crew

centre of expertise for waters

Summary of ESSPI-CREW results 2011-12

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1.0 PURPOSE OF ESPPI-CREW

The aims of the Evaluating Science, Policy and Practice Interfaces (ESPPI-CREW) project are to:

- Understand existing science: policy: practice interfaces;
- Measure and analyse how CREW's structure, members and activities contribute towards these interfaces; and
- Evaluate performance and suggest ways to improve links between research, policy and implementation.

Through these, ESPPI-CREW will support the following CREW aims in increasing:

- the networks between researchers, policy makers and practitioners in the field of water management (both the coverage and the quality of interactions);
- the skills and capability of researchers to share knowledge appropriately and in response to policy/practitioner demand; and
- the impact of knowledge generated by CREW activities, such that it can lead to improved environmental, social and economic outcomes for those involved in water management.

2.0 CREW activity

CREW undertook the following activities in 2011-2012 including: 9 capacity building projects; 18 call down projects; and several activities designed to manage and promote the centre such as V-CREW; the CREW facilitation Team (CFT); the Steering Group and the Policy-Research Advisory Group (PRAG).

Capacity building projects are designed to build partnerships between the research institutes, universities and policy makers to deliver applied research. These projects lasted approximately 9 months; were funded to an average cost of £57,000; and generated several outputs ranging from reports through guidance to maps and toolkits. These projects respond to expressed demands from policy or practice, but are designed to offer a longer-term process than the call-down projects. They tended to start around the same time.

Call-down and Rapid Response projects are designed to be rolling projects, responding to immediate policy demands and delivering to a tight deadline. They can last anything from a few days to a few months; with costs varying accordingly (from £24,000 to £250 a project). Outputs ranged from peer review of reports through technical guidance to factsheets for teachers.

V-CREW is the CREW website and its supporting activities, such as the register of expertise. It is the main medium for sharing information and building a CREW community. It went live in June 2011; and generated 2000 hits over the first 9 months of the centre.

The CFT involves 5 part-time staff and they handle all the administration of the centre, including identifying and responding to challenges, under the guidance of the Steering Group. During the first year, they met monthly. The Steering group's remit is to provide strategic advice, direction and oversight; making recommendations so that CREW fulfils its objectives. During the first year, they met 3

times. The PRAG's remit is to provide advice on the operational delivery of CREW, including information sharing and helping with prioritising. They met twice in the first year.

3.0 Results: Networks

Network analysis requires an understanding of the quantity and quality of interactions. It is also important to undertake multi-level network analysis, looking at the engagement of organisations and the engagement of individuals within organisations. Networks have been built during the first year of CREW, but confusion over the structure and purpose of CREW meant that it is possible that potential members were put off participation. Efforts by the CFT to promote CREW and the register of expertise should help with this.

Although CREW's capacity building and call down/rapid response projects only involved 7.5 FTE in total (4 FTE from the research providers and 3.5 from the University sector), it has involved several organisations and individuals. In total, five organisations were involved in CREW, working with the James Hutton Institute and seven Universities. These projects engaged 45 individuals as principal investigators (Pis) –13 from James Hutton Institute; 10 from Universities and 22 policy makers or employees at the policy and practice organisations. Whilst these metrics demonstrate networks generated for the life of each project, it is important that these networks are supported beyond the life of the project, so that the capacity is not lost to future policy needs.

A number of disciplines and topic areas were engaged by CREW[1]: including hydrology, catchment science, engineering and aquatic ecology. Although natural sciences dominated, there were people involved in CREW with backgrounds in social science, performance evaluation and human health. So far, the majority of interaction has focussed on freshwater environment, which may have a knock on impact on networks.

4.0 Results: Capacity

Capacity stands for the skills and capability of researchers to respond to policy and practitioner demands. Both policy makers and scientists were seeking improved mutual understanding leading to more policy relevant research, communicated by concise and jargon-free outputs. Researchers found the demand-driven nature of CREW enjoyable but challenging. Individuals found it easiest when the projects were building on existing research and relationships.

A workshop held in September 2011 to identify future capacity building projects generated a huge number of requests. The process of prioritising projects, procuring them and delivering them created a time lag, which has created problems for timely delivery of advice. Alternative means to predict demand for capacity building topics are being adopted, such as the Water Futures Day held November 2012; and

[1] Data from PRAG, CSG, and capacity building projects responses only

intelligence gathered from existing stakeholder events. Therefore, there is less need for the PRAG to be convened.

As predicted by the baseline questionnaire results; communication was important to ensure outputs were suitably targeted and concise. Lots of time needs to be set aside for on-going discussion to build mutual understanding. Baseline information illustrated that whilst a website and newsletters were important communication processes for both scientists and policy makers; the latter were most keen on targeted face to face meetings; and the scientists preferred on-going email communication.

Whilst scientists and policy makers have broadly similar objectives for their activities, their timescales and workplace incentives are often different. Expectations regarding how long things take, what degree of certainty can be given, and how the information should be used need to be managed and discussed. Much of these issues can be assuaged by building up relationships, which allow better anticipation of needs and more trust in the final products. There was also confusion over the differences between CREW and other processes such as the RESAS Environment Research Programme.

Issues with procurement meant that input from Higher Education Institutes was delayed, impacting on the capacity available for some projects. The CFT can assist in building capacity by providing information and support on planning and implementing Knowledge Exchange (KE) activities; and the evaluation process can support by promoting reflection and sharing at the start, middle and end of projects. However, there are also problems about getting academics to respond to the demand-driven agenda with few opportunities for academic publications. The CFT are developing ways to indicate how CREW can act as a platform for further funding for more strategic academic research.

5.0 Results: Impact

It is very difficult to establish impact of knowledge exchange, given all the intervening variables affecting how knowledge is imparted; understood and used. Impact of knowledge exchange often occurs after the project is finished, when knowledge is used in future activities. For this reason, the impact of the 1st year of CREW has not been evaluated. However, both scientists and policy makers would like the work funded by CREW to have an impact in terms of improving policy development and implementation and to increase the profile of water related knowledge in Scotland and abroad.

6.0 Lessons Learnt & Ways Forward for CREW

The main lessons learnt from the first year were:

- Improve visibility of CREW and make access to information and publications easier, including information about members and their expertise on V-CREW;
- Communicate the benefits of demand drive science;
- Develop more effective ways to identify the priority areas for capacity building projects;
- Illustrate how CREW complements but does not duplicate the RESAS research programmes;
- Assist PIs to align their projects with the overall remit of CREW through the use of a standardised research planning template;

- Provide a checklist for PIs of essential steps for implementing KE; and
- Assist PIs to embed KE evaluation throughout their project through encouraging self-evaluation.

7.0 Lessons Learnt & Ways Forward for ESSPI-CREW

The main lessons learnt from the first year were:

- Promote a partnership approach between CFT and project managers to specify clear aims, objectives, activities, performance measures, and indicators of achievement and to make explicit the assumptions as to why they believe that interventions are likely to deliver the desired outcomes;
- Ensure the standardised research planning template help link inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes;
- Use the data collection to facilitate start-up, mid-term and final reflections on achieving 'success' and impact;
- Consider how to assess impact effectively;
- 'Map' networks to illustrate the depth and breadth of CREW's activity graphically; and identify areas/skills to target;
- Widen data collection beyond PIs to include all stakeholders involved in capacity building projects;
- Develop a more systematic data collection process for call-down projects; and
- Consider how to use learning from evaluation to inform CREW's planning cycle, which will be difficult given the staggered start dates of projects in 2012-3.

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