

Responses to audit and evaluation findings DOTARS Regional Programmes 2001-2004.

ANAO Administration of Grants: Better Practice Guide May 2002	Recommendations	Regional Partnerships	Sustainable Regions
1. Planning for an Effective Grant Program			
<p>1a Establish the need for the program</p>	<p>No recommendations for this ANAO principle.</p>	<p>DOTARS hosted a <i>Regional Australia Summit</i> in October 1999 in response to the then “rural crisis” that was associated with the disproportional impacts of structural change on non-metropolitan Australia i.e. the impacts of globalisation, technological change and government policies of deregulation. The Summit explored strategies to address a range of challenges facing non-metropolitan regions including: loss of private and public services, i.e. banks, post office, Medicare etc, higher levels of unemployment, industry closure, declining infrastructure and IT services. Much of which was being highlighted by the political rise of the One Nation Party.</p> <p>Some publications that highlighted the challenges in regional Australia include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Regional Banking Services: Money too Far Away</i>, House of Reps Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration (1999). ▪ <i>Impact of Competition Policy Reforms on Rural and Regional Australia</i> (Productivity Commission 1999) ▪ <i>Jobs for the Regions: A report on the inquiry into regional employment and unemployment</i> Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee (1999) ▪ <i>Country Australia: influences on population and employment.</i> (ABARE February 2000) ▪ <i>Regional Divide? A Study of Incomes In Regional Australia</i> (NATSEM 2000) ▪ <i>Time running out: Shaping Regional Australia's Future</i> (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services 2000) ▪ <i>State of the Regions</i> – a series of reports from ALGA (1998, 1999 and 2000). <p>The Governments response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Regional Australia Summit</i> in October 1999. ▪ <i>Rural Transaction Centre programme 1999.</i> ▪ <i>Regional Solutions Programme 2000-2001.</i> ▪ <i>Stronger Regions Stronger Australia Statement</i> in August 2001 (whole-of-government approach). ▪ The Sustainable Regions Programme late 2001(in response to the needs of eight poorer performing regions). ▪ In late 2001, DOTARS absorbed the Regional Assistance Programme (RAP), the ACC network and Dairy RAP from DEWR. ▪ The Regional Partnerships programme announced in July 2003: it combined eight separate regional funding programmes under the one national programme framework. ▪ RP expanded in the 2004-05 Budget with an additional \$77.6 million over the 4 years. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The expanded programme will address ongoing structural adjustment issues associated with the national drought and some of the key recommendations of <i>Regional Business: A Plan for Action</i> prepared by the expert Regional Business Development Analysis (RBDA) panel in 2003. 	

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<p>1b Produce program guidelines</p>	<p>“DOTARS provide all staff with a comprehensive set of guidelines and training” (RTCs). (pg 44)</p> <p><i>Source: The Auditor General Audit Report No.12 2003-2004 The Administration of Telecommunications Grants (DCITA & DOTARS)</i></p> <p>“Make clear, in guidelines to potential applicants, the assessment criteria and their relative importance as a basis for evaluating applications” (pg 40).</p> <p><i>Source: The Auditor General Audit Report No.48 2001-2002 Regional Assistance Programme</i></p>	<p>Guidance to complete the RP funding application is offered on the DOTARS website and by Regional Office staff and Area Consultative Committees (ACCs). ACCs have a role of facilitating and coaching applicants through the application process.</p> <p>A RP Internal Procedures Manual has been developed to guide DOTARS staff and ACCs through the application and assessment process. Staff are regularly updated on its content and any changes by the Regional Partnerships and Operations Section.</p> <p>Guidelines for applicants, DOTARS staff and ACCs clearly articulate the criteria for what will and will not be funded and the assessment criteria; i.e. outcomes, partnerships and support and project viability (Part 3 of the Application Form).</p> <p>Guidelines were developed in consultation with key stakeholders and tested for useability in the development of RP.</p> <p>RP Guidelines are published on the DOTARS website.</p>	<p>The SR Programme Guidelines (and the SR Public Information Paper it replaced) and operational protocols provide guidance for applicants, DOTARS staff and the eight Sustainable Regions Advisory Committees (SRACs). These were developed in consultation with key stakeholders and tested for useability in the development of SR.</p> <p>Many of the SRACs have developed guidance and explanatory material on their role and objectives.</p> <p>Guidelines for applicants and DOTARS staff clearly articulate the criteria for what will and will not be funded. SRP project assessment is measured against ten criteria (Attachment A, SRP Guidelines). These are divided into 3 mandatory and 7 general requirements. Guidelines were developed in consultation with key stakeholders and tested for useability (i.e. Part 2 of the SR Application Form).</p> <p>SR Guidelines are published on the DOTARS website.</p>

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<p>1c Define operational program objectives</p>	<p>Nil (picked-up later)</p>	<p>The RP programme contributes to DOTARS Outcome 2: greater recognition and development opportunities for local, regional and territory communities (PBS 2004-05 p.62). RP has the following four objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening growth and opportunities • Improving access to services • Supporting planning • Assisting in structural adjustment <p>These objectives are reflected in the RP <i>Evaluation Strategy</i>, the Application Form and programme guidance material and form part of the assessment process (Internal Procedures Manual, page 80).</p> <p>Key performance indicators for each outcome have been identified in the RP <i>Evaluation Strategy</i>. These programme outcomes are also identified in the guidance and coaching material for DOTARS Regional Office staff and ACC Executive Officers.</p>	<p>The SRP contributes to DOTARS Outcome 2: greater recognition and development opportunities for local, regional and territory communities (PBS 2004-05, p.62). Sustainable Regions projects must address one or more of the following outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved understanding of the characteristics of the region • Identification of future directions • Creation of employment • Establishment of businesses • Provision of key resourcing for sustainable development • Closer community interaction • Partnerships between the private sector and government for the sustainable development of the region • Develop the leadership and capacity to address regional priority issues and develop local solutions <p>All applications must also address one or more of the regional priorities determined by the SRAC established for the programme in each region.</p> <p>The need to address the local priorities and outcomes is reflected in the SRP application form, guidelines and assessment process. Guidance and coaching material has also been provided to DOTARS staff and SRAC executive officers.</p>

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<p>1d Establish performance measures</p>	<p>“Refine the national performance indicators, to ensure that the information provided reports adequately on the objectives and outcomes established for the programme” (pg 17)</p> <p><i>Source: The Auditor General Audit Report No.48 2001-2002 Regional Assistance Programme</i></p>	<p>Key Performance Indicators have been identified in the <i>RP Evaluation Strategy</i>.</p> <p>The <i>Strategy</i> identified the following reporting and monitoring framework: a Post Implementation Review (June 2004), 6 monthly internal reports, 18 month consolidated internal reports (ongoing), external evaluation begins June 2006.</p> <p>The RP guidelines require applicants to consider specific outcomes and measures to demonstrate individual project performance and how this will contribute to the objectives of the programme. These are then agreed in a formal Funding Agreement in an outcomes reporting schedule. ACC EOs and Regional office staff play a large role in coaching applicants through this process and capturing outcome information.</p>	<p>Key Performance Indicators have been identified in the <i>SR Evaluation Strategy</i> (now incorporated under RP).</p> <p>PIR, June 2004, Stage 11 March 2005 and Stage 111 external evaluation report in late 2005-2006.</p> <p>The guidelines require applicants to consider specific outcomes and measures to demonstrate individual project performance and how this will contribute to the objectives of the programme. These are then agreed in a formal Funding Agreement in an outcomes reporting schedule. SRAC EOs and Regional Office staff play a large role in coaching applicants through this process and capturing outcome information</p>

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<p>1e Design program for accountability</p>	<p>“In order to reduce administrative costs DOTARS review functions and responsibilities of the RTC Secretariat relative to the resources allocated.” (pg 44)</p> <p><i>Source: The Auditor General Audit Report No.12 2003-2004 The Administration of Telecommunications Grants (DCITA & DOTARS)</i></p> <p>“Define the role of ACCs in the implementation of Commonwealth funding programs and undertake a review of the performance of individual ACCs in relation to these responsibilities” (pg 45)</p> <p><i>Source Senate Committee Report, Finance & Public Administration References Committee, A funding matter under the Dairy Regional Assistance Program</i></p>	<p>The operation of ACCs is defined in their procedures manual. The procedures manual for RP now incorporates activities associated with the operations of RP including Regional Offices and ACC procedures (June 04). The performance of ACCs and Regional Offices are subject to ongoing review and agreed performance measures.</p> <p>New Key Performance Indicators have also been developed to monitor and measure ACC performance (June 04). Annual Business Plans and triennial Regional Strategic Plans are already in place and being updated.</p> <p>Regional Programmes Group has introduced internal monthly Activity Reports (late 2003) that now detail activity and performance against allocation (including by individual ACC).</p>	<p>National Office maintains an overview of the work of each of the eight committees established for the programme. Regional Offices are increasingly being engaged to work with National office staff on supporting the work of SRACs as their resource levels permit.</p> <p>Introduction of new annual administrative budget plans in April 2004 that bring funding procedures and accounting inline with ACCs thereby increasing a greater sense of accountability, autonomy and self leadership. SRP also reports to Cabinet on the programmes development and performance on a regular basis.</p> <p>Regional Programmes Group has introduced internal monthly performance reporting that details activity and performance against allocation (including by individual SRACs).</p>
<p>1f Design program for value for money</p>	<p>Seek to maximise the benefit of public expenditure on regional program grants by incorporating a ‘best value’ principle into program guidelines” (pg 65)</p> <p><i>Source: Senate Committee Report, Finance & Public Administration References Committee, A funding matter under the Dairy Regional Assistance Program</i></p>	<p>The strong partnership funding focus and the issue of benefit to region and value for money is incorporated in RP.</p> <p>Value for money is determined by taking into account the total request for RP funding against outcomes, partnerships and project viability.</p> <p>Value for money criteria is explicitly stated in RP guidelines, Application Form, RP Internal Procedures Manual and training for assessors, Regional Offices, and ACCs.</p>	<p>The strong partnership funding focus and the issue of benefit to region and value for money is incorporated in the SRP Application Form and assessment procedures (see assessment criteria 1 to 7 Attachment A of the SRP Guidelines). These 7 criteria are consistent with RP outcomes, partnerships and project viability value for money criteria.</p>

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<p>1g Risk management</p>	<p>Nil ANAO. <i>KPMG Review of Regional Partnerships.</i></p> <p><i>KPMG Review of Sustainable Regions Programme (draft report).</i></p> <p>Ensure the consideration of risk associates with Applicants and projects is adequately conveyed in the recommendation to the Minister.</p>	<p>Independent risk management undertaken and recommendations have or are being addressed.</p> <p>See Attachment A.</p> <p>July 04, introduced 'regular file reviews' in Regional Offices as a mechanism to assure due process has been followed and that files are properly maintained (i.e. all relevant information properly documented).</p> <p>Update RP Internal Manual to reflect procedural changes (July 2004).</p>	<p>Comprehensive internal risk management undertaken and issues have been or are being addressed.</p> <p>See Attachment A.</p> <p>July 04, introduced 'regular file reviews' in National Office as a mechanism to assure due process has been followed and that files are properly maintained (i.e. all relevant information properly documented).</p>
<p>1h Consider taxation issues</p>	<p>Nil.</p>	<p>The implications of tax issues have been addressed in relation to GST under the Administration section of the RP guidelines (P.8).</p> <p>GST registration is preferred.</p> <p>All recipients must be registered with the ATO and businesses are required to submit ABN/ACN numbers in the application form.</p> <p>GST to non-registered organisations –grant GST inclusive.</p> <p>Applicants are encouraged to seek their own advice from a qualified tax professional.</p>	<p>The implications of tax issues have been addressed in relation to GST in the SRP application form (p.7).</p> <p>GST registration is preferred.</p> <p>All recipients must be registered with the ATO and entities are required to submit ABN/ACN numbers in the application form</p> <p>Applicants are encouraged to seek their own advice from a qualified tax professional.</p>

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2. Selection of Projects			
<p>2a Grant announcements</p>	<p>“In conjunction with ACCs, develop and document minimum standards for providing feedback on projects that are not approved” (pg 42)</p> <p><i>Source: The Auditor General Audit Report No.48 2001-2002 Regional Assistance Programme</i></p> <p>“DOTARS, in conjunction with stakeholders, considers: the efficiencies of moving to more frequent assessment rounds, and/or establishing regular known cut-off dates for the submission of applications” (pg 44)</p> <p><i>Source: The Auditor General Audit Report No.48 2001-2002 Regional Assistance Programme.</i></p>	<p>Process is explained in the guidelines. RP is a discretionary grants programme and meeting the criteria is not a guarantee of funding.</p> <p>Unsuccessful applicants are advised by the Department within 2-3 weeks after Ministerial decision and feedback is provided to unsuccessful applicants and ACCs. Regional Offices prepare a standard letter to the applicant which includes specific reason(s) for non-approval.</p> <p>Under certain circumstances (RP Internal Procedures Manual Chapter 5.5 Review Process) applicants may seek a review of decision.</p> <p>Announcements are made as soon as practical.</p> <p>Continuous assessment and approval in place. No cut off dates for submission of applications as specified in the RP guidelines.</p>	<p>Unsuccessful Expressions of Interest are advised by SRAC.</p> <p>Unsuccessful applications are advised by Department within 2-3 weeks including why application was unsuccessful. SRAC EOs also provide feedback to proponents.</p> <p>Announcements are made as soon as practical.</p> <p>There is no formal review of decision process under SRP.</p> <p>SRACs regularly advertise for Expressions of Interest (EoIs). EoIs broadly assessed and SRACs determines which EoIs are invited to submit full applications. Applications assessed by SRAC against SR criteria and region’s priorities, SRAC then makes recommendations to the Minister (on a continuous basis).</p> <p>Tasmania differs in that the SRAC has an Investment Plan for the region and assesses funding proposals against this plan and the SRP criteria.</p>

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<p>2b Select funding strategy</p>	<p>“Funding to address regional disadvantage be distributed on the basis of objective funding considerations and that mechanisms be put in place to support intended policy outcomes” (pg 44)</p> <p><i>Source: Senate Committee Report, Finance & Public Administration References Committee, A funding matter under the Dairy Regional Assistance Program.</i></p>	<p>The approach and purpose of notional allocations for each ACC to support RP applications in their regions is currently under review.</p> <p>RP adopts a flexible funding strategy, i.e. payments are made against agreed milestones in the Funding Agreement between the applicant and the Department.</p>	<p>SEIFA index used to identify the 8 regions.</p> <p>Each SR has a specific allocation, set in recognition of a range of local circumstances</p> <p>SR adopts a flexible funding strategy taking into account specific project considerations, including type of applicant, other funding contributors and benefits of project for region. Payments are made against agreed milestones in the Funding Agreement between the applicant and the Department.</p>
<p>2c Handling and assessing applications</p>	<p>“DOTARS adopt transparent and systematic assessment procedures for regional program grants, incorporating an improved documentary record of assessment procedures” (pg 64)</p> <p><i>Source: Senate Committee Report, Finance & Public Administration References Committee, A funding matter under the Dairy Regional Assistance Program.</i></p> <p>“Produce standard documentation / pro-formas that can be used across the RO network.</p> <p>NO should ensure RP’s Internal Procedures manual is reviewed and communicated to all staff.”</p> <p><i>Source: Draft KPMG ‘Review of Regional Office Delivery’ May 2004.</i></p>	<p>Systematic assessment procedures are established in the RP Internal Procedures Manual and published through websites and guidelines.</p> <p>The flow: Applicants → ACCs → RO TRAX → Assessors → Q&A NO → Minister.</p> <p>Documentary record of assessment included in TRAX and hard copy files (in addition ROACH).</p> <p>RP Operations section undertook review of project visitation practices and has circulated a new standard proforma to Regional Offices for comment in June 2004 (also see under 3 below).</p> <p>Internal RP Procedures Manual reviewed and new version circulated to Regional Offices and ACCs in June 2004. Regular updates to be done each 3 months (or earlier as required).</p>	<p>SRAC assessment processes documented and minuted by EO. Chairs forward recommendations to Minister. SR Programme Guidelines outline the assessment process.</p>

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3. Management of Funding Agreements			
<p>3a Establish monitoring arrangements</p> <p>3b Establish funding agreements</p> <p>3c Monitor progress and payments</p> <p>3d Acquit funds</p>	<p>“Develop a national monitoring and review strategy for individual projects which incorporates a risk based approach (RAP)”. (pg 61)</p> <p><i>Source: The Auditor General Audit Report No.48 2001-2002 Regional Assistance Programme. Also, KPMG Review of Sustainable Regions Programme (draft report).</i></p> <p>“Specify the outcomes and outputs expected from projects, linked to milestones and performance indicators in funding agreements” (pg 73)</p> <p><i>Source: The Auditor General Audit Report No.12 2003-2004 The Administration of Telecommunications Grants (DCITA & DOTARS)</i></p> <p><i>KPMG Review of Sustainable Regions Programme (draft report).</i></p> <p>“Require progress reports and financial expenditure reports during the establishment phase of projects” (pg 73).</p> <p><i>Source: The Auditor General Audit Report No.12 2003-2004 The Administration of Telecommunications Grants (DCITA & DOTARS)</i></p> <p>“Make payments, apart from the initial project payment, subject to the approval of progress reports ” (pg 73)</p> <p><i>Source: The Auditor General Audit Report No.12 2003-2004 The</i></p>	<p>A rigorous monitoring and compliance strategy is already in place and guidance on the approach to project monitoring is included in the RP Internal Procedures Manual. Training for Regional Office staff to improve understanding of the strategy and consistency of implementation is ongoing. Regular RO managers meetings and weekly phone conference reinforce training. The number of project site visits is now being recorded as part of the routine RO monitoring of RP activity.</p> <p>Performance information on project outcomes is collected in the RP Application Form and detailed in the reporting schedule of individual funding agreements (of successful applications).</p> <p>The schedule to the contracts clearly sets out milestones and payments linked to outputs.</p> <p>The Evaluation Strategy seeks to collect both outputs (through agreed milestones) and outcome performance information.</p> <p>Progress reports and financial expenditure reports are required for the duration of projects under RP Funding Agreement.</p>	<p>Reviewing formal policy and procedures for administration and management of projects under SR.</p> <p>The monitoring and compliance strategy for Sustainable Regions is similar to that for Regional Partnerships. The Executive Officer for each of the 8 regions also assists in the monitoring and compliance strategy to differing degrees in each of the regions. Where due diligence is conducted on funded projects recommendations are carried through to the monitoring and compliance activity.</p> <p>Performance information on project outcomes is collected in the SRP application form and detailed in the reporting schedule of individual funding agreements (of successful applications).</p> <p>The Evaluation Strategy seeks to collect both outputs (through agreed milestones) and outcome performance information.</p> <p>Milestone/progress reports are required before further funds are released (an enhanced monitoring system is being considered, including developing pro-formas for milestone assessments and systematically documenting field visits).</p>

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3. Management of Funding Agreements continued			
	<p><i>Administration of Telecommunications Grants (DCITA & DOTARS)</i></p> <p>ROs should take a proactive approach to timely submission of progress reports, if possible the use of an administrative officer and suitable system should be used to facilitate process.</p> <p>ROs should finalise outstanding legacy projects (DRAP, RAP, etc) as soon as possible.</p> <p><i>Source: Draft KPMG 'Review of Regional Office Delivery' May 2004.</i></p> <p>Ensure that SR staff understand better practice principles of program administration and monitoring.</p> <p><i>Source: KPMG Review of Sustainable Regions Programme (draft report).</i></p>	<p>The RP Internal Procedures Manual provides guidance to Regional Offices on project monitoring and reporting, including a risk management framework to assist in determining the level and type of monitoring and reporting required. A report template has been drafted and this function will also be incorporated in TRAX.</p> <p>RTC programme has a system established to monitor progress of projects and ensure applicants are meeting milestones identified in funding agreements.</p> <p>Regional Offices have identified the finalisation of legacy programmes as a high priority.</p> <p>Under consideration.</p>	<p>National Office and Regional Office staff are proactively engaged in liaising with project proponents to ensure the timely and smooth implementation of projects and to address problems or delays.</p> <p>The objective is to ensure funded projects deliver the intended benefits to the region in a timely and effective way and that the SR programme expenditure is kept on budget each financial year.</p> <p>Under consideration.</p>

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4. Evaluation of the Grants Programme			
<p>4a Managing the Review</p> <p>4b Carrying out the Review</p> <p>4c Reporting</p>	<p>“[develop] in conjunction with relevant stakeholders, a strategy for the systematic evaluation of the Regional Assistance Programme.” <i>(pg 17)</i></p> <p><i>Source: The Auditor General Audit Report No.48 2001-2002 Regional Assistance Programme.</i></p>	<p>A comprehensive evaluation strategy has been developed for both the Regional Partnerships and the Sustainable Regions Programme (see 1d above). Business rules have been addressed in response to recommendations above.</p>	<p>A comprehensive evaluation strategy has been developed for both the Regional Partnerships and the Sustainable Regions Programme (see 1d above). Business rules have been addressed in response to recommendations above.</p>

Key Findings and Recommendations from the KPMG Review of Regional Partnerships	Regional Partnerships	Sustainable Regions
<p>Implement a formal monitoring and compliance strategy. Site audits of grantees including a review of operations to determine compliance with guidelines and the funding agreement (pg 3).</p>	<p>(See 1d, 3 a, b, c and d)</p>	<p>(See 1d, 3 a, b, c and d)</p>
<p>Development of TRAX continued and completed in a timely manner.</p> <p>Specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to track status of applications and approved grants; • Various statistical reports on application • Allocation of resources; • Allocation of funds; and • A mechanism to facilitate the processing of payments. • Suitable testing should be performed to ensure that the ‘shadow’ (interim measures to overcome TRAX reporting shortfall) spreadsheet data is consistent and accurate. • Security controls should be put in place for these ‘shadow’ systems. (RP) • Continue to monitor workloads at RO and ensure that sufficient resources are allocated between Regional Offices (pg 8). <p><i>Source: KPMG Findings and Recommendations on the Review of Regional Partnerships Programme.</i></p>	<p>The Claims module will be implemented in August 2004. This module will include full financial management of projects.</p> <p>Further work is being undertaken to enhance the reporting capability of TRAX which will deliver a broad spectrum of management reports including the capacity to monitor the business process flow. A transition strategy is being developed for implementation of the Claim release which will facilitate orderly data migration and upload from existing systems.</p> <p>Regional Operations section introduced password controls on all financial reporting spreadsheets, ROACH and project Tracker. Appropriate change control, access, security measures and links will be developed between TRAX and those generated by other spreadsheets.</p> <p>Resource monitoring and planning is an ongoing process between the National and Regional Offices to ensure that sufficient resources and workloads are allocated between ROs.</p>	<p>See comment (to left) to address the issues raised in relation to TRAX, as this system applies to SR.</p> <p>SR team introduced new annual budgeting requirements that make it a business rule to put all SR applications on TRAX (April 04).</p>

References

- The Auditor General Audit Report No.48 2001-2002 Regional Assistance Programme
- Senate Committee Report, Finance & Public Administration References Committee, A funding matter under the Dairy Regional Assistance Program
- Acumen Alliance Audit of Regional Solutions 2001
- Regional Programme Reform Taskforce Analysis and data: Internal Report (DOTARS, 15 May 2002)
- The Auditor General Audit Report No.12 2003-2004 The Administration of Telecommunications Grants (DCITA & DOTARS) (RTCs)
- KPMG Findings and Recommendations on the Review of Regional Partnerships Programme
- DRAP Internal Audit November 2002
- Courage Partners Post Implementation Review of RTC, June 2002 and June 2003
- Deloitte Touche Tomhatsu Evaluation of RAP (2004)
- Deloitte Evaluation of DRAP (2004)
- KPMG Review of Regional Office Delivery (draft May 2004)
- KPMG Review of Sustainable Regions Programmes (draft September 2004)