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Welsh Government

RESEARCH, DOCUMENT

# Evaluation of Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being (ENRaW) Grant: final report (summary)

A final evaluation report on the impact and achievements of the Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being (ENRaW) Grant as part of the Rural Development Programme 2019 to 2023.

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# Introduction

The Welsh Government's pan-Wales Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being (ENRaW) grant scheme was a single environment grant scheme established in April 2018. It was expected to support projects to make improvements in and around residential areas and to deliver benefits for people, businesses, and their communities. ENRaW was intended to fund pilot and demonstration projects which promoted cooperation and collaborative action to:

- develop, regenerate, and broaden access to sustainable green infrastructure
- improve the quality of the urban and rural built environment
- develop resilient ecological networks, areas, and nature-based solutions

A capital budget of £33.325m and revenue budget of £26.096m over a four-year period between 2019/20 and 2022/23 was made available and three competitive funding windows were administered by the Welsh Government to award funding. The scheme secured Rural Development Programme (RDP) funding part-way through delivery in 2019, to maximise the resources available, although the first window was funded via Welsh Government funds only.

A total of 59 ENRaW projects were delivered and awarded £44.115m funding in total. Of these, 36 projects were awarded £14.542m funding during Window 1, five projects were awarded £14.402m funding during Window 2, and 18 projects were awarded £15.171m funding during Window 3.

## Aims and objectives of review

The aim of the evaluation was to assess if ENRaW funded projects, delivered between April 2019 and September 2023, delivered against scheme aims and objectives. The evaluation was expected to review:

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- the administration and delivery of the grant scheme by Welsh Government, including application processes, monitoring requirements and grant management with a view to identifying what has worked well and what could be improved in the future
- the direct impact of grants and whether the grants awarded achieved their original aims and objectives, including achievement of targets and outcomes set out in applications and delivery plans
- wider and unexpected benefits and achievements, including any wider multiple benefits over and above direct benefits expected

The evaluation was undertaken between October 2021 and October 2023. It involved the preparation of a Theory of Change (ToC) and Evaluation Framework report (unpublished, January 2022) and an Interim Report [\[footnote 1\]](#) which considered the administration and delivery of the grant scheme and provided early findings on the impact of the scheme. It also involved the preparation of a final evaluation report which considers the impact and achievements of the scheme in greater detail.

## Method

The final evaluation involved:

- a desk-based review of recent policy and strategic documents, ENRaW scheme documentation and monitoring data, and project level information
- interviewing two Welsh Government officials involved in the management of the ENRaW scheme
- developing and distributing a bilingual online survey to all ENRaW funded projects (59) and receiving 30 survey responses, which covered 34 funded projects [\[footnote 2\]](#), a response rate of 58% of all funded projects
- undertaking qualitative fieldwork with a total of 23 projects, with eight of these being re-interviews with projects who contributed to the interim

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fieldwork. A total of 40 individuals contributed to the qualitative fieldwork from across the 23 projects

- synthesising the findings of the fieldwork and desk-review and preparing a final report

## Main findings

The evaluation found that ENRaW:

- closely reflected Welsh Government policy and strategies by supporting a wide range of cross-policy projects spanning community and social, environmental, economic, and cultural policies across Wales at scale and pace
- encouraged and supported significant cross-sector working which would have been unlikely to have been achieved otherwise
- effectively supported the establishment and development of new partnerships and enabled others to expand and strengthen, both geographically and in terms of the partners involved
- funded good quality projects which were aligned to its community and social, environmental, economic, and cultural ambitions

In terms of scheme administration and delivery, the evaluation found that ENRaW:

- was promoted effectively and proved a popular funding scheme as it offered to support 100% of project costs over a medium-term period of three years
- Window 1 grant application, assessment and administration arrangements were reasonable and appropriate, and a clear strength of this funding window was the applicant's ability to deal directly with a Welsh Government officer; the transfer of the scheme into RDP mechanisms and the need to satisfy RDP funding requirements was disruptive and detrimental to the

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smooth administration of the scheme

The evaluation found that in terms of achievements and performance:

- Window 1 funded projects delivered as intended whilst Windows 2 and 3 projects faced greater issues such as shorter than planned delivery period, grant administration issues and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
- projects were only able to spend 83% of their allocated funding (£36.5m), and £7.5m of the £44m funded awarded was not spent at the time of drafting the final evaluation report
- an appropriate set of indicators was adopted to demonstrate the outputs being achieved by ENRaW projects, but these were not always clearly defined or consistently interpreted by projects
- some of the outputs achieved by Window 1 projects were substantial e.g., engaging nearly 100,000 people and planting over 19,000 trees; and Window 1 projects performed well against their targets
- the absence of verified monitoring data for Window 2 and 3 funded projects made it impossible to offer any conclusions about the achievements and performance of these projects

In terms of benefits and outcomes achieved, the evaluation found that:

- projects delivered a very wide range of outcomes which cut across different policies and sectors; ENRaW was most successful in generating community, social and environmental benefits; whilst still positive, projects achieved fewer cultural and economic benefits
- outcomes relating to improvements made (e.g., to access facilities) are the most likely to be sustained on an ongoing basis whilst those which are dependent on ongoing resources and capacity (e.g., co-ordinating volunteering and educational opportunities) are the least likely to be sustained in the future without another source of funding
- the lack of overall scheme outputs and achievements made it difficult to offer a view on the value for money achieved via ENRaW; the scheme could have

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achieved better value for money had funded projects been afforded their full delivery period to fully utilise their funding allocation and deliver their objectives

- there was good evidence that activities are being sustained post funding largely because partnerships have secured grant funding from other sources; these other funding sources are often considered more suitable than ENRaW for partnerships and the type of activities being delivered

In terms of achieving cross cutting objectives, the evaluation found that:

- projects delivered innovative and meaningful activities to contribute towards the RDP Cross Cutting Objectives and the Welsh Government cross-cutting themes; projects also used and promoted the Welsh language in a positive way; there was very little evidence to demonstrate how projects had embraced gender mainstreaming
- whilst projects contributed positively to RDP Focus Areas which were closely aligned with their remit (such as rural development, jobs, and diversification) their contribution to other more technical Focus Areas ambitions was more limited as projects tended not to focus on agricultural or forestry innovation or developments
- engagement with marginalised communities was an exceptionally strong feature of ENRaW projects with extensive evidence gathered over the course of the evaluation that they worked with disadvantaged and under-represented groups

## Recommendations

The evaluation offers the following 10 recommendations.

- Any future funding scheme should provide greater guidance and clearer expectations to projects about what might be expected of them in terms of

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achieving gender mainstreaming cross-cutting objectives.

- The outputs achieved by Windows 2 and 3 ENRaW projects should be captured and reported upon, and the Welsh Government should consider publishing them in a short update report to complement this final evaluation report.
- Any future similar funding scheme should adopt clearer definitions for common indicators to allow for the reporting of more accurate achievements.
- Future grant funded projects should be encouraged to adopt short film-making methods of disseminating their story and achievements.
- ENRaW projects which have yet to fulfil their funding requirement to provide end of project evaluation reports should be encouraged to do so.
- The Welsh Government should consult with the sector to find out how much of a funding void will be created following the withdrawal of ENRaW and explore how it should prioritise the use of reduced funding to support cross-sector partnership working.
- The Welsh Government should recognise, and build upon, the strengths of ENRaW's grant funding design should it provide similar funding in the future, notably:
  - the consultation process and the input of stakeholders into its co-design
  - its intended long-term approach to provide funding over a three-year period
  - its offer of both revenue and capital funding
  - its full cost recovery funding model
  - its two-stage application process consisting of (i) a simple and short EoI stage and (ii) a full application stage
  - its focus on sustainable partnership and collaborative working across multi policy areas
  - its focus on regional and landscape scale delivery
- The Welsh Government should reflect upon the following lessons learnt to inform any future similar grant funding scheme:
  - timescales for approving applications and providing confirmation of funding should be set out in advance and adhered to

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- applicants and grant holders should be able to deal directly with a dedicated funding officer
- reporting and grant claims processes should be commensurate to the level of funding awarded
- processes for approving scheme expenditure should be simplified and shortened
- funded projects should have greater flexibility to accommodate changes to their budgets
- claims, monitoring, and reporting processes should be better designed to suite large, complex, and collaborative projects
- Any future similar grant funding scheme for partnership projects should be designed to:
  - include a short development period, of around three to six months, to allow partnerships to develop a comprehensive delivery plan, establish their governance arrangements and embed collaboration and trust
  - facilitate the sharing of experiences and good practice between funded projects
- The Welsh Government should explore and review the merit of alternative partnership grant funding mechanisms such as via the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) or the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), should it decide to make available similar funding in the future.

## Footnotes

[1] [Evaluation of Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being Grant: interim report](#)

[2] As some survey respondents were responsible for more than one ENRaW project

## Contact details

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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