



Migration Observatory Evaluation Phase 1 Report

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Abstract

The evaluation demonstrates that the Migration Observatory is making significant progress in meeting its strategic objectives. Within a short period of time it has successfully established itself among relevant stakeholders and organisations as a welcome, credible and leading source of information and data on migration in the UK. Use of its resources is widespread. The evaluation identifies the impact that the Observatory is beginning to have within the migration sector and in informing media and policy debates on related issues.

Disclaimer

This is the report of independent evaluators commissioned by the Migration Observatory. The views expressed in this report should not be taken as being the views of the Observatory, COMPAS, the University of Oxford or its affiliates.

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1 Executive summary

Between July and October 2011 Firetail conducted the first stage of the evaluation of the Migration Observatory's work. The evaluation approach comprised of:

- A series of interviews with 25 of the organisation's stakeholders spanning a range of roles and sectors (including civil servants and elected officials, civil society and business groups and academic, think tanks and research organisations)
- Quantitative analysis of its web and social media reach
- Other evidence presented by the Observatory regarding its engagement with stakeholders

This document presents the findings from these different components of the evaluation.

Context

Based at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford, the Migration Observatory provides independent, authoritative, evidence-based analysis of data on migration and migrants in the UK, to inform media, public and policy debates, and to generate high quality research on international migration and public policy issues.

Following its launch in March 2011 the Observatory commissioned an ongoing programme of evaluation to explore and track attitudes to the organisation and its use, influence and impact.

The stakeholders interviewed have expressed serious concerns about the state of the media, public and policy debate on migration issues. They regard it as highly polarised, stressing that a lack of credible and objective data on migration over recent years has acted as a barrier to productive discussion and effective evidence-based policymaking.

Perceptions of the Migration Observatory

Interviewees welcome the Migration Observatory as an important new player in the sector, and one which provides organisations from a range of sectors with access to robust and impartial evidence. The Observatory is said to stand out from other players in the migration sector for occupying a unique position that combines:

- Independence and neutrality (although one stakeholder offered a contrary view)
- Authority and credibility
- Accessibility to a broad range of stakeholders

This evaluation finds that, in the six months following the Migration Observatory's launch, the organisation has successfully established itself among key stakeholders as a leading source for evidence on migration in the UK.

Through discussions with stakeholders, a picture emerges of the Observatory as an organisation that is considered to be at the 'top of its game' and one that delivers on its proposition. It receives repeated praise on all levels; from its production of consistently high quality resources through to the design of its website and its professional and responsive stakeholder engagement.

Use and impact

Evidence analysed for the evaluation demonstrates that the Observatory has passed its first test of becoming relevant to organisations that use and support it, as well as to those who are more questioning of the organisation's approach.

Use of its resources is already widespread and varied among stakeholders. The quantitative data collated reveals strong interest in and engagement with the Observatory. It achieved 6,034 visits to its website in October demonstrating significant retention of web traffic. The number of people following it on Twitter has grown month on month to over 500 followers.

There is also strong qualitative evidence that the organisation's resources are being used by a wide range of individuals and organisations who now regularly draw on the evidence it provides, whether to expand on their existing knowledge or in preparing briefings, newsletters, reports and news stories.

As a result of these achievements, the Observatory is beginning to exert influence within the media and policy sectors which it seeks to inform. A number of those interviewed feel that the Observatory has already had significant impact on the media narrative around the issue of migration targets and on the way some working in the media now approach the use of migration data.

References to the Observatory's work in speeches given by Vince Cable (Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills) and the recent meeting in which the Vice Chancellor of the University of Oxford discussed the "Thinking Behind the Numbers" report with the Prime Minister and other government ministers provide clear evidence that the organisation has also established its presence at the highest political level. The evaluation will continue to monitor the impact of this engagement.

Many stakeholders, however, struggle to give specific examples of impact and instead articulate a general sense that the introduction of the Observatory is significant and changes 'the feel' of the sector. This common response to being asked to gauge impact reflects some of the challenges and considerations of attributing specific impact to the Observatory's work (as required by the REF guidelines and other funding frameworks.) For many, the organisation is simply too new for it to be able to demonstrate attributable impact at this stage of its development. Also, in focusing solely on the identifiable, verifiable and measurable in evaluating the Observatory's impact and success there is a risk of missing the bigger picture of its significant achievements.

Looking to the future

Responding to an organisation still in its infancy, interviewees highlight a number of suggestions as to how the Observatory could become more effective in meeting its aims and objectives citing the importance of:

- Maintaining and strengthening the organisation's media presence
- Reaching out to new sectors
- Strengthening face to face relationships

For the majority of stakeholders, however, the priority for the Observatory is to maintain and build upon the strengths for which it is becoming recognised. The organisation's neutrality is largely regarded as the Migration Observatory's most important asset and our strongest recommendation is to ensure that this is preserved in a context where the strongest criticisms of the organisation to date are, for a significant number of stakeholders, that it is too neutral and, for one, that it is not sufficiently independent.

Stakeholders spontaneously identify where they expect their own and their organisation's use of Migration Observatory resources to grow. They foresee future events and scenarios in which they and an increasingly diverse range of stakeholders will come to rely on Observatory materials.

Should the organisation develop over the next two years in the same manner as it has since its launch, it is reasonable to assume that the evidence collated in later stages of the evaluation will point to increasingly substantial impact. This impact will come from the Observatory securing its position as the most reliable, trusted and neutral source for migration data. In doing so, they have every chance of achieving the objectives of their strategy.

2 Background, objectives and terms of reference

Based at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford, the Migration Observatory provides independent, authoritative, evidence-based analysis of data on migration and migrants in the UK, to inform media, public and policy debates, and to generate high quality research on international migration and public policy issues. The Observatory was launched in March 2011 and in May 2011 it commissioned Firetail to undertake an external evaluation of its work.

The Migration Observatory's objectives differ from those of "advocacy" organisations in that it is not trying to achieve policy outcomes, or direct the media – or others involved in the debate on migration – to particular conclusions. The broad scope of its work is, however designed to deliver certain outcomes – in particular to ensure better informed public and policy debate. Within this its key aims are to:

- Become known as the premier UK website for reliable, independent, trusted and up-to-date data and analysis on migration, migrants and related public policy issues in the UK
- Achieve more clarity in the public and media debates about what we know and don't know about the size, characteristics and impacts of migration in the UK
- Empower users and stakeholders to become better informed and more effective contributors to Britain's migration debate
- Make policy-making more evidence based
- Encourage all of the organisation's key audiences to engage in critical thinking and debates about fundamental issues, consequences and trade-offs involved in policy-making on migrants and migration in the UK
- Provide users the opportunity to interact with migration data and analysis
- Contribute to filling gaps in the research evidence base on international migration in the UK

In working towards these objectives the Migration Observatory has set out its medium and long term aspirations:

By the end of 2011:

- To have established itself as a major player in the migration debate among its key audiences
- To have evidence that it has made good progress towards all its objectives and that its work has positively affected the actions or outputs of members of its key audiences
- To be in a position to apply for further funding to extend the life-time of the Migration Observatory beyond March 2013

By March 2013:

- To have established itself as "the" independent expert body on migration issues in the UK
- To have evidence that it is achieving all its objectives, and to have repeated, demonstrable impacts on the actions and outputs of its key audiences

The broad objective of this evaluation is to monitor and assess the Observatory's success in meeting the organisation's aims and aspirations, to highlight problems and shortcomings, and

suggest improvements to enhance the performance of the project. At the outset of the process the Observatory identified four broad areas of its work for the evaluation to assess, namely:

- A) Introducing evidence to key public and policy debates [PUBLIC DEBATES];
- B) Improving the quality of evidence and information used in media debates [MEDIA];
- C) Making policy more evidence based [POLICY];
- D) Building and developing strategic alliances and expanding our support base [USER ENGAGEMENT]

The evaluation will track the Observatory's success in delivering on these for the duration of the project.

This document presents the findings from the first phase of the evaluation. The conclusions of the evaluation will be presented to funders and possibly other external organisations. The detailed document produced by the Observatory setting out requirements for this evaluation is appended to the report.

3 The evaluation process

3.1 Qualitative component

Between July 22nd and September 27th Firetail conducted 25 evaluation interviews with the Migration Observatory's key stakeholders.

Collectively a wide range of stakeholders took part in this stage of the evaluation. The final sample is outlined below:

- Civil servants from BIS, Home Office and GLA (6 interviews)
- Academia, think tanks, research organisations (5 interviews)
- Civil society groups: NGOs, advocacy organisations, trade unions (6 interviews)
- Media (4 interviews and 1 x 5 minute discussion)
- MPs (2 interviews)
- Business organisations (2 interviews)

The location of those interviewed largely reflects the geographical profile of the Observatory's key stakeholders. Twenty of those interviewed are London based. Of those working outside London we interviewed two stakeholders based in other areas of England, one in Northern Ireland, one in Scotland and one in Belgium.

The sample above was generated from a source list of stakeholders provided by the Observatory, which comprised a broad range of roles and organisations. Interviews were then scheduled and conducted over the phone and questions were based around a semi structured discussion guide, which is appended to this document.

Discussions took place on a confidential basis. Recordings of the interviews have been analysed in the preparation of this report.

3.2 Quantitative component

Data for the quantitative analysis is provided by the Migration Observatory. The team inputs data from Google Analytics, Mailchimp and Vimeo each month into a template which is then analysed

by Firetail. The Observatory has also provided evidence of its engagement with stakeholders for consideration in the evaluation. Alongside this, Firetail is monitoring Parliamentary mentions.

Data collated between March and October has been analysed in the preparation of this report.

3.3 Limitations and comments on the process

The majority of stakeholders interviewed engaged well with the process and generously gave time in assisting the Observatory through the evaluation. In relation to previous evaluations, we have found the wider constituency of stakeholders to engage particularly well with the evaluation; the Observatory clearly has a large group of close affiliates, both new and old, who are keen to assist and support it. A small minority of senior stakeholders interviewed were inevitably unwilling to be questioned at length or to comment in detail, offering instead an overview of their perceptions of the organisation. Their input, along with those who talked at length about the Observatory, was valuable for the evaluation and reaffirms the extent to which many stakeholders perceive a need for the work of the Observatory.

In stark contrast, a small number of organisations and individuals, notably those coming from positions that advocate favoring stricter controls on immigration, did not engage with the evaluation. Some of those contacted from these organisations commented that they could not ‘justify’ spending time on the interview while others provided little explanation. One stakeholder from this group did agree to a five minute discussion. However, relative to our previous experience, accessing relevant high level senior, political stakeholders has been particularly difficult in this process. We are unable to say definitively why any of these stakeholders have not participated but for the political stakeholders it may well be a reflection on the political sensitivity of migration issues.

The breadth of political views represented within the sample therefore has some limitations and in interpreting the data we are mindful that there remains an imbalance in the sample between those who do and do not favour stricter controls on immigration.

The other limitations to this evaluation are common to all qualitative campaign evaluations:

- *Confidentiality.* To ensure the evaluation is based on frank and open feedback from interviewees, we are committed to respecting respondents’ anonymity. Comments made in the interviews are therefore not attributed to individuals in this report and we avoid including direct comments which would enable an individual to be identified
- *Quantifying data.* With a qualitative exercise of this kind we do not quantify how many people share specific views, instead we offer a guide throughout the report as to whether the views expressed are shared by the majority or a group of interviews. Equally, we consider it important to include some comments voiced by just one or two individuals as these often add to our detailed understanding and the richness of the evaluation. Where comments are voiced in just one interview this is noted in the document
- *Attribution.* In interpreting the evidence collated and analysed in the evaluation it is important to consider the perennial question of attribution: where progress has been made, to what extent is it possible to attribute this to the Observatory’s work? Attribution of impact in public policy is by definition more qualitative and less verifiable than impact in other areas of academic research. The challenge of attributing impact to the Observatory is exacerbated by the number of organisations providing evidence on or communicating about migration as well as media coverage of related issues. These factors cannot be quantified and accounted for in full. Attribution indicated in the

evaluation is based on the available evidence, the qualitative element of which relies on partial external perceptions of the Observatory.

4 Context

Migration is a high profile issue generating debate and comment across sectors. For those interviewed, migration remains a key issue in the UK and one that is firmly fixed on the agendas of Government, the media, business and civil society groups alike.

There are felt to be peaks in some organisations' engagement with migration issues, driven largely by the timing of Government consultations, policy announcements and the way in which the media responds to these. A number of stakeholders suggest that, at present, some Government officials are reluctant to communicate externally about migration. It is an issue surrounded by political sensitivities.

Despite different levels of engagement with the migration debate, interviewees agreed that migration is a contentious issue which will remain a permanent feature of the policy landscape. It is an issue that cuts across sectors, impacts on other policy issues, and has an impact on lives and communities across the UK. As a result, public, political and media interest is expected to remain high. Several stakeholders expect it to be a key area of debate in the run up to the next general election, which is anticipated in 2015.

There is concern among stakeholders interviewed about the current state of debate around migration. Interviewees describe public and media conversations as polarised, unproductive and paralysed. The lack of credible and objective data on a range of migration issues is felt to have stood in the way of constructive discussion and effective evidence-based migration policymaking.

A couple of participants feel that the debate has moved on in the last 5 years and become less polarised, but the majority have not perceived any significant improvement.

Media: *"It's a debate that is hugely ideological, with a huge division of views between two camps... Nearly all migration topics are contested between them and yet there is no fundamental truth. If you take, for example, the Government's Control of Immigration figures... people who are ideologically in favour of immigration would say that they probably exaggerate the scale of migration because they don't deal with inflows and outflows accurately. People who are more sceptical would say that they underestimate the scale of it because they only look at legal migration and not illegal entry - so the figures themselves are all framed ideologically."*

MP: *"The centre of gravity of the debate has become shriller and sourer and more difficult...we need to consolidate a balanced, more nuanced approach to this in terms of the empirical data and the corresponding public policy pressures that it creates in terms of housing, public services, health, education, the role of the census....all of those things."*

Media: *"The whole debate suffers from a lot of misinformation. It is incredibly difficult to understand. Even the way the Government has chosen to measure migration is difficult. People don't understand it."*

Business Organisation: *"It's very emotive. The setting of Government policies is worryingly based on poor evidence. It is driven by a political agenda and a populist agenda and media debate that doesn't really want to or deliberately doesn't understand or explain the nuances of immigration."*

5 Stakeholder Perceptions of the Migration Observatory

5.1 Relationship with the Observatory

The Observatory has been highly successful in establishing itself across a range of relevant sectors since its March launch. It has become a key player in the broader community of actors working on migration and has become of relevance to a diverse range of organisations, including those that are critical of it.

The team is praised for thinking strategically about those with whom the Observatory needs to engage and is said to be effective in then building these relationships across different sectors and organisations. It is said to have established itself particularly well within broadsheet and broadcast media organisations and the migration policy community according to a number of interviewees working in these fields.

Civil servant: *“Among the people who know and care [in Westminster] I think they have a profile. They have generated a fair few column inches in the last few months so I think people involved in the migration debate would all have heard of it and have a fair understanding of what it does.”*

While there is strong variation in the organisation’s relationships with its stakeholders, the Observatory is seen as consistently professional and flexible in the way it adapts and responds to the varied bespoke needs of the individuals, organisations and sectors that it engages with. Those interviewed engage with the organisation at different levels and through a variety of channels. Some are regular Twitter followers who keenly anticipate the Observatory’s response to announcements and regularly check the website for new research or updates. Others have a close and longstanding relationship with members of the COMPAS team, a relationship that now extends to the Observatory. Equally, there are respondents whose engagement with the organisation is less direct yet who feel assured that they could access information from the website or contact a member of the team directly were the need to arise. Where organisations have wanted members of the Observatory to attend events it is said to have been receptive to such requests and made a valuable contribution to these.

5.2 Understanding of the Observatory

All those interviewed have a broad understanding of the Observatory’s objectives and activities. It is regarded as providing sophisticated signposting to and monitoring and dissemination of high quality, impartial evidence, which seeks to inform and impact on the debate surrounding migration. Some also communicate in terms of what the Observatory does not do; it is largely understood that the Observatory is not linked to any political party, nor is it a lobbying organisation.

One area where the organisation’s position is slightly nuanced is in relation to its role in conducting and generating research. This uncertainty, about whether the Observatory is an initiator, a conductor and/or a broker of research is echoed across a number of interviews. It should be noted, however, that this lack of clarity or understanding does not represent a concern for those interviewed, nor does it have a negative impact on their assessment of the Observatory’s work. Participants do not readily recall examples of research, which have been generated in part or in full in response to the Observatory’s activity.

Academia, think tanks, research organisations: *"I'm not entirely sure how much they are about doing primary research and how much it is just about dissemination."*

For a small number of stakeholders who have a longstanding relationship with COMPAS, the distinction between COMPAS and the Observatory is also somewhat blurred. Equally, this does not generally detract from their perceptions of the organisation as these individuals also view COMPAS as a highly credible body.

Civil servant: *"I must admit that sometimes I am not sure who [staff members] is COMPAS and who is Migration Observatory."*

5.3 Views on the value of the Observatory's proposition

'Hugely valuable', 'crucial' and 'extremely useful' are terms used by stakeholders across sectors in assessing the value of the Observatory's work. It is felt that migration is an issue on which everyone has something to say, and that there has been no shortage of organisations conducting advocacy and campaigning work on migration issues. What has been missing from the debate, however, is a body that separates fact from opinion and which provides media and policy makers within and beyond Government with evidence to underpin the narrative. There is majority agreement from participants across the sample that the migration sector needs a body that provides this accurate, impartial evidence of migration, which is accessible to a non-expert audience. All but two stakeholders interviewed believe that the Migration Observatory is filling this gap.

Participants describe the migration sector as a crowded one and generate a lengthy list of organisations that contribute to the debate in different ways including NGOs and other civil society groups, Government bodies, think tanks and academic institutes. However many respondents feel that the Observatory occupies a unique position within this space as the only organisation disseminating information that combines:

- *Accessibility:* Presented in a way that is instantly useable by non-experts
- *Neutrality:* From an organisation without a (perceived) agenda
- *Authoritative Expertise:* Both in terms of individuals within the team and the project overall
- *Timeliness:* Work is up to date and the organisation is fast to respond

Civil society group: *"I think their contribution to the debate... is enormously valuable in a situation where there is a lot of anecdotal and apocalyptic stuff being used by the media in particular."*

Employer/business representative: *"From a policy point of view it's very useful to have this information in a polarised debate, a non-aligned voice, that isn't speaking from a party political point of view."*

Academia, think tanks, research organisations: *"I think there is not enough evidence and sober analysis in the migration debate in the UK so this is very helpful. Having it collected in a site so people don't have to go and search it out from different academic studies... in an intelligible format is helpful and welcome."*

Beyond the Observatory's quality and impartiality, its focus on seeking to present complex data in an accessible way is well noted. The majority of those interviewed feel that the Observatory performs well in this respect and they value the impact it has for them and their organisations. On a practical level some stakeholders say that access to Migration Observatory resources makes digesting research easier. Some noted that much research in the area is impenetrable in its length, detail and format. A number mention the value of the Observatory's role in explaining the evidence, its sources and its limitations thus leading them to a clearer understanding of and ability to communicate the facts. It is clear that for some stakeholders the Migration Observatory has become a key 'go to' source for information and has reduced the number of other organisations/sources they need to consult in order to be informed.

Several participants suggested that by using the Observatory's material, the credibility of their own work is enhanced. The ability to refer to materials produced by an organisation with the Migration Observatory's strong reputation strengthens their own case and makes it harder for others to dismiss their viewpoint.

Media: *"There are very few academics who are prepared to intervene in public debate and fewer who cut the mustard when they do. ...There is a timidity to the public debate around immigration, but we have a duty to get the right voices out there. What the Migration Observatory have done so well is to put their heads above the parapet in the name of public understanding."*

MP: *"Our relationship with them is very important for us because obviously there are very few sources of information on immigration outside of the MAC... getting in-depth information that stacks up is quite critical. Our resources are limited and obviously the Migration Observatory has been a massive help with that... for example...on the likely impact of Government proposals on...net migration - there are not many sources that can do that kind of modeling and statistical analysis."*

Think tank: *"The fact the information is coming from Oxford University makes people think it is serious. With so many websites people want to know the pedigree and agenda behind it [their statistics.] This has credibility."*

5.4 The Migration Observatory and other players in the field

Interviewees turn to a range of organisations for information on migration issues. IPPR, Migration Watch, Home Office statistics are all mentioned by individual respondents as credible voices in the debate, though the credibility of these groups was contested by others.

There are a number of other organisations working in the sector, which are cited as credible including MPI, ONS, CReAM, NIESR. While the credibility of these organisations is not contested they are largely perceived to be of most relevance to specialist audiences. Several say that these organisations are not geared to, or in the case of ONS, are not successful at communicating with the Observatory's key audiences who they perceive to be media representatives, policy makers and, for a couple of interviewees, the broader public. Two stakeholders comment that the Observatory has adopted a role that should be properly within the remit of the ONS.

A number of interviewees identify some overlap between the work of the Observatory and these other bodies in the field. For the most part they are not concerned by this. Some say that the Migration Observatory is geared at a specific audience, namely media representatives and policy

makers, who are not fully catered for by other bodies in the sector. A number of stakeholders, particularly those representing civil society groups, believe that multiple voices are good for the sector. They are keen for the Observatory to play some role in addressing the perceived historic deficit of reliable, independent migration data.

Media: *"I think the Migration Observatory have a less explicit agenda...than the IPPR which is very straight forward about its views on Migration. Migration Watch is more to the right - being more sceptical about migration. I'd probably put the Migration Observatory somewhere in between or not really on that spectrum – I mean I don't think they have an explicit agenda do they?"*

Civil society group: *"Prior to the existence of the Migration Observatory, when we wanted to use statistics we had to rely on Government websites. The ONS has many fine characteristics but making information available in a readily usable format is not one of them."*

Civil servant: *"We don't regard people working in the same area as us as competitors...especially in this area where it is a case of the more good quality research and dissemination the better."*

5.5 Perceptions of the organisation's delivery

Through discussions with stakeholders from across different sectors, a picture emerges of the Observatory as an organisation that is very much at the top of its game in terms of how it delivers on its proposition. From the design of its website through to the way it engages with its stakeholders, respondents are extremely positive – to the extent that some struggle to identify areas where improvements could be made.

The team is regarded as strong, expert and professional with several interviewees suggesting that other organisations could learn from the Observatory's professionalism.

Stakeholders repeatedly refer to the 'beautifully designed' (NGO) website as engaging and easy to use and navigate. Information is said to be presented in a user-friendly way without negating the integrity of the content and there is praise for the tools that enable users to generate their own charts. The newsletter is considered to be professional and accessible.

A number of respondents raise issues related to timing which cement the Observatory in their minds as a highly professional organisation, praising it for:

- *Pre-empting news stories*
- *Regularly updating information on the website*
- *Understanding the news cycle*
- *Preparing swift responses to events and announcements*
- *Issuing newsletters at intervals designed to maintain interest*
- *The level and speed of staff responses to queries*

Media: *"They've grasped how the media works. They've got a topflight guy [Rob] who understands how the news cycle works. They are flexible when they need to be."*

Business organisations: *"The information is well presented. The website is good and well put together. It is detailed without being overwhelming. It's topical and up to date...Our relationship*

with them is fine. I feel as though if I need to call up and ask a question they would be open to that.”

Civil servant: *“I mercilessly use their functions where you can change graphs. It’s fantastic. You can get all the evidence there. Most of it is produced by Government so we have access to it anyway, but they make it really functional.”*

Civil society group: *“Traditionally I would just Google. Nowadays I would tend to go to the Migration Observatory because I know they are doing current stuff. It has made me feel a lot more confident that I have all these things in one place. I don’t have to make sense of all these huge documents any more.”*

Academia, think tanks, research organisations: *“What I like about it, and I would as an academic, is that they are backing up their claims with evidence and data... Martin helps to raise the level of the debate.”*

Where participants do suggest areas in which the Observatory could improve, these tend to be secondary issues, which do not significantly detract from stakeholders’ overall positive impressions of and relationship with the organisation. A number of stakeholders, for example, call for the organisation to become even sharper in its timing; particularly in its understanding of the news cycle, production of timely and compelling stories, and its ability to respond to events and announcements.

Some criticism is also voiced by a couple of media representatives and one NGO stakeholder, who feel that the tone and presentation of Observatory data and analysis is still too academic. Of these one notes some improvement over recent months saying that Observatory briefings have been made shorter and more user friendly.

Media: *“There is just the one single problem of it being an academic based initiative: that it does suffer from the academic failing of moving from the necessity of talking to themselves to being able to talk to the wider population. It is always difficult to make that transition.”*

In stark contrast to the majority view, there are a couple of interviewees who express strong criticism of the organisation. One NGO is disappointed that the Observatory is, in their view, failing to provide data which is accessible to those in civil society groups. They explain:

Civil society group: *“The website looks good and easy to look around. The problem is once you get there you could spend hours there. The newsletters are good but the digests need to be more functional I’d say....there are reams of information... As it is, it’s quicker for me to go to Migration Watch and work backwards from there than it is for me to go the Observatory and try to work through all that detail [referring to information required to support responses to a Government consultation].”*

This criticism may be coloured by wider frustration at the Observatory for failing to communicate a strong position on migration policy. Others from civil society groups have offered opposing views about the usefulness and accessibility of the information

One of the Government officials interviewed is also critical of the Observatory for, in their view, failing to live up to its promise to occupy the neutral ground in the debate. They suggest that the Observatory appears to criticise Government too readily, illustrating their position by saying that the themes it chooses to cover and the tone of its tweets do not fit that of an impartial player. It is important to note that there are other voices within BIS and the Home Office which are positive

about the quality of the Observatory's work and regard it as a credible player (even if some have only limited use for its materials.) Similarly, some voices outside of Government are critical of the quality of research produced by the Home Office.

Civil servant: *"They are providing some very good information in their reports on the website. I do have significant problems though with their interventions with the media which I don't think are objective unfortunately...and some of their research reports as well... I think that they are increasingly perceived as essentially taking one side and that is an anti-Government, slightly political perspective. It has done them a disservice and lost them a lot of points. Their email updates and Twitter notes... they are all very much pointing to issues of Government policy and criticism of Government policy and encouraging people to comment on Government policy. I've never seen anything from the other side. I don't expect them to support Government policy but I do expect them to present a balanced view and they're not doing that."*

6 The Migration Observatory's current and anticipated impact

6.1 Introduction

A key aim of the evaluation is to provide evidence of how Migration Observatory resources are being used by stakeholders, to understand the organisation's perceived, actual and potential impact. It provides detailed insight into current use and perceived impact of Migration Observatory resources and, in doing so, also makes clear the need for discussion and consideration of how impact can be determined and to what ends.

This section provides information on:

- *Stakeholders' spontaneous and prompted perceptions of the Observatory's impact*
- *Quantitative evidence of the organisation's reach*
- *Assessing the Observatory's impact and the challenges this raises*
- *Details of current and potential use of Observatory resources*

6.2 Stakeholders' spontaneous and prompted perceptions of impact

Some stakeholders readily and without prompting discuss their views on the impact of the Migration Observatory.

For the most part they talk in terms of a general impression that the introduction of the Observatory has had an influence on their roles and sectors. Several see the Observatory as increasingly recognised and referenced in meetings, discussions and presentations. Many cite the extent of their media coverage and the fact that the Observatory is now widely recognised within Government, media and civil society as a demonstration of positive impact. Some talk about the impact it has on their own work noting that the introduction of the Observatory means there is now an independent, trusted and visible source of information on migration, which they are able to access.

Stakeholders suggest that the Observatory has delivered on the qualitative markers of trust, awareness and reliability among a network of senior decision-makers. In our experience these are good indicators of impact in a policy-making environment. If decision-makers are aware of an organisation, trust their work to be credible and know that they can be responsive when necessary, then this organisation will be having an impact.

Media: *"They are pretty good about fronting the debate. They got 10 minutes on 5 live with Migration Watch, which isn't a Radio 4 audience, so they're reaching out and getting out of the media ghettos. They aren't preaching to the converted, they are getting out and about and if their goal is public understanding, they should keep that up."*

MP: *"That more balanced approach has lost out over the last few years so in one sense we are running up hill a bit but relatively speaking and in a relatively short space of time...it [the Migration Observatory] has begun to re-establish a different pole in this discussion and I think therefore the job at the moment is to put the footings in the ground around that and I think it is doing so....The rate of change is significant but the task is so big."*

6.3 Quantitative indicators of impact

While interviews with stakeholders establish an understanding of how this audience interacts with the Observatory and the impact of this interaction, the sample size does not allow for this to be quantified. An analysis of the Observatory's web-based data, however, enables broader engagement with the Observatory to be tracked and quantified.

In analysing the data generated across the Observatory's different social media activities, a clear and promising picture emerges about the organisation's reach. The launch earlier in the year was clearly successful in encouraging strong engagement with the website and social media. The number of users then initially trailed off month on month, following the launch as would be expected at this stage in the project's development. September and October, however, have seen renewed growth in engagement with the Observatory's website and other aspects of its social media profile.

These patterns, as presented in the charts below, would indicate that the Observatory has secured a profile among a wide number of followers and therefore, it is reasonable to assume, within a significant number of organisations. The strength of recent growth would indicate that the organisation is continuing to produce materials which retain current stakeholders' interest as well as appealing to new targets.

Where benchmarks are available, Migration Observatory is performing well in its online communications. For example, the table below looks at the performance of its email newsletters over the first five months. Open rates (the % of recipients who opened the email) and clicks (links clicked by recipients within the newsletter) are consistent, and high when compared to industry benchmarks.

Table: Email Newsletter performance (Open rates and clicks)

Newsletter	Open Rate		Clicks	
	Migration Observatory	Industry Average	Migration Observatory	Industry Average
June 2011	40.21%	16.6%	19.31%	3.3%
July 2011	39.29%		17.11%	
August 2011	39.16%		17.97%	
September 2011	38.11%		17.87%	
October 2011	37.69%		18.56%	

Source: Mailchimp

Measuring impact in social media is a new, emerging and imprecise discipline. The challenge is to measure reach, audience and influence. In social media, having credibility among a small but influential audience may be more effective than serving a large number of less well-connected people. New services such as Klout (www.klout.com) seek to score this online influence in the aggregate.

These methods are new and open to criticism. For example, there is a lack of transparency in how scores are derived and the rebasing of the algorithm makes longitudinal comparison difficult.

The most influential actors in social media according to this analysis are pop stars with many millions of followers. With these caveats, looking at these scores serves to locate the Observatory's work in the wider social media landscape.

From analysis of these scores, we can see that the Observatory is making effective use of social media and influencing more effectively than the majority of academics. This supports the qualitative conclusions drawn from interviews.

Across October/November 2011, the Migration Observatory's twitter account (@migobs) had a score in the 42-45 range. This score is out of 100 and seeks to measure the breadth and strength of online influence.

In comparison, leading media organisations (such as the Daily Telegraph and BBC News) have Klout scores in the 75-80 ranges. Individual journalists who have an active social media presence have scores in the 55-70 range. The main twitter account for COMPAS has a score in the range of 32-35, Migration Watch had a score 39-42. The range of scores for individual academics on twitter ranges widely, with most in the 20-25 range.

Looking at web traffic, the Observatory has done well in sustaining the web traffic generated at launch. In other campaign launches, one normally anticipates web traffic dropping back significantly after a successful media launch. Rules of thumb vary, but traffic levels can drop to around 10-25% of that achieved at launch. In comparison, the Observatory has been successful at retaining web traffic and has built up the number of visits steadily over the six months.

Figure 1: Monthly web traffic

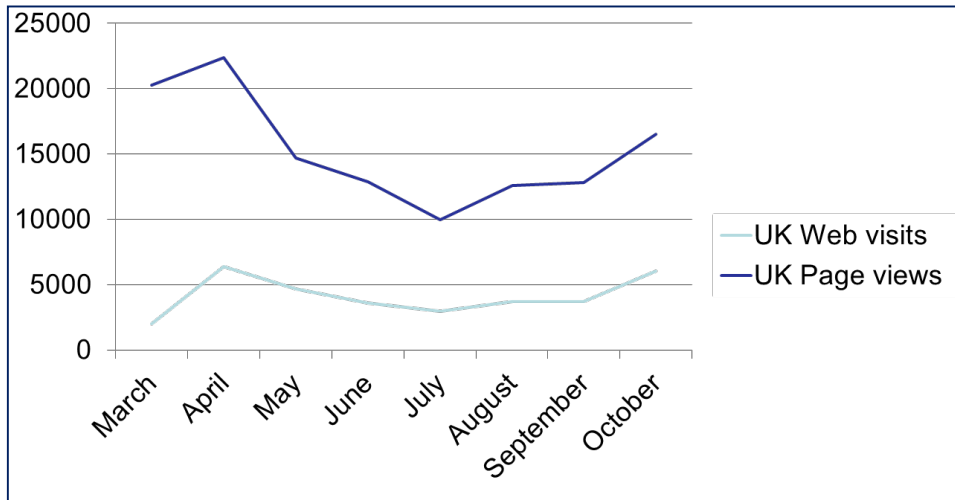


Figure 2: Social media engagement

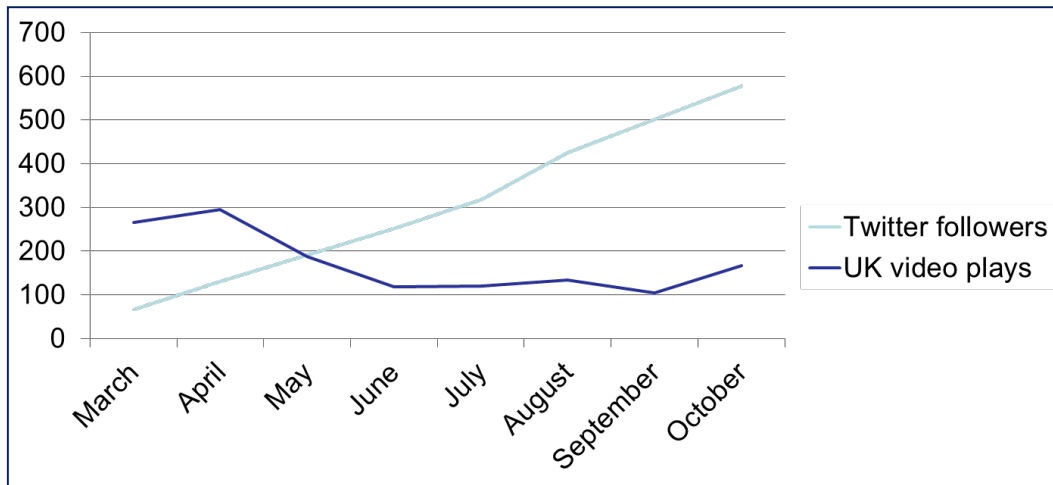
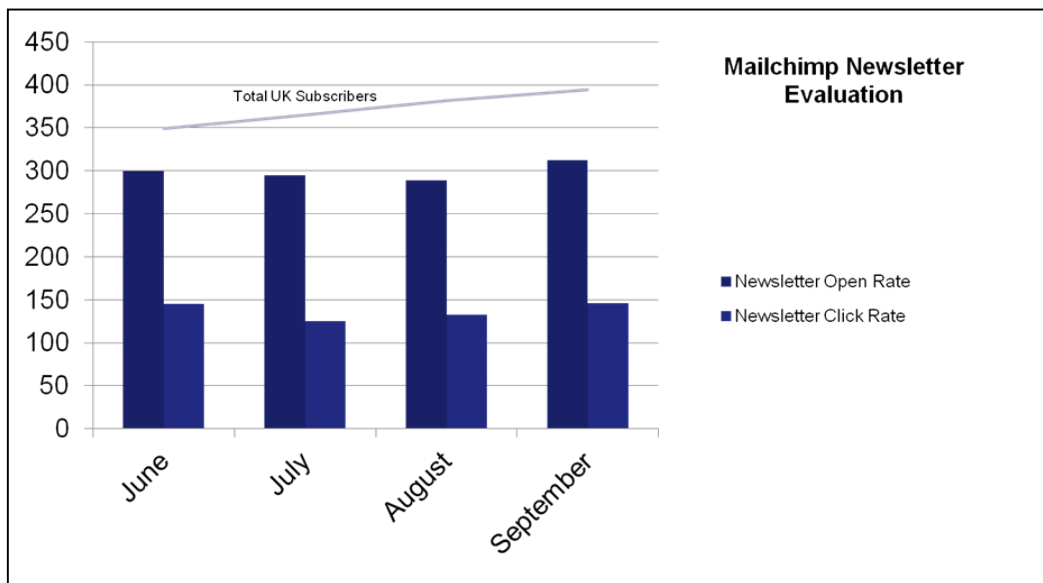


Figure 3: Engagement with the newsletter



Identifying the origins of web traffic demonstrates that people are accessing the site through a series of different channels. The majority of visits to date (57%) have come through Google/Google Organic with a further 20% of traffic coming directly to the Migration Observatory website. In addition, there are a number of sites directing a smaller but still significant proportion of visits. Referrals from the COMPAS website have been constant since the launch and have directed 3% of traffic. Another 3% of referrals are from BBC with Twitter (and T.co – which represents links on Twitter) collectively accounting for just over 3%. In the months since August, the Guardian, Spectator and Economist have all registered in the top 5 referral sites.

The amount of non-UK based traffic to the website is significant. While 68% of visits are from within the UK there have been over 16 000 international visits. 7% of these come from the US with Australia (2%) and Germany (2 %) generating the next highest volumes of traffic.

Monitoring this data over the coming months will be important in demonstrating the level at which interest and engagement stabilise among the organisation's wider community of stakeholders. As indicated in the above chart while the number of subscribers to the newsletter is steadily growing, actual engagement with it dropped off slightly in October. The ongoing monitoring will play an important role in highlighting any such patterns to enable the Observatory to consider their implications.

6.4 The challenges of attributing impact

As outlined in the earlier sections of this chapter it is clear that the Observatory is having a broad impact at a range of levels. However, seeking precise attribution of this impact in terms of outcomes (as expected by REF guidelines and other funding frameworks) does present a range of challenges for the Migration Observatory, particularly at this baseline stage of the evaluation. Stakeholders outline the key challenges facing the Observatory in this respect:

For many participants, the organisation is simply too new for it to be expected to demonstrate attributable impact. A number stress that it is too early to judge the real long-term impact of the organisation; they recognise that it is seeking to influence the context of the way public debate about immigration is conducted and say that this cannot and should not be, the job of six months. The range of organisations in the sector poses difficulties in terms of attribution; policymakers, officials and journalists consider multiple sources when developing stories or briefings. From our experience these players will not, in general, wish to appear captive to one organisation or to assign credit to work they can reasonably credit to themselves. Similarly, some suggest that to attribute impact to the Observatory as a standalone body risks dismissing the contribution that other long standing organisations are making to improving the quality of debate. There is also a significant gap between how frequently the Observatory's resources are used, and how often they are referenced. Having used the website to be guided to and help understand data from less accessible sources, some stakeholders will then reference those original sources. Conversations with some stakeholders indicate that they do not provide such references in the ordinary course of their work.

These challenges, as presented by those interviewed, reflect our concerns about the risk of focusing on the identifiable, verifiable and measurable, in evaluating the Observatory's impact and success namely that there is a danger of missing the bigger picture of what is being achieved when this bigger picture tells an important story.

Civil servant: *"It is quite early isn't it to say that (how much impact) - I can't say much more about the impact. I can say that putting more evidence and accurate data into the public domain can only help that process. Has the nature of the debate changed as a result of what the Observatory has done? I think it has supported a welcome trend which was occurring anyway which was to make the debate slightly more balanced and slightly more evidence based - even if the policy doesn't necessarily follow from that. I would say they are doing a lot of the right things to make that happen but we may have a better view in a year or two about whether they have changed the quality of the debate. I think almost inevitably if they keep doing what they are doing they will have some impact on the quality of the debate."*

Business organisation: *"I think it is having good impact on the immigration debate. I think it's done well to get its name out there and get itself quoted in newspaper articles but I think it is still early days and it still needs broader recognition in the various groups. I think they are on a journey to do that and there is still work to do which is understandable given that they are new in this space."*

6.5 Assessing the Observatory's impact

Despite the challenges outlined above the evaluation does point to a number of examples where the impact of the Observatory is clear and specific.

Media impact

The clearest, example of this is perceived within the media narrative where a number of stakeholders feel its influence has gone beyond the 'impressive press coverage' achieved by the Observatory. A couple note that the "Off target" piece has played an important role in influencing the course of the debate on issues related to net migration targets. As one media stakeholder explains:

Media: *"They did a piece showing statistically there was absolutely no way the Government was going to be able to meet its net migration targets with the policies it had put in place so it did this piece of research and showed that even if everything went according to plan its numbers would still be way out. So that was a story that...reporters ran which really helped to inform the whole agenda....Everyone had said in a really 'waffly' way that that target was going to be impossible to meet but no one had managed to prove it statistically."*

Several stakeholders also say that the Migration Observatory has had an impact on the approach to conducting the narrative around migration among some in the media. A number of the journalists interviewed say they now have a reputable and reliable source that they will readily consult in developing stories and verifying data. The existence of the Observatory is also said to highlight the importance of accuracy and facilitates the process that journalists go through to achieve this. Similarly a couple of respondents pick up on the use of Observatory data in correcting misinformation in the media and have detected an increase in news pieces which refer to data sensitivity and accuracy.

Academic, think tanks, research organisations: *"I think it has certainly stimulated discussions on a number of issues.and I think that I have also seen in the media data limits, being discussed more frequently, with more regular caveats... to what extent only due to Observatory I don't know."*

Media: *"They are hugely valuable. In this complicated area it is easy to make mistakes in reporting. As a journalist you need someone looking over your shoulder to warn you about the mistakes you can make. And they are also able to give a steer on where the real issues are based on evidence not sensationalism."*

Civil society group: *"As long as we can continue [to pull journalists up on accuracy] there will be that indirect and important influence. Every time they have an influence on the content of those stories...the trend of the media debate depends on the influence of tabloids. There is an enormous prize at the end of this road. It is not the kind of public benefit you can create in these 6 months..."*

Media: *"We've been waiting for an organisation like Migration Observatory for a long time. They present the facts and figures which lets me [a journalist] say 'these are the facts, now here is the row.'"*

Media: *"I think that for so long Migration Watch was the default, go-to voice for so many lazy journalists... The fact there is now an alternative go to voice is very important and that in itself is a major achievement - such is the paucity of research-based voices in the immigration debate. I can't underestimate that - I think it is extremely important that they exist and that they carry on doing their work."*

Business organisation: *"When they did their 10 reasons why the immigration evidence base is poor, the reason that was picked up among policy wonks by myself and in the press is because it was a very well thought through, presented and dispassionate piece of work."*

Political impact

There are also signs that the Migration Observatory is having an impact within the political arena.

In October, following the completion of the evaluation interviews, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Oxford met with the Prime Minister and other members of the Cabinet and discussed the Observatory's "Thinking Behind the Numbers" report. A copy of the document was subsequently emailed to the Prime Minister's Office. Vince Cable, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, has also referenced the Observatory's work on several occasions including in the speech given on Immigration to the British Council on December 8th 2011. These are clear demonstrations that the organisation has established a presence at the highest political levels and the evaluation will continue to monitor the impact of this engagement.

A number of those interviewed within the evaluation also refer to the Observatory's increasing profile in Westminster and provide evidence of MPs being aware of and using Migration Observatory resources. To date, the Observatory has received one Parliamentary mention from Shabana Mahmood MP in an Oral Answer to Questions on Tier 4 Visa Requirements, 27th July.

MP: *"They are hugely respected within the Shadow Home Office team. I would say that for people who are interested in immigration issues they have made an impact and they are respected...[Their impact] is in terms of being a go-to website and a source of information for people who want to engage in the immigration debate."*

Feedback from the interviews did not provide evidence of use or impact at a senior political level though this may, in part, be due to the difficulties we had in engaging senior politicians with the evaluation. A couple of voices heard in the evaluation ask to what extent it is able to impact on the debate when sections of the media and Government are, in their view, unwilling to engage with research on migration. Another voice indicated that some senior politicians within the Coalition are aware of the Observatory but somewhat frustrated by its perceived anti-Government stance. These perspectives are tempered by the reality of recent ministerial and prime ministerial exposure to the Observatory's work referred to at the beginning of this section.

Academia, think tanks, research organisations: *"A lot of the media and to some extent the politicians have closed their eyes and ears to analysis on this subject because they think that is not where the general public is. So there is limited traction for research in this area...It is worth trying...but that is one of my worries."*

6.6 Current use

This baseline evaluation of the Migration Observatory also seeks to capture examples of how its resources are being used. Discussion with stakeholders and analysis of the Observatory's quantitative data demonstrates that its research is being used by a broad range of stakeholders.

Qualitative accounts of usage vary in terms of how often and to what ends individuals consult the research. Specific examples are outlined in the chart below. Several of those interviewed draw on it regularly as a background source for the work they are doing. Others reference data and use the chart tools in the preparation of documents, speeches and briefings. A number of the journalists interviewed use Observatory data to inform the development of news stories. In broad terms stakeholders anticipate their current use of Migration Observatory resources will increase over time and point to a number of particular examples of where this might happen. These are also presented in the chart below

Figure 4: Examples of current and potential use of Migration Observatory resources

Current use	Additional foreseen/potential uses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Briefing the chair of a member's organisation prior to interviews in the media Referenced at APPG Copying and pasting of a chart and '10 reasons' in a submission and briefing for a Government minister Quoting data in a large organisation's members' newsletter In correcting inaccuracies in stories linked to migration in 2 newspapers (the Guardian and the Daily Express) In researching academic papers/briefings To inform internal discussions in different organisations To explore different options for engaging ways of presenting data As a source of news/updates on NGO websites MP quotes data in constituency /public meetings Preparing a briefing to a Peer prior to a debate in the Lords 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Referencing data in organisations' responses to Government consultations In preparing the content of courses to be taught (HE, migration related studies) and in preparing materials on these Expected that this academic year, students will increasingly use the Observatory website (videos in particular are expected to appeal) In preparing briefings for party conferences

Figure 4: Example case studies

Academic	"When I have been putting together papers and briefing docs on migration I go there to get migration figures. For example on policy evolution where they did a really nice summary. It used to be that I'd have to go to a dozen places to get that information. ...In the last report I did for X I went to the Observatory and got a whole bunch of specific statistics."
Civil servant	"Another document I did was looking at the evidence across Government and where we've got evidence holes. We're doing a big push about being a bit smarter about the way we make policy and it was contributing to a broader document on evidence and sources and where we, as policy makers are in a slight vacuum, when we try and advise ministers and migration is one of them. For that I totally cut and paste the 10 problems of migration statistics."

Journalist	"I call them every time there is a big story. I may not always quote them but I look to them to see what the key issues are."
MP	"When we organise to get people at Home Office questions to present questions on immigration...apart from our own briefings we would also guide them towards statistical briefings that the Migration Observatory put out on their website."

Inevitably the sample also includes interviewees whose use of the Observatory's materials is limited. A number working in roles closely aligned to the work of the Observatory (i.e. within academia/research/think tanks), say they are unlikely to 'use' its resources in the sense of referencing data. They explain that they tend to go straight to original sources. Within this group of stakeholders there is still interest in keeping abreast of what the Observatory is doing both in terms of gaining 'pointers' and as a source which encourages them to consider other angles/ways of working. It is also important to note that one of the academics used has regularly drawn on Migration Observatory resources in their work.

Those working in these roles are also most likely to comment that the Observatory does not tend to produce information which is new or 'ground breaking for them.' Again, this does not necessarily detract from the value of the organisation's proposition as they recognise that they are not the target recipients of such information.

It is also interesting to note that while some of these stakeholders do not derive direct value from the Observatory's work in their role or organisation, it would appear to value its work in influencing the broader context in which they operate.

Civil society group: *"At the moment it has been more background reading in terms of putting together arguments...It is also the case that we have used some of their materials for briefings which we have given our members, so we can have that dialogue with our members around migration."*

7 Looking to the future

7.1 External influences

Stakeholders agree there is an on-going role for the Migration Observatory in informing and influencing debate around migration. There is agreement across the board that migration will remain a source of strong public, political and media interest and scrutiny over coming years.

In considering the Migration Observatory's future in this context stakeholders point to a number of future events and scenarios, some presenting opportunities and others challenges, which they feel the organisation should be mindful of:

The planned review of annual limits, which, it is anticipated will continue to draw attention and provide an on-going opportunity for scrutiny and comment.

Political interest in migration in the run up to the next general election (anticipated in 2015) is expected to be high thus requiring analysis and debate of data and policy. A number of interviewees comment that this will provide a strong opportunity for greater use of Migration Observatory resources although one stakeholder urges the organisation to be prepared for any challenges this might create (e.g. anticipating more direct attacks on the organisation's legitimacy and independence as its political influence grows).

Stakeholders comment that the annual cycle of party conferences will also present opportunities for policy makers to make use of Migration Observatory resources in collating evidence to substantiate policy positions on migration.

It is felt that the introduction of new EU accession countries will create a need for new evidence on trends and impact.

Civil society groups noted that as they begin to feel the impact of government cuts, the value of the Migration Observatory's work in distilling evidence will save them time and money.

One stakeholder comments that the team should keep up to date with the Leveson enquiry to be aware of any outcomes that will impact on its work in terms of the use of evidence and any changes to the regulatory landscape.

MP: *"I can only see it [the Migration Observatory] getting more and more important. From the polling, migration is the number one issue of concern, ahead of the economy interestingly enough. It is going to be a central debate ahead of the 2015 election. And because there aren't that many people who can give a balanced view, because they are independent and viewed as credible... as the debate becomes more sophisticated they will become more important."*

7.2 The future of stakeholders' engagement with the Observatory

On a personal/organisational level the majority of those interviewed envisage that their use of Observatory research and resources will increase as the debate evolves and foresee a range of scenarios in which they will draw on this information. There is a strong sense that the Observatory's proposition is based on solid strategic thinking and as a result it has created a strong position and reputation for high quality work. Provided that the Observatory maintains this approach there is an expectation that it will become further established in relevant sectors.

In contrast a couple of interviewees say their future engagement will be contingent upon the Observatory adapting its work so as to feel appropriate for them. For one of the civil servants interviewed this is about the Observatory becoming more balanced both in terms of the

information it produces and how it is delivered. One of the NGO representatives interviewed suggests that their use of Observatory materials will depend on the Observatory producing more accessible, digestible information.

Civil servant: *“I think they need to step back from the current approach and think about what objective interventions look like and what does objective news provision actually look like in this area... To give an example, the Migrant Rights Network produces a Twitter feed putting out information about migration and I find that a lot more balanced and objective than the Observatory.”*

7.3 Strengthening the Observatory’s role

Practical recommendations

During the interviews stakeholders were asked to consider what the Observatory could do to further strengthen its role. Collectively, participants generate a range of suggestions of practical steps that they feel would contribute to the organisation achieving greater influence and impact.

For many, the Observatory’s priority should be to ‘carry on with the good work’ in terms of producing high quality impartial outputs, reaching out to a broad range of stakeholders and building awareness in the media. Running more high profile events, including a one-day conference in London are suggested by several as a good means of establishing an important direct relationship with relevant stakeholders.

Several interviewees feel that more could be done to strengthen the Observatory’s media presence through:

Securing a stronger profile on Sky and within the tabloid press

An increasing focus on releasing compelling data that can form the basis of engaging news stories

Timing the release of some pieces to enable Sunday papers to be the first to cover them

Engaging with local press on issues of local interest

A number call for closer links to be forged between the Observatory and policy makers and attempts to firmly position the organisation in the minds of Government ministers through:

Greater engagement with policy makers at events

Giving great prominence to policy makers on the website (one respondent suggests generating videos of policy makers’ responses to issues to feature on the website)

Continuing to build relationships with senior civil servants

A couple of interviewees suggest the organisation reaches out to local government as potential users of Observatory resources

One respondent identifies a need for a ‘shield’ of policy makers to be put in place to defend the Observatory against potential criticism in the future

Other practical steps which stakeholders urge the Observatory to consider as it plans its future work include:

Closer engagement with the business community

Becoming a dissemination portal for summaries of other research being published on related issues

Clearer references to and web links for other research institutes working on migration issues

Develop a newsfeed on relevant issues

Media: *"I think they've been doing all the right things...I don't think they have made any great errors they just need to be pushing to be out there a bit more than they are at the moment but I think that is work in progress."*

Debate around the Observatory's future role

It is important to note that when stakeholders are asked what more an organisation could do to achieve greater impact, some generate a wish list. Experience of previous evaluations would suggest that where such wish lists are developed they often reflect the limitations stakeholders perceive in their own organisation, or the gaps they identify in the sector more widely.

In discussing the work of the Observatory, some interviewees call for the organisation to adopt a stronger role in lobbying, agenda setting and rebutting inaccuracies. A number of the civil society organisations interviewed express a desire for an organisation to act as direct counterweight to the voices felt to be shaping the debate, such as Migration Watch or to become part of an effective coalition which has this as its objective. In part, these calls can be attributed to a perceived lack of effective, alternative voices. Some feel, for example, that organisations such as the IPPR have moved away from migration as an issue or have their own agenda that reduces their credibility among some audiences.

It is also important to stress that a number of respondents who regard the Observatory's neutrality as its key differentiator caution the Observatory against taking any steps to occupy this space. Some talk hypothetically about other potential consequences of the Observatory deciding to 'broaden its ambitions' and become a more directional voice in the debate. Their main concern is that this would see the organisation's independence and neutrality questioned which would impact on how stakeholders receive and use the materials it produces. They also note that in such a crowded sector, any movement in this direction would bring the risk of 'encroaching' on other organisations' work and that any such crossover would then limit the Observatory's ability to generate stronger impact.

One respondent suggests that the Institute for Fiscal Studies should be looked at as a model that maintains an academic stance but is still able to lead the agenda in its policy space.

Civil society group: *"The aim would be to put all this evidence-based research to harness the debate on the migration issues. At the moment it is difficult to find another more independent body, a reputable organisation who can get this right. If they [Migration Observatory] want to go to a different level the next thing is to link more directly with the grass roots level to be able to do advocacy and campaigns."*

Civil society group: *"From my point of view it is a case of 'carry on the good work'... I would like to see more opposition to the likes of Migration Watch, talking about what migrants have contributed and talking about migrants as people not numbers...but in a way if the Migration Observatory got involved in that it would detract from their credibility so while that is what is lacking it isn't necessarily what I would want them to do."*

7.4 Gaps in the evidence base

When considering future themes for the Observatory to focus on stakeholders identify a range of gaps in data on migration, some of which they feel the Observatory would be well placed to fill.

These are outlined in the table below:

Figure 4: Potential themes

Comparative Studies	Questions of process	Impact of national and EU policies
International comparative studies of migration policy in other countries especially within Europe	Work to reconcile difference in definitions (esp. with regards to the Labour Force Survey)	Changes to EU migration (explore restrictions)
Financial and labour contributions of different immigrant communities in the UK	More detailed, specific data for Scotland and Northern Ireland	Data on successful repatriation and the number of UK residents leaving the UK
More work on disaggregating migration by form		Research among businesses on the economic impact of Government migration policy

8 Lessons

The Migration Observatory has successfully established itself among many key stakeholders within the migration debate as a leading and credible source for evidence on migration in the UK. Conversations with the Observatory's key stakeholders, analysis of its media, web and social media profile and, most recently, its high level political engagement demonstrate that the organisation has become relevant to a range of organisations and individuals spanning diverse sectors and political perspectives.

There is strong evidence that the organisation's resources are being used by a wide range of individuals now regularly drawing on the evidence it provides, whether to expand on existing knowledge of an issue or to use specific data in the preparation of briefings, newsletters or in putting together news stories.

The extent to which it delivers impact in informing and influencing migration-related debates is expected to become increasingly evident as stakeholder engagement grows. Already, some key influencers suggest that the Observatory can take credit for shaping elements of the media debate around migration. As well as influencing the content of the media narrative, some note a change in approach in the media, with increasing references to data limitations and journalists who are more mindful of the importance of data accuracy when covering complex migration issues.

These are noteworthy successes for an organisation still in its infancy. Taking into account that stakeholders are judging it not only against other research institutions, where it scores highly, but also against major established organisations with finely honed PR capacities, these achievements are significant.

The baseline review stage of this evaluation points to a number of lessons and opportunities for the Observatory as it develops the next stages of its work plan:

- ***MAINTAIN NEUTRALITY:*** Neutrality is regarded as the Migration Observatory's most important asset. The organisation should hold onto this as a priority. To put this in context the strongest criticism of the organisation was that (for a significant number) it is "too neutral" and (for one) that it is not sufficiently independent. There is an opportunity to address the sentiment among some stakeholders in Government that over recent months the Observatory has moved away from a strictly neutral position and equally to reiterate the fundamentals of its strategy to those who want to see it adopt campaigning and advocacy positions.
- ***REACH OUT TO 'NEW' SECTORS:*** Stakeholders identify opportunities for the Observatory to further expand its influence through encouraging use and engagement among a broader range of sectors including local government, the business community and Peers.
- ***KEEP UP THE MOMENTUM WITHIN THE MEDIA:*** The Observatory has delivered and implemented a largely successful media strategy to date. Consolidating this success through an increased presence in the tabloid press, Sky and the Sunday papers while maintaining links already established with other areas of the media is considered important.
- ***STRENGTHEN FACE TO FACE RELATIONSHIPS:*** While, for many stakeholders, the key value of the Observatory is the resources they access via the website, a number say

the organisation would benefit from holding a large scale conference, or similar event bringing relevant policy makers and organisations together.

- **CONTINUE TO NURTURE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE ALREADY ENGAGED:**
This first stage of evaluation has played a role in ‘reminding’ individuals and organisations about the Observatory. Sharing this feedback with stakeholders will provide an opportunity to highlight some of the Observatory’s challenges and successes and, in doing so, sustain the valuable connections it has made to date.

Following the completion of this first stage of evaluation, we will continue to monitor the impact the Observatory is making through its website, social media platforms and its profile in the media and Westminster, before holding a final series of discussions with stakeholders in 2013.

Should the organisation progress over the next two years in the same manner as it has since its introduction it is reasonable to assume that the evidence will point to an organisation demonstrating increasingly substantial impact. This impact will come from the Observatory securing its position as the most reliable, trusted and neutral source for migration data, with the consequence that the migration debate will steadily move on from the terms on which it has been conducted over recent years.

Appendix 1 - Migration Observatory Evaluation - discussion guide

Interviewee	
Job title and organisation	
Date	
Interviewer	

NB: Use of italics denotes instruction for interviewer

Note on demonstrating impact in line with ESRC and HEFCE guidelines: *Throughout the interview any references made to specific materials seen or developed by stakeholders which cite MO will be recorded, as will the perceived impact of any such materials*

Introduction

- *Thank respondent for their involvement. Confirm purpose of discussion and explain the process including Firetail’s role as independent evaluators*
- *Assure of confidentiality (comments will not be attributed to individual stakeholders unless they request this.) Seek permission to record discussion*

(again, assuring anonymity and that recordings will only be used by Firetail for reporting purposes)

1. What is your role?
2. How salient is the issue of migration within your work, organisation and sector? What drives this?
3. How would you describe the state of the migration debate at present?
4. How does migration link in with other issues you/your organisation are addressing?

GOVERNMENT INTERVIEWEES: Explore priority issues and where migration sits in relation to these

5. Which migration issues are most important in your work / within your organisation?

Awareness of and relationship with Migration Observatory

6. Are you aware of MO? If so, how did you initially become aware of the organisation?
7. To what extent would you say you have a relationship with MO?
8. How did this relationship develop? How has it evolved? (*Probe for whether the interviewee has been proactive in obtaining information through MO or been a passive recipient*)
9. How would you describe your relationship with MO?
10. How informed do you feel about MO's role, aims, activities and structures? How far does this match the level of information you would want on these?

Perceptions of MO

11. What is and what are your views on the value of MO's overall proposition?
12. To what extent is there a need for the services/resources provided by MO? How important it is for data and information on migration to be available in this way and why?
13. What are its aims and objectives and how far is it meeting these?
14. What are the strengths and weaknesses of MO's work? What has it achieved? What challenges does it face?
15. Thinking about the MO's different areas of focus, what are your views on how well it is performing in each of these areas? (*Probe on providing analysis of data, informing media and public policy debates and generating research*)
16. What are your views on the relative value of these different areas of work?

17. How is MO viewed within your organisation and, more broadly, within your sector? Why?

MEDIA INTERVIEWEES: To what extent is MO recognised across the media? How consistent are perceptions of MO across the media?

GOVERNMENT INTERVIEWEES: To what extent does MO have a profile in Westminster? What could it do to improve this?

18. How well is MO positioned to reach its objectives? (*Probe on perceived levels of independence, authority and credibility and the reasons underpinning these perceptions*)

19. Who else is working on these issues? How credible are these different organisations overall? And in relation to MO?

20. How important is it for academics to be undertaking this work?

ACADEMIC INTERVIEWEES: What do you regard as the lessons and challenges for MO in connecting research to policy in this way?

21. How successful has MO been in establishing itself to date? How well does it build relationships?

22. To what extent is MO playing a role in relevant sectors and networks? Are there any sectors or networks in which MO should be more active?

Engagement with and perceptions of MO resources

23. Which, if any, MO services/resources have you used in your role/within your organisation? What are your views on the quality of these services/resources? (*Probe on use of website and social media, contact with MO staff etc.*)

24. Have you/ your organisation used Migration Observatory research? Why/why not?

25. What research have you used and how have you used it? (*Probe for detailed examples of use noting references to specific documents/programmes/policies etc.*)

26. How often have you used Migration Observatory research? How likely are you to use it again in the future? Why and how?

27. How do MO research and resources compare to information on migration from other sources which stakeholders use in their work? What are its strengths and weaknesses in this respect?

28. Which, if any, areas of the website are of most use to you/your organisation and how are these used? (*Probe on key areas of website i.e. news and comment, briefings, data and resources*)

MEDIA INTERVIEWEES: What encourages/discourages use of MO resources in preparing news stories? Who else do you talk to in this context and why? What role do you see for MO in the debate?

29. How well does the MO website meet your needs as a user? (*Probe for any suggestions for improvement*)
30. What are your views on the quality of the content published on the website? How useful is this content for you? Why?
31. What are your views on the usability of the data?
32. Thinking about your needs are there any notable gaps in the information provided on the MO website? And thinking about the needs of others in your sector, how comprehensive is the data provided?

Perceived impact of MO

33. Have you communicated the work of MO within your organisation? And outside your organisation? Have any MO materials been disseminated/referred to in this context?
34. To what extent does MO have an impact in terms of a) your work b) your organisation and c) your sector?
35. Could you share specific examples of where this impact has been evident?
Interviewer to probe on possible scenarios relevant to the interviewee and to discuss what the impact of these has been. Possible scenarios would include:
 - a. Has MO influenced the role of data in the debate or changed the way you look for data? How?
 - b. Do you feel better informed/ more able to make a case? Exactly how do you feel this has happened?
 - c. Has it enabled your organisation to present a stronger evidence based case? How and to whom? (*Probe for examples of use and potential use*)
 - d. Has it filled any gaps in the research evidence base?
 - e. Have you and your colleagues used MO resources in the preparation of any policy papers/internal or external documents/speeches or other content? (*Where there are examples of this probe for full details. Exactly which resources were used and how?*)
 - f. *For those who have used MO research: To date, what has the impact of using MO research been? (Explore in detail how the research has been used. Encourage participants to consider any immediate impact as well as 'knock on' changes that may have fallen out of, or been influenced by the use of such Migration Observatory research. Probe for full details on any mentions of MO in relevant materials)*

- g. Has it had an impact on the quality of debate around relevant issues within your sector?
- h. To what extent is MO having a broader impact? What and how? How far is what MO is saying on migration becoming an agreed standard both within your organisation and beyond?
- i. GOVERNMENT INTERVIEWEES: Have you seen/heard evidence of MO's work being referenced? Where? Who is referencing it?
- j. CIVIL SERVANTS *Probe on the specifics of any MO analysis, conclusions, terminology or materials used in materials prepared by civil servants for government or for the public*
- k. MEDIA INTERVIEWEES: To what extent is MO having an impact on the use of evidence in stories related to migration issues?
- l. ACADEMIC INTERVIEWEES: How far is the work of MO resulting in more reactive and proactive Oxford academics in the public debate? How important is this?
- m. CIVIL SOCIETY INTERVIEWEES: To what extent do you feel your organisation's ability to make a case to the public and government officials has been improved. How and why? (*Probe for specific examples*)

MO as an organisation

- 36. What are your views on how effectively MO operates as an organisation? What are its strengths and weaknesses at an operational level? (*Probe on level of responsiveness, efficiency of internal and management structures etc.*)
- 37. What are your views on the cost/benefit of different MO activities?
- 38. What are your perceptions of its levels of resourcing relative to need?

Looking to the future

- 39. To what extent do you feel there is an on-going role for MO?
- 40. What do you anticipate will happen to its level of reach/impact? What factors will determine its success in this respect?
- 41. Which changes in your sector/ within policy areas are likely to impact on MO? (*Explore challenges as well as any opportunities that the organisation should seek to capitalise on*)
- 42. What advice would you offer MO in terms of how it can maximise the impact of its work?
- 43. Do you have any other recommendations to assist MO as it develops future phases of its work?
- 44. Do you have any other final comments regarding MO?

45. *End interview and thank interviewee. Explain next steps*

APPENDIX 2: The Migration Observatory Review and Evaluation- Requirements of the evaluation



THE MIGRATION OBSERVATORY REVIEW & EVALUATION

A document explaining the requirements for the
evaluation of the Migration Observatory
(www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk)

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The Migration Observatory: Review and Evaluation

This version: 12th April 2011

- **This document:**

The Migration Observatory is looking for an external evaluation team to evaluate its work and impact during April 2011-March 2013. This document explains the purpose of the evaluation process, the aims of the Observatory and how success may be measured and evaluated. We expect the external evaluator we recruit to work with us to produce a more detailed evaluation plan. This document is purely for the purpose of inviting tenders for this project.

- **The purpose of the evaluation process:**

The Migration Observatory is committed to continuous review and assessment of its activities. The process will include ongoing internal evaluation (by the Migration Observatory team) and external evaluation (by independent externally contracted experts). The results of the self-evaluation will also feed into the external evaluation.

The objective of the evaluation is to assess our success in meeting key project aims and objectives, highlight problems and shortcomings, and suggest improvements to enhance the performance of the project.

The conclusions of the evaluation will be presented to funders and possibly other external organisations. The indicators of success thus need to include a clear set of issues that our funders recognise as covering the most important issues.

- **Our aims:**

Mission Statement of the Migration Observatory

The mission of the Migration Observatory is to provide independent, authoritative, evidence-based analysis of data on migration and migrants in the UK, to inform media, public and policy debates, and to generate high quality research on international migration and public policy issues.

Key aims:

- become known as the premier UK website for reliable, independent, trusted and up-to-date data and analysis on migration, migrants and related public policy issues in the UK
- achieve more clarity in the public and media debates about what we know and don't know about the size, characteristics and impacts of migration in the UK
- empower users and stakeholders to become better informed and more effective contributors to Britain's migration debate
- make policy-making more evidence based

- encourage all our key audiences to engage in critical thinking and debates about fundamental issues, consequences and trade-offs involved in policy-making on migrants and migration in the UK
- provide users the opportunity to interact with migration data and analysis
- contribute to filling gaps in the research evidence base on international migration in the UK

Key audiences:

- Policy makers
- Journalists
- Parliamentarians
- Civil society
- Academics

Website:

The Migration Observatory's website was formally launched on 29th March 2011 in London. It can be accessed at www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk. The site is split into four primary areas – news and commentary, briefings, data and resources and policy primers.

- **Outcomes and defining success:**

The Migration Observatory's objectives differ from those of "advocacy" organisations in that we are not trying to achieve specific policy outcomes, or direct the media – or others involved in the debate on migration – to particular conclusions.

However, the broad scope of our work is designed to deliver certain outcomes – in particular to ensure that we have a better informed public and policy debate. To establish whether this has been achieved, we need to identify key indicators that can help us to understand whether our work is delivering impact.

Below we list key types of objectives that we are aiming to achieve and some potential indicators (bullet points). The indicators are indicative only. We expect the contracted supplier to help us identify more detailed indicators for measuring our progress against the objectives.

1) Introducing evidence to key public and policy debates [PUBLIC DEBATES]

A key goal is to measurably improve users' ability to actively contribute to public policy debate in an informed and evidence based way. Success means that a greater number and wide range of organisations feel better able to make informed and evidence based contributions to migration and related public policy debates in the UK.

We will need to identify use of our materials by and impacts on key groups including, for example:

Civil society organisations such as:
NGOs and advocacy groups
Think-tanks
Business organisations
Trades unions
Policy makers – e.g.:
Civil servants,
Politicians
Media
(see below)

Indicators could include:

- Use of the site and its content, charts and analysis in materials published by civil society groups involved in the migration discussion to construct their arguments
- Better informed advocacy by civil society organizations. Including improved ability to make their case to the public and government officials
- Direct action by policy makers to address key issues and information gaps identified by the Migration Observatory
- Use of Migration Observatory content by policy makers in published documents or references to the project, its figures or work in parliament.
- Use of Migration Observatory experts, figures, reports, analysis or charts in the media (see below)

2) Improving the quality of evidence and information used in media debates [MEDIA]

A second, but related, key goal is to inform and improve the evidence based underlying media debates of migration. Success means a high media profile and direct work with journalists that enables balanced reporting in a wide range of media, contributing to a more evidence based media discussion.

Indicators could include:

- Coverage of the Migration Observatory’s media releases in key outlets (*as defined by media strategy*) from across the political spectrum.
- More balanced media coverage that will give greater weight to evidence
- Use of the Migration Observatory’s charts, data and analysis in stories that have not been generated by the Observatory.
- Consistent references to the independence and authority of the Observatory in media stories.
- Unprompted approaches from journalists for comment on key issues.
- Evidence that Migration Observatory key points are becoming “received wisdom” in the media narrative.

3) Making policy more evidence based [POLICY]

To demonstrate success, we require evidence that our work is feeding into policy thinking and policy-making processes, and that some of the key issues that our analysis raises are addressed. By “policy” we mean public policies at national, regional and local levels as well as the policies of key stakeholders in the migration debate.

Indicators could include:

- references to our work in parliament/parliamentary questions.
- Informed policymakers who will be in a better position to understand and address migration challenges and problems based on evidence
- demonstrations of impact in terms of responses to the Migration Observatory by civil servants.
- use of our analysis, conclusions, terminology or materials in materials prepared by civil servants either for government or for the public
- Use of our analysis in policies of stakeholders
- evidence that issues we have raised are being addressed.

4) Building and developing strategic alliances and expanding our support base [USER ENGAGEMENT]:

Identifying who will help us to change the nature of the migration debate and providing them with the materials that they need to do so.

Success means that we establish a broad set of supporters from across political, intellectual and social divides, build good relationship with a large number and wide range of users who interact with us to improve the work and impact of the Migration Observatory and have a large enough group of supporters/followers to be able to deliver impact with or without media support.

One approach would be to differentiate between two groups - key influencers and the wider group of supporters we need to back our work and to influence the influencers.

Key Influencers e.g.:	Wider supporters e.g.:
• Academics,	• Social-media users
• journalists,	• Educators
• civil servants,	• Students
• Data providers	
• politicians,	Etc.
• civil society groups.	
• Bloggers	
• Trades Unions policy staff	
• Business interest groups (ie CBI)	

Indicators could include:

- Government data providers engaged and improving their work
- Coverage in tabloid, mid-market and local media as well as in national broadsheet/more intellectual media.
- Evidence that our material is used by both pro and anti-migration advocacy organisations.
- Social media impact – large group of supporters on sites such as twitter.
- Hits on the website – maintaining a strong flow of online traffic to the site.
- Strong support from targeted politicians and civil servants (see section 3 [POLICY])
- Use of our work by business lobby groups, trades unions and other civil society groups

5) Ensuring optimum working [OPTIMUM WORKING]

Identifying how the Observatory team needs to operate to be most effective in delivering our messages and impacts.

Key considerations –
• Visits to the website, and its use by, and value to, key audiences
• Timeliness of responses/proactive externally facing work,
• Authority.
• Accuracy.
• Balance.
• Penetration.
• Value for money.

Indicators could include:

- Comparative assessments of the Migration Observatory’s web traffic with other organisations of equivalent size and scope, functioning in other policy areas.
- Efficacy of media interventions
- Regularity/validity of challenges to our analysis
- Cost/benefit analysis of each element of the site
- Efficiency of internal structure and management practises
- More reactive and pro-active Oxford academics in the public debate

- **Medium and long term aspirations:**

The Observatory is currently funded until March 2013. By the end of 2011, we want to be in a position to apply for funding beyond March 2013.

Within 6- 8 months (i.e. by the end of 2011):

- To have established ourselves as a major player in the migration debate among our key audiences.
- To have evidence that we have made good progress towards all our objectives and that our work has positively affected the actions or outputs of members of our key audiences.
- To be in a position to apply for further funding to extend the life-time of the Migration Observatory beyond March 2013

Within two years (i.e. by March 2013):

- To have established ourselves as “THE” independent expert body on migration issues in the UK.
- To have evidence that we are achieving all our objectives, and to have repeated, demonstrable impacts on the actions and outputs of our key audiences.

- **Timeline**

The Migration Observatory was formally launched on 29th March 2011. The evaluation should start as soon as possible and cover two years (April 2011-March 2013). A first evaluation report should be completed by November 2011. A final report should be completed by the end of the 2-year evaluation period.