



# nuclear information service

EVALUATION STUDY 2012  
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In June 2012, Nuclear Information Service (NIS) commissioned Henrietta Wilson to conduct an evaluation of its work, both to review its operations to date and consider its strategic direction for the next 3-5 years. The evaluation process consisted of research with representative NIS stakeholders to collect a range of views of NIS's successes and weaknesses, alongside ideas for future work. Two parallel methods of information collection were used for this: a short internet survey requiring a combination of multi-choice and narrative response, and semi-structured interviews to collect more detailed qualitative insights. The results were analysed to develop a representative picture of stakeholder views on NIS.

Overall, the evaluation demonstrated that NIS works well in many respects. The research identified a consistent picture that NIS is positively regarded and valued by many diverse stakeholders. It pinpointed a number of NIS's strengths, including its unique research focus: its concentration on the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) was particularly appreciated here, and also noted was its attention to tracking nuclear warhead movements as well as its ability to link its local research focus with a broader political picture. Other NIS strengths acknowledged by the research include the quality of its staff, especially its Directors. The effectiveness of its research was also valued, both in terms of its information collection - with recognition that it is thorough, reliable and balanced - and dissemination,

with users respecting NIS's monthly email update newsletter and website. Moreover, NIS is seen to be an efficient and effective organisation, and is seen to have had a tangible effect in raising public awareness and promoting debate. It is also viewed as being good value for money. While the research appreciated these aspects, it also emphasised that there is wide demand for NIS to continue with its current activities.

The research also indicated areas in which NIS is seen to be not performing so well. Areas that need addressing include such sector-wide issues such as NIS's reliance on the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT) for funding, and its stretched staff base. While not suggesting that NIS can be complacent about these areas, there is an understanding that many UK-

Nuclear Information Service Board members and staff at evaluation study findings meeting, Braziers Park, Oxfordshire, August 2012.



based nuclear disarmament civil society groups operate in similar conditions and under similar constraints. In other words, these identified weaknesses do not necessarily imply that NIS is being inefficient, but to an extent they may reflect the nature of this sort of work at the moment.

More specific to NIS, the evaluation research suggested that NIS needs to better clarify and articulate its underlying principles and theories. Discussions at a NIS strategic planning workshop in August 2012 indicated that these areas are at least partially understood internally, which implies that the challenge is to ensure that they are discussed and agreed across the organisation, and clearly presented to outsiders. The evaluation study also generated suggestions of ways in which NIS products could be improved, in

terms of who they are circulated to, details of the website and monthly update emails, and the tone of research reports.

Apart from the identified strengths and weaknesses, the study identified a number of opposed views of NIS' role. Notably, the research indicated that there were different views of the extent to which NIS should engage with officials in government departments, and whether NIS should be a campaigning organisation. There was also a strong response to suggestions that NIS might consider becoming a charity or merge with another organisation. While a few comments were made that such developments might help NIS consolidate its position, far more expressed ambivalence about the suggestions, with concern that they might undermine NIS' niche position

without any tangible benefit. The research elicited strong engagement with possible future projects, suggesting a number of positive directions NIS could take, along with collective good will and support from partner organisations. Prominent here was a firm belief that NIS should continue with its existing research focus and outputs, along with suggestions for specific projects that NIS could pursue in the short, medium and longer terms. The research also identified political opportunities that NIS could usefully engage with, including the UK decision on whether or not to renew Trident, and the implications of the Scottish Independence referendum for the UK's nuclear weapons.

Summing up, the evaluation shows that NIS is highly regarded and respected across its research, outputs and staff, and demonstrates that its products are widely used. It also identifies weaker areas, giving suggestions for how to address

these, and makes proposals for future core and project work. Addressing the findings of this research study will give NIS staff and its Board a sound basis for assessing how best to continue and build on its strengths, and addressing the areas that need particular attention.

NIS is following up the evaluation study by preparing a strategic plan which will build on the lessons learnt from the study and set out the direction and nature of the organisation's work over the next five years.

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