



**Nick Dales
and Alison Darlow**
Evaluation Specialists

Our two specialists are based in our Chief Scientist's Directorate (CSD). Their work makes sure that everything we do is grounded in the best available evidence.

"The beauty of evaluation is that it takes you to areas of work you've never experienced," says Alison. "I'm leading on our 'Greener Farming and Fisheries' programme and the learning curve is steep! We need to know about the plans for delivering programme aims and programme staff need to know how evaluation can help them with their plans. There are a lot of phone calls, webinars and exchanges of paperwork, leading to research and study."

"I'm working with our 'Sustainable Development' and 'Resilient Landscape and Seas' programmes", says Nick. "Like Alison, I have expertise in one of the programmes I'm leading on, but my knowledge of Resilient Landscapes and Seas is minimal. Evaluation genuinely takes you to parts of the organisation other roles don't reach."

Working with programmes across Natural England takes up a lot of Alison and Nick's time, but they still need to deliver the objectives of their own projects.

Alison continues: "Last year we trained 35 Natural England staff through a course I developed with the help of Nick and another colleague. Our plan is to train enough staff to provide our range of programmes with self-sufficiency in the skills they require."

"It's an exciting time to be an evaluation specialist", say Alison. "The work is challenging, very busy, dynamic, but also invigorating. The more specialist advice we can give, the more this culture will develop and the more we'll drive evidence-based outcomes".