was conducted internally by the Evaluation Team within SPED. The study assessed all recommendations and highlighted ten key recommendations for consideration in the strategic planning process. These findings were used in the Strategic Plan (2013/14–2016/17).

Over recent years there has been a change in approach to evaluations, with greater focus on thematic and country evaluations and impact assessments. The approach has proved to be more cost-effective, given the limited size and resource base of the Secretariat's programmes. All Secretariat evaluations include a strong examination of processes, particularly design and delivery, as these are seen as critical aspects that contribute to programme effectiveness. The evaluations also have a strong strategic focus aimed at examining the changing developmental landscape and priorities so as to define the focus and scope of future work.

3 Purpose and scope of assignment

The Strategic Planning and Evaluation Division (SPED) is commissioning a meta-evaluation for the period 2005–2016. The purpose of the meta-evaluation is to provide an overall assessment and synthesis of relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the programmes evaluated. In addition, the evaluation will review the quality of evaluations conducted, level of follow-up and implementation of recommendations and nature of lessons learnt over the period, making recommendations from both the strategic and operational perspectives that will directly input into the Strategic Plan (2017/18–2021/22).

Specifically, in reviewing the reports of completed evaluations, the meta-evaluation will:

- assess the quality of evaluations conducted against agreed international standards, including the quality and applicability of the lessons learnt and recommendations;
- assess the implementation of recommendations, aggregate key recommendations not yet implemented and propose tracking mechanisms;
- propose mechanisms for improving the utilisation of recommendations and the lessons learnt moving forward;
- provide recommendations on how the evaluation function can be improved within the Secretariat; and
- identify issues, challenges and lessons learnt and make recommendations for the design of the next Strategic Plan (2017/18–2021/22).

4 Methodology

The Consultant will include the following key steps in the conduct of the meta-evaluation for information collection, analysis and report writing during the study:

- conducting a desk review and analysis of evaluation reports (and reference to project related documents);
- aggregating the evaluation findings;
- developing a quality assessment tool against which all evaluations are assessed and assess selected evaluations;
- reviewing evaluation and learning processes;
- conducting interviews and focus group discussions with staff; and
- undertaking any additional activities, as may be agreed with SPED, in order to enable the proper execution of the evaluation.

5 Deliverables

The meta-evaluation will provide the following deliverables to the Secretariat:

- an inception report with the Meta-Evaluation framework, work plan and methodology;
- a draft evaluation report;
- a dissemination seminar/presentation on the evaluation findings and recommendations; and
- a final evaluation report, incorporating all feedback/comments received on the draft report and during the dissemination seminar.

The deliverables must be submitted to SPED electronically as a Microsoft Word document. The inception report is due within two weeks of the initial meetings with the Secretariat staff and the review of literature. The draft evaluation report is to be submitted within two weeks of completion of the interviews with the Secretariat. Following the presentation of the evaluation findings at a seminar at the Secretariat and receipt of feedback comments from the Secretariat and other stakeholders on the draft report, the Consultant(s) is/are expected to submit a revised final Meta-Evaluation report. The draft (and final) evaluation report must be no more than 50 pages, excluding all annexes. The copyright of the Meta-Evaluation Report shall belong to the Commonwealth Secretariat.

6 Schedule and level of effort

The study is planned to commence in early summer 2016. It is estimated that 45 consultant days will be needed to complete the study. No country field visits for validation of findings are envisaged in this study. Travel and DSA expenses related to meetings with the Secretariat will be covered separately as per Secretariat's Travel Policy for external consultants. The consultant(s) will work in close collaboration with SPED.

7. Location

The consultant(s) will need to travel to the Commonwealth Secretariat office in London, UK for initial meetings and interviews with Secretariat staff and for presentation and discussion of the draft reports and recommendations.

Any other relevant work is to be undertaken at the consultant(s)' normal place of work and there is no provision for any other travel.

8. Consultancy requirements

The consultant(s)/consultancy team should demonstrate the following:

- substantive knowledge and experience in undertaking reviews, evaluations and critical research, with a minimum of 10 years' experience;
- knowledge and experience of strategic plan design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
- in-depth knowledge of RBM approaches in the context of international organisations, particularly in the work streams of multilateral organisations;
- the ability to handle and analyse big datasets, and conduct multi-country reviews;
- excellent communication skills, both spoken and written English, including experience in the production of clear and concise reports for international/intergovernmental institutions, and delivery of messages to a diverse audience;
- a good understanding of the work of multilateral organisations, especially the Commonwealth; and
- familiarity with the Sustainable Development Goals development process and international development architecture.

7.2 Evaluation Framework

Evaluation question	Sub-questions	Methodology and tools
<p>1 What are the major strengths and weaknesses of the evaluations and what factors contribute to their quality?</p>	<p>Were the evaluations planned well to ensure clarity of task? Are ToRs well formulated and accessible?</p> <p>Did the evaluation reflect good practice in terms of rigour and validity?</p> <p>Was the process consultative?</p> <p>Was the methodology clearly described and appropriate for purpose?</p> <p>Did the evaluation properly address the evaluation questions?</p> <p>Were clear and specific recommendations made?</p> <p>Were well-evidenced and applicable learning points drawn out?</p> <p>To what extent has the issue of gender been considered in the planning, design and implementation of the evaluation?</p> <p>Do evaluations conform to the Gender Mainstreaming Guidelines?</p>	<p>Desk review of evaluation reports and associated Terms of Reference. An <i>Evaluation Summary Template</i> should be completed for all evaluations.</p> <p>Assessment of evaluation reports and ToRs against all sections of Quality Assessment tool (QAT).</p> <p>Internal SPED meta-evaluation presentation and feedback sessions. Comprehensive notes should be taken and circulated.</p>
<p>2 To what extent are evaluations utilised for decision-making and organisational learning?</p>	<p>To what extent are challenges and recommendations evolving into lessons learnt?</p> <p>To what extent are recommendations being implemented?</p> <p>How often are recommendations and lessons being repeated?</p> <p>Are management responses being drafted?</p> <p>Are recommendations being tracked?</p>	<p>Desk review of evaluations. An <i>Evaluation Summary Template</i> should be completed for all evaluations</p> <p>Liaise with relevant Divisional staff – by phone, email and in person – as follow up to desk review. Recommendation-tracking spreadsheet</p> <p>Focus group discussions with internal stakeholders</p> <p>Internal SPED meta-evaluation presentation and feedback sessions. Comprehensive notes should be taken and circulated</p>

Evaluation question	Sub-questions	Methodology and tools
<p>3. How can the Evaluation Section strengthen its contribution towards organisational learning?</p>	<p>What are the existing policies and functions of the Evaluation Section? Where are the gaps?</p> <p>To what extent do the existing policies and functions of the Evaluation Section contribute towards levels of quality and uptake of evaluation products?</p> <p>What role does the evaluation function play in decision-making?</p> <p>Are internal stakeholders aware of evaluation processes and products and do they find them valuable in meeting their needs?</p>	<p>Focus group discussions</p> <p>Review of Secretariat's learning and evaluation processes</p>
<p>4. What are the key lessons and recommendations that can be extracted, distilled and synthesised for input into the next strategic planning process?</p>	<p>Are there implicit or explicit lessons stated in the reports that are applicable at strategic level?</p> <p>Are recommendations and learning points clearly presented and easy to extrapolate?</p> <p>Are the lessons learnt significant and meaningful?</p> <p>Which common themes, if any, are occurring among recommendations and learning points?</p> <p>Is it possible to categorise recommendations? How?</p>	<p>Conduct desk review of evaluations and apply section 4 of the QAT.</p> <p>Recommendation-tracking spreadsheet</p>

7.3 List of evaluations and other documents reviewed

List no.	Title	Internal/ external
1	Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat Development Assistance in the Area of Corporate Governance 1996-2003	External
2	Evaluation of the Commonwealth Media Development Fund	External
3	Development of a Strategic Framework for the Commonwealth Secretariat to Support the Tourism Sector	External
4	Evaluation of the Strategic Gap Filling Programme of the Commonwealth Secretariat	External
5	Performance Audit of the Commonwealth Secretariat Gender Mainstreaming Strategy	External
6	Commonwealth Education Good Practice Awards	Internal
7	Sierra Leone Evaluation Study 1999-2005	External
8	Evaluation of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation	External
9	Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Assistance to member States in Trade Law	External
10	Review of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Support to the Iwokrama Programme	External
11	Evaluation of Secretariat's Training Programme	External
12	Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat Debt Management Programme (2003/04 - 2007/08)	External
13	Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Programme of Technical Assistance on Maritime Boundary Delimitation (2003/04 -2008/09)	External
14	Evaluation of Commonwealth Private Investment Initiative	External
15	Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Assistance to Member States in Public Private Partnership	External
16	Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Assistance to Member Countries on Criminal Law	External
17	Impact Assessment of Malta Commonwealth Third Country Training Programme (MCTCTP)	External
18	Belize	Internal
19	Sri Lanka	Internal

List no.	Title	Internal/ external
20	Kenya	Internal
21	Solomon Islands	Internal
22	Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Assistance to Member States in Legislative Drafting	External
23	Technical Assistance Impact study: Commonwealth Secretariat support to Jamaica on Debt Management	Internal
24	Technical Assistance Impact study: Institutional Strengthening of the Credit Union Sector in the Bahamas	Internal
25	Evaluation of Geneva based Trade Advisory support to member states in multilateral trade negotiations.	External
26	The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment: 2007 – 2015. Mid Term Review	Internal
27	Evaluation of Commonwealth Singapore Third Country Training Programme	External
28	Evaluation of the Commonwealth Connects Programme.	External
29	Commonwealth Media Development Fund – Review and Renew	Internal
30	End Term Review of Gender Plan of Action	External

Other internal documents referenced

List no.	Title
1	Commonwealth Secretariat Evaluation Guidelines 2015
2	Commonwealth Secretariat Project and Programme Management Evaluation Guidelines 2010
3	Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan 2013/14- 2016/17
4	Commonwealth Secretariat Revised Strategic Plan 2013/14- 2016/17

7.4 Quality Assessment Tool

Evaluation title		Evaluation code	
Name of assessor		Date of assessment	

Rating system

- **A = Good** – meets criteria listed in 'guidance' column and demonstrates a high level of evaluation good practice;
- **B = Satisfactory** – meets each of the criteria listed in 'guidance' column at a satisfactory level;
- **C = Unsatisfactory** – does not meet all of the criteria listed in 'guidance' column at a satisfactory level;
- **D = Poor** – meets few or none of the criteria listed in 'guidance' column;
- **Z = Not applicable** (Reasons should be given in the 'comments' column).

Applying the rating system

- The 'area of enquiry' column states the element of the evaluation being assessed or the question being asked.
- The 'guidance notes' give criteria and guidance as to what is deemed 'satisfactory'.
- The 'comments' column should be used to give a brief reason for the rating. (These will be referred to in moderation sessions to ensure consistency of rating applications.)
- A 'satisfactory' (B) rating should only be given if the report is judged to be satisfactory in all the criteria listed in the guidance column. (In exceptional cases, assessors may note in the comments section that the rating is borderline.)
- Where an area of enquiry is deemed not applicable, reasons should be given in the 'comments' column.

Section 1: Assessing the Terms of Reference (ToR)

Area of enquiry	Guidance notes	Comments	Rating
1.1 Purpose and scope	<p>The ToR should clearly describe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what is to be evaluated – including objectives and key stakeholders; • the purpose, specific objectives and focus of the evaluation; • the intended use and users of the evaluation product 		
1.2 Expectation of good evaluation practice	<p>ToR clearly states the Secretariat's expectation of good evaluation practice (e.g. application of OECD-DAC criteria; reference to international standards including international law)</p>		

Section 2: Assessing evaluation methods, practice and constraints

Area of enquiry	Guidance notes	Comments	Rating
2.1 Appropriateness of the overall evaluation methods	The evaluation methods should be clearly outlined in the report and their appropriateness, relative to the evaluation's primary purpose, focus and users, should be explained including strengths and weaknesses of the methods		
2.2 Consultation with primary stakeholders	The evaluation report should outline the nature and scope of consultation with primary stakeholders as part of the evaluation process. (Adequate consultation with primary stakeholders is required for 'satisfactory' rating)		
2.3 Evaluation constraints	The evaluation report should outline key constraints to carrying out the evaluation (e.g. poor agency monitoring systems, lack of access to key information sources, etc.) and the effect of these constraints		

Section 3: Appropriate application of OECD-DAC criteria

Area of enquiry	Guidance notes	Comments	Rating
The evaluation should provide evidence of adequate and appropriate application of the OECD-DAC criteria outlined below.			
3.1	Relevance	Relevance is concerned with assessing whether the programme is in line with local needs and priorities. It refers to the overall goal and purpose of a programme	
3.2	Effectiveness	Effectiveness measures the extent to which the programme achieves its purpose, or whether this can be expected to happen on the basis of the outputs	
3.3	Efficiency	Efficiency measures the outputs in relation to the inputs. This generally requires comparing alternative approaches to achieving the same outputs, to see whether most efficient process has been used	
3.4	Cost effectiveness	Cost-effectiveness looks beyond how inputs were converted into outputs, to whether different outputs could have been produced that would have had a greater impact in achieving the project purpose	
3.5	Impact	Impact looks at the wider effects of the programme – social, economic, technical, environmental – on individuals, gender, age-groups, communities, and institutions	
3.6	Sustainability	Sustainability is concerned with measuring whether an activity or an impact is likely to continue after Secretariat support has ceased	

Section 4: Assessing the evaluation report

Area of enquiry		Guidance notes	Comments	Rating
4.1	Report legibility and accessibility	<p>The evaluation report should use clear language; be succinct; and be clearly laid out</p> <p>Grammatical and spelling errors should be minimal to none</p> <p>Key findings, conclusions, recommendations, lessons should be easy to extrapolate</p>		
4.2	Coverage of the evaluation report	The report should adequately cover all areas specified in the ToR and answer all of the evaluation questions		
4.3	Strategic focus	The evaluation should examine the changing developmental landscape and priorities, making reference to international standards and law where applicable		
4.4	Findings, conclusions, recommendations	<p>Findings should be supported by solid evidence</p> <p>Conclusions and recommendations should flow logically from, and reflect, the report's central findings. The report should provide a clear and defensible basis for value judgements</p> <p>Recommendations should be clear, relevant and applicable</p>		
4.5	Lessons learnt	<p>Statements should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consist of a generalised principle that can be applied in other situations; • be justified with proof of why they are valid; • be explained in the context of the intervention or programme that is being evaluated 		

Section 5: Gender mainstreaming

Area of enquiry		Guidance notes	Comments	Rating
5.1	Planning and design	<p>Expectation of consideration of gender issues and gender analysis clearly stated on the ToR</p> <p>Secretariat gender technical expert consulted or on evaluation team</p>		
5.2	Methodology	<p>The evaluation collected sex-disaggregated data</p> <p>The evaluation analysed data using a 'gender analysis'</p> <p>Consultation was carried out with a representative balance of both men and women</p>		
5.3	Report	<p>Data were presented separately on women and men</p> <p>Gender equality issues and gaps were identified and an appropriate diagnosis of the problem was presented</p> <p>Strategic actions and entry points for responding to the issues and gaps were presented</p>		

Section 6: Overall comments

Area of enquiry		Guidance notes	Comments
6.1	Comments on issues not covered above.	This is an opportunity for any additional comments, including those on the evaluation's general strengths and weaknesses	

7.5 Interview guide

SPED has commissioned a meta-evaluation covering the period 2005–2015, which is being conducted jointly by SPED and a consultant. Across the last few months, a substantial amount of desk work has already taken place – with all (30) evaluations reviewed for purposes of synthesising key learning and recommendations, and 50 per cent of those having been assessed for quality. We are now in the final phase of the study, which involves recommendation tracking and internal stakeholder interviews.

Six evaluations were selected by SPED as a focus for this phase of the study. They were selected on the basis that they span, and represent evaluations across, the strategic and enabling outcome areas as far as is possible. They are as follows:

- Evaluation of the Strategic Gap Filling Programme of the Commonwealth Secretariat (2007)
- Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat Debt Management Programme (2003/04–2007/08)
- Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Programme of Technical Assistance on Maritime Boundary Delimitation (2003/04–2008/09)
- Evaluation of Secretariat's Training Programme (2010)
- Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Assistance to Member States in Legislative Drafting (2015)
- End Term Review of Gender Plan of Action (2016)

The primary goal of these interviews is to elicit information about how the evaluation function can better support organisational learning. We are keen to hear staff perceptions of the evaluation function – both from those who have been involved in the selected evaluations (or other evaluations) and also those who have not yet been involved with the evaluation function. The interviews are semi-structured around the following areas of enquiry:

- Planning of evaluations
- Design of evaluations
- Management of evaluations
- Reporting and dissemination of evaluations
- Response and follow-up of evaluations
- Utilisation of evaluations

We envisage that this process will be free flowing and tailored. Some questions may focus on the specific selected evaluations whilst others may be more general. This will be dependent on the group of interviewees and their level of engagement with the selected report. Broad questions are listed on the following page.

1. Selected evaluation
 - Who was involved directly in this specific evaluation?
 - Who was familiar with this evaluation before notification of this interview?
 - How useful did you find this evaluation?
 - What are its key strengths and weaknesses?
2. Planning of evaluations
 - If you have been involved with evaluations, how would you describe the process of planning for an evaluation and what was your role in the planning process?
 - Who else played a role? Who took ownership of this process?
 - How did SPED engage you and support you in this process?
 - If you have not been involved in evaluations what would you expect the process to be? How would you expect SPED to engage and support you in this process?
 - In general, what do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the broader evaluation planning process? How could it be improved?
3. Design of evaluations
 - If you have been involved with evaluations, how would you describe the process of designing an evaluation and what was your role in the design process?

- Who else played a role? Who took ownership of this process?
 - How did SPED engage you and support you in this process?
 - If you have not been involved in evaluations, what would you expect the process to be?
 - How would you expect SPED to engage and support you in this process?
 - In general, what do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation design process? How could it be improved?
4. Management of evaluations
- If you have been involved with evaluations, how would you describe the process of managing an evaluation and what was your role in the management process?
 - Who else played a role? Who took ownership of this process?
 - How did SPED engage you and support you in this process?
 - If you have not been involved in evaluations, what would expect the process to be?
 - How would you expect SPED to engage and support you in this process?
 - In general, what do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation management process?
 - How could it be improved?
5. Reporting and dissemination of evaluations
- If you have been involved with an evaluation, how accessible and readable did you find the final report?
 - How were the key findings and recommendations shared with you? If they were not shared with you, who were they shared with?
 - How did SPED engage and support you in this process?
 - If you have not been involved in evaluations, what would you expect the process to be? How would you expect SPED to engage and support you in this process?
- In general, what do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation reporting and dissemination process? How could it be improved?
6. Evaluation response and follow-up
- How would you describe the approach to response and follow-up to evaluations and what has been your role in this process?
 - Who else played a role? Who took ownership of this process? How did SPED engage you and support you in this process?
 - If you have not been involved in evaluations, what would you expect the process to be? How would you expect SPED to engage and support you in this process?
 - In general, what do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the processes used to respond and follow-up to evaluations? How could they be improved?
7. Utilisation of evaluations
- Do you see evaluations influencing key decision-making in the Secretariat?
 - Are there any crucial factors which you feel enable/ inhibit the utilisation of the evaluation recommendations in the Secretariat?
 - Do you engage with evaluations recommendations? If so, how do you do that or how would you expect to do that? Are there any (formal or informal) mechanisms or processes in place to support you to do that? If not, why not?
 - Do you have any other suggestions as to how SPED could contribute to improving
8. Do you have any other suggestions as to how SPED could contribute to improving knowledge management and organisational learning in general?
- Thank you for your time

7.6 List of Secretariat staff interviewed

List of Commonwealth Secretariat staff interviewed as part of meta-evaluation.

No.	Name	Role	Division
1	Evelyn Pedersen	Adviser and Head of Evaluation	Strategic Planning and Evaluation Division
2	Joel Burman	Adviser	Technical Assistance Unit
3	Purvi Kanzania	Programme Officer	Technical Assistance Unit
4	Pauline Campbell	Technical Assistance Adviser	Technical Assistance Unit
5	Oluwatoyin Job	Technical Assistance Adviser	Technical Assistance Unit
6	Sanjay Kumar	Adviser	Debt Management Unit
7	Sanjay Lollbearree	Adviser	Debt Management Unit
8	Emma Thwaite	Assistant Legal Officer	Rule of Law Division
9	Mikhail Charles	Assistant Legal Officer	Rule of Law Division
10	Hawah Koroma	Legal Research Intern	Rule of Law Division
11	Segametsi Mothibatsela	Legal Adviser	Rule of Law Division
12	Nicole McIntyre	Legal Adviser	Rule of Law Division
13	Marie-Pierre Olivier	Legal Adviser	Rule of Law Division
14	Shadrach Haruna	Legal Adviser	Rule of Law Division
15	Mark Guthrie	Legal Adviser	Rule of Law Division
16	Elizabeth Bakibinga	Legal Adviser	Rule of Law Division
17	Amelia Kinahoi Siamouma	Head of Gender Section	Gender Section
18	Kemi Ogunsanya	Adviser	Gender Section
19	Roseanna Kandulu	Programme Officer	Gender Section
20	Julian Roberts	Interim Director ONR	Oceans and Natural Resources Division

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Meta-Evaluation: A Synthesis of Evaluation Studies, 2017

Management Response



The Commonwealth

Evaluation title	Meta- Evaluation: A Synthesis of Evaluation Studies, 2017
Evaluation Published	December 2016
Management response prepared by	Strategy, Portfolio, Partnerships and Digital Division
Management response approved by	Senior Management Committee

Overall comments

The Secretariat is in agreement with all 17 recommendations. Three (3) recommendations have been deferred as decision-making on these recommendations will have to take account of other on-going reviews. All other recommendations are agreed to and actions have been identified to implement over the remainder of the strategic plan.

Recommendation 1

Define and clarify roles in relation to the evaluation function by:

- a) Re-draft evaluation policy in line with the findings of this study, and clearly setting out the role of the Evaluation Section. Both the quality of, and engagement in, the evaluation function will be strengthened if decision makers, management and staff properly understand the role evaluation plays in the Secretariat's work.
- b) Revising and strengthening the Evaluation Guidelines ensuring that roles and responsibilities are interwoven and clarified throughout the document. The Guidelines should be updated in line with the following recommendations and general RBM principles.

Management Response

AGREED

The Secretariat's evaluation policy will be re-drafted taking into considerations the outcome of this evaluation, also reflecting learnings to-date.

Evaluation guidelines will be revised to reflect learnings as well as the organisational approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning.

Recommendation 2

Relocate Evaluation Section to an independent unit in the organisational structure to ensure that it is free from undue influence and bias. The Secretariat should use the current restructuring context as an opportunity to relocate and redefine the Evaluation Section so that it operates independently from other management functions, with a direct line of accountability to the Board of Governors.

Management Response

DEFERRED

A High Level Review of the Secretariat's governance arrangement is currently ongoing. Decisions with respect to the organisational structure are to be deferred pending the conclusion of the Review.

Recommendation 3

Establish peer review committees to oversee evaluations in order to improve quality and preserve the principles of independence. The Secretariat should move ahead with plans to establish peer review committees to oversee and assess the quality of all evaluations. The governing protocols and processes as well as the function of these committees should be well documented and visible, and clearly stated on evaluation Terms of Reference (ToRs). The core committee should include an external presence and gender expert. (This is not a recommendation that the gender expert should be sourced within the Gender Section of the secretariat as this may not be manageable in terms of capacity.)

Management Response

AGREED

A peer review mechanism for evaluations will strengthen the quality of evaluations delivered. The Secretariat will establish this mechanism and develop protocols for internal learning.

Recommendation 4

Improve quality of the Evaluation Section’s processes and products:

- a) By providing clearer and more precise advance definition and targeting of evaluation end-users.
- b) By revising the guidance on evaluation ToRs. Guidance on developing ToRs.
- c) By incorporating gender mainstreaming into the Evaluation Guidelines as a compulsory element of the evaluation function.
- d) By defining what ‘value for money’ (cost effectiveness) means for the Secretariat
- e) Agreeing and developing guidance based on minimum thresholds for evaluation budgets
- f) Implementation of mechanisms for tracking of recommendation uptake status.
- g) Incorporating of regular annual meta-evaluation (quality aspect)
- h) Development of a capacity building plan for the evaluation function.

Management Response

AGREED

The Secretariat will review the standard terms of reference to reflect more utilisation approach to evaluations; .

Value for money is a widely used concept. The Secretariat will define its application to the organisation and the difference with efficiency for guidance to evaluations.

The Secretariat will also establish a mechanism for tracking evaluation recommendations, showing progress on implementation. Meta evaluations will be included within the Secretariat’s evaluation strategy and plan.

Recommendation 5

Develop an evaluation knowledge management strategy and system. An easily accessible and user-friendly database for storing evaluation lessons and recommendations should be developed, either linked to or within the existing Programme Management Information System (PMIS). The database should be centrally managed by the Evaluation Section with access for other Divisions. The evaluation section should encourage utilisation of the database and provide guidance as to how this knowledge can be accessed and utilised for planning and design purposes at project, programme and strategic levels. This system should be linked into a broader organisational knowledge management strategy to improve the evidence base for programmes and policy designs.

Management Response

DEFERRED

The Secretariat is initiating a review of its management and data systems in order to inform a broader organisational knowledge management strategy. While the evaluations function is developing systems for managing and tracking evaluations and their outcomes, further development of this will be sequenced after the organisation strategy in order to ensure coherence.

Recommendation 6

Develop and implement a Communication Strategy for the evaluation function. The strategy should include how to share, for example: the Evaluation policy; the Evaluation Programme; the Evaluation Guidelines; the synthesis briefings; and the recommendation status reports. The strategy should aim to tackle: the perception that there is a lack of transparency with regards to certain elements of evaluation function and the lack of trickle-down (in relation to both engagement in, and knowledge of the evaluation function) to all levels of staff.

Management Response

AGREED

The Secretariat will develop and implement an Evaluation Communication Strategy.

Recommendation 7

Conduct regular and systematic synthesis of evaluation findings, learning and recommendations. Evaluation Section to review and analyse findings from all evaluations on an annual basis to identify systemic or significant trends and issues. Evaluation Section to prepare briefings on the synthesis results to be disseminated (including to the Board of Governors) for purposes of decision-making and planning. It might be useful to set up cross-Secretariat seminars to discuss common trends and issues.

Management Response

AGREED

The Secretariat will produce evaluation summary reports that provides a synthesis of findings to facilitate decision-making. The Secretariat will also produce an annual evaluation and learning report, with progress on implementation of evaluation recommendations.

Recommendation 8

Invest sufficient time, financial and human resources in the Evaluation Section and in building wider staff capacity in theory and application of results-based management principles. In order to effectively implement all of these recommendations above a significant boost in human and financial resources may be required. In addition, senior managers should commit to working jointly with the Evaluation Section in order to support the achievement of these recommendations across the organisation.

Management Response

AGREED

The Secretariat recognises the need to allocate and protect monitoring and evaluation resources to systematically facilitate the function within the organisation. The Secretariat has made progress in allocating dedicated resources to monitoring, evaluation and learning.

Recommendation 9

Continue to pay attention to and implement the recommendations from the Training Evaluation that was undertaken in 2010. In particular, training should only take place as part of a wider structured capacity development programme; with no one-off training events. All aspects of training across the Secretariat should be overhauled and/ or designed in line with the recommendations of the 2010 evaluation.

Management Response

AGREED

To ensure continued implementation of recommendations of the training evaluation, there is now clear guidance on appraisals of capacity building and training programmes.

Recommendation 10

Develop a Secretariat-wide approach to coordination across Divisions, within Divisions, with PCPs, and with external stakeholders, in order to improve effectiveness and maximise impact of the Secretariat's work.

Management Response

AGREED

The Secretariat recognises the need to strengthen a more cohesive coordination approach internally and externally. A Secretariat-wide approach to internal and external coordination will be developed.

Recommendation 11

Continue to invest in a Secretariat-wide approach for exploring, developing and maintaining strategic partnerships in order to maximise resources and impact. Exploring partnerships should be a standard expectation when reviewing or designing projects or programmes, and also an ongoing aspect of programme management. Development of a Partnership Strategy could support in promoting this area of work.

Management Response

AGREED

Partnerships with Commonwealth Organisations and other International Organisations is central to the Secretariat's operations. A partnership strategy will be developed that provides the framework for external engagement.

Recommendation 12

The Secretariat should identify opportunities and invest in raising the visibility and awareness of the Secretariat, its comparative advantages, and its work.

Management Response

AGREED

The Secretariat takes into consideration this recommendations as it in the process of reviewing its communication strategy.

Recommendation 13

Commit to and invest in development of an organisational-wide knowledge management strategy and system. Attention should be paid to ensure that the system incorporates and links well with any evaluation KM system that is introduced as well as exploring any existing KM systems that already operate in isolation.

Management Response

AGREED

The Secretariat will develop a knowledge management strategy that will also guide systems development.

Recommendation 14

Human Resources senior management to engage with evaluation findings and ensure review of key policies in relation to how the Secretariat engages with consultants. This includes the potential use of pro bono experts and a review of consultant terms and conditions.

Management Response

AGREED

The Evaluation Team will ensure that Human Resources are integral in the evaluation function to ensure evaluation findings and recommendations relating to human resources are effectively addressed.

Recommendation 15

Continue to conduct proper scoping missions and needs assessment and abstain from activities unless it is clear that an enabling environment exists. This could be informed by any prior knowledge of the success factors required in the enabling environment.

Management Response

AGREED

The Secretariat will strengthen its project appraisal processes with clear guidelines to ensure that adequate needs assessment is conducted before a project is designed.

Recommendation 16

Continue to invest the time and resources in order to fully operationalise the Gender Mainstreaming Strategy. Move ahead with plans to identify gender focal points within Divisions and finalise development of the online course on gender. Identify additional gender expertise within or outside the Secretariat and provide the support to the evaluation function where required.

Management Response

AGREED

Gender mainstreaming strategy is in development and once completed will address all aspects of human resources, programme design, monitoring, evaluation and capacity building.

Recommendation 17

Following up on recommendations from this study. It is acknowledged that the above recommendations require assigned personnel and clearly stipulated timelines in order to be effectively implemented. Given the broad range of recommendations and the current restructuring context, it was deemed more appropriate for this element of work to be done internally. Therefore, a comprehensive and prompt follow-up meeting is advised, with meaningful engagement from senior management.

Management Response

AGREED

Following this evaluation, management responses for evaluations have now been instituted that also tracks implementation of evaluation recommendations.

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