
Second External Interim Evaluation of the Culture 2000 Framework Programme – Invitation to Tender No. DG EAC 31/04

Final Report to the Directorate General Education and Culture of
the European Commission – Executive Summary

By Patricia Llopis-Navarro, Andrew McCoshan, Steven Murray and Simon Roy

ECOTEC
Research & Consulting Limited

Priestley House
12-26 Albert Street
Birmingham B4 7UD
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)121 616 3600
Fax: +44 (0)121 616 3699
Web: www.ecotec.com

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Priestley House
12-26 Albert Street
Birmingham
B4 7UD UK
Tel: +44 (0)121 616 3600
Fax: +44 (0)121 616 3699
Website: www.ecotec.com

6-8 Marshalsea Road
London
SE1 1HL UK
Tel: +44 (0)20 7089 5550
Fax: +44 (0)20 7089 5559

13b Avenue de Tervuren
B-1040 Bruxelles
Belgique
Tel: +32 (2)743 8949
Fax: +32 (2)743 7111

Modesto Lafuente 63 – 6a
E-28003 Madrid
España
Tel: +34 91 535 0640
Fax: +34 91 533 3663

31-32 Park Row
Leeds
LS1 5JD UK
Tel: +44 (0)113 244 9845
Fax: +44 (0)113 244 9844

Tower Business Centre
Portland Tower
Portland Street
Manchester
M1 3LF
Tel: +44 (0) 161 238 4965
Fax: +44 (0) 161 238 4966

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Culture 2000 Framework Programme

The Culture 2000 Framework Programme is currently the European Union's (EU) chief financing and programming instrument for its activities in the field of cultural co-operation. The Programme was formally established by a Decision of the European Parliament and the Council in February 2000. Originally established to run until the end of December 2004, the duration of the Programme was subsequently extended to the end of 2006.

Over 1,000 projects were supported under the Programme between 2000 and 2004, with 88% of them being specific and/or experimental innovative actions under Action 1 and 10% structured and multi-annual co-operation agreements under Action 2. Twenty-four Special Cultural Events or Cultural Heritage Laboratories were also set up under Action 3. On average, €2million were allocated per annum, giving a total spend of almost €160million. On average, Action 1 projects were awarded €88,000 and Action 2 projects €667,000.

The most popular artistic fields for Action 1 projects were translation (266 projects), cultural heritage (226) and performing arts (208), with the visual arts (135) and literature, books and reading (55) less common. The same ranking in the numbers of projects was found under Action 2, with cultural heritage having 45 projects, performing arts 33, the visual arts 21 and literature, books and reading just six. Eleven Special Cultural Events were supported with €1.4million, and 13 Action 3 European Cultural Heritage projects were supported with €3.1million.

Scope and purpose of the evaluation

ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd was commissioned to undertake the Second Interim Evaluation of the Programme, which it carried out during 2005. This evaluation was intended to follow on from and complement the First Interim Evaluation, which reported in November 2003, and hence was designed to avoid duplication with it.

The Terms of Reference specified two expected results of the evaluation:

- **an interim evaluation of the Culture 2000 Programme, covering in particular – but not only – Actions 2 and 3 of the Programme as well as the New Member States; and**
- **recommendations aimed at improving implementation of the current programme as well as any future EU programme in the field of culture.**

The main focus of the evaluation was on reconstructing the intervention logic and evaluating the Programme in terms of its relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, utility and sustainability. A series of evaluation questions were specified in the Terms of Reference under each of these headings.

Methodology

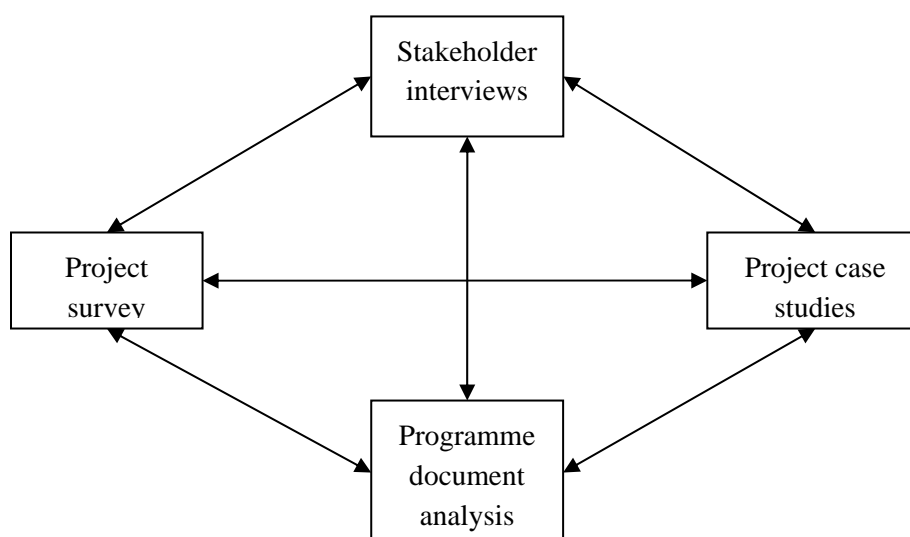
The evaluation strategy was designed to take a common approach to the different actions comprising the Programme, but to remain flexible enough to cope with the practical differences between actions.

The key stages in the evaluation methodology were as follows:

Stage 1	Inception, reconstruction of the intervention logic, and discussions with programme staff
Stage 2	Basic data and information gathering
Stage 3	An on-line survey of project leaders and co-organisers
Stage 4	In-depth interviews with key stakeholders, project leaders and co-organisers
Stage 5	Case studies
Stage 6	Analysis and assessment

Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd

The various stages of the methodology collected quantitative and qualitative data. During the evaluation, stakeholders and representatives from all participating countries were involved. Data from these varied sources was brought together in the final analysis and assessment stage of the evaluation. The key principle of this stage was to cross-reference emerging conclusions to ensure the consistency, reliability and validity of findings through a process of triangulation, shown in the following diagram:



Strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation design

The evaluation design contained several strengths and weaknesses. Specific strengths included the following:

- The involvement of all key stakeholders in the evaluation ensured that a balanced weighting of stakeholder opinion was possible.
- The use of multiple data sources and data-collection methods enabled the triangulation and verification of conclusions.
- The emphasis on the European Commission's (EC) key research topics in the design of data-collection tools and coding of the resulting data ensured that appropriate and useable data was collected.
- The evaluation design allowed for flexibility in the timing and quantity of each element of the project. For example, fieldwork phases were free-standing, so delays in one fieldwork element did not entail serious repercussions for the entire project.

Specific weaknesses included the following:

- There was a reliance on the evaluation's e-survey to gather information from project participants. Owing to time, cost and language restrictions, an on-line survey consisting predominantly of quantitative 'closed' questions was chosen. The structure of the survey and the decision to reduce the number of project interviews undertaken reduced the amount of in-depth qualitative data collected from projects (although some qualitative data was collected via case studies and interviews).
- Difficulties arose in balancing the respective 'voices' of stakeholders. For example, in some topic areas of the study stakeholders were unable to comment knowledgeably, or their views were explored in more depth than other stakeholders.
- The delay in commencing the project resulted in the fieldwork phase coinciding with the summer holiday period, necessitating extension of the fieldwork phases and their encroachment into the final data analysis and reporting phase.

CONCLUSIONS

Relevance

The study concluded that Culture 2000 provides an adequate basis for addressing both the original and current needs in cultural co-operation, and that the cultural fields it employs adequately reflect the nature of the domain of culture. There is a widespread view that the Programme is well focused in terms of its aims and objectives. The flexibility provided by the breadth of the objectives means that new developments in the cultural field can be readily accommodated within the Programme.

There is a generally widespread perception of the need for a programme that specifically supports the cultural sector (rather than culture being included within other programmes), and that Culture 2000 provides the basis for doing this.

The Culture 2000 Programme clearly addresses a gap in funding for transnational co-operation in Europe, and has also generated substantial new transnational co-operation in the form of new or improved links between cultural operators. It also plays a large role in the conceptualisation and implementation of new co-operation projects. Many partnership links and activities have continued after the end of Culture 2000 funding, and in some cases links have led to additional, non-Culture 2000 transnational co-operation activity.

There is no evidence that the Programme's sectoral approach hinders or stimulates cultural co-operation in Europe in general terms.

The annual priorities adopted in selection years 2002-2004 may have meant that some good-quality projects in non-priority fields were not funded. However, the limited funds available mean that the Programme's managing and selection authorities must set priorities, and hence it is inevitable that some good-quality co-operation activity cannot be supported.

Effectiveness and impact

Objectives

Culture 2000 has a set of very broad objectives and, in the sense that projects make contributions to achieving all of them, it can be concluded that the Programme is broadly achieving its objectives. That said, greater progress appears to have been made against some objectives than others. Most projects report impacts in terms of improving knowledge of European cultures and heritage and improving understanding of European cultural diversity.

Only a small proportion of projects report new or stronger links with cultural operators in non-European countries. Reasons for this include the level of resources available for this type of activity and the start-up costs that are involved (greater than working simply within Europe). Overall, cultural co-operation activities with third countries are a minor focus of the Programme.

Only a minority of projects target people from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. But there is no evidence that the inclusion of objectives relating to culture's role in tackling social and economic disadvantage is too ambitious, unachievable with the resources available, or distracts attention from the core objectives of co-operation and exchange. Indeed, co-operation and exchange could provide good-practice examples of the role that culture can play in alleviating social and economic disadvantage.

Little evidence could be found that the Programme attracts more 'traditional' participants who might be less pioneering than 'non-traditional' cultural operators – a wide variety of organisations participate.

Constraints on the achievement of objectives

At the level of individual projects, a number of factors were identified that act as constraints on the achievement of objectives:

- lack of experience in European projects;
- weak management and communication skills on the part of cultural operators;
- lack of information on potential partners and of funding to support initial exploratory contact; and
- lack of resources within the cultural sector in general.

No evidence was found that small operators are more adversely affected by such factors to the extent that it leads to their under-representation in the Programme (no such under-representation was found).

Financial rules and procedures

In general, financial monitoring is regarded as sound, and enquiries are widely reported to be dealt with efficiently. Most projects believe that the new 70/30 payments procedure has improved cash flow.

With regard to the effect of the 5% co-financing rule, most projects believe it to be a barrier to participation. However, this is not a surprising finding since the effect of this type of factor will only ever be negative. Furthermore, there are no benchmarks available to know whether this is a particular issue for the cultural sector. Either way, there is a strong case for requiring a level of financial input as a means of ensuring a solid level of commitment.

Adequacy of present instruments

Participants were found to cover the full range of artistic fields (although mainly cultural heritage and performing arts) and the full range of organisation sizes (from the very small to the very large) and types (private, public, not-for-profit). No one particular type of organisation appears to dominate.

In conclusion, the current programme is an adequate mechanism to meet the needs of cultural co-operation in Europe. Respondents express concerns over the scale and scope of the Programme, but as it currently stands Culture 2000 provides good examples of what transnational co-operation can achieve and how to implement co-operation that could be incorporated into national policies and programmes.

Efficiency and cost-effectiveness

Overall, the administrative and management resources available for running Culture 2000 appear to be quite modest. On the face of it this seems to make for efficiency in terms of delivering the Programme: projects are selected and the budget is spent. However, more resources targeted in particular areas would actually increase efficiency by raising the quality of projects' applications and their outputs and maximising the benefits from the funds spent through enhanced dissemination. Specific benefits of additional administrative resources would include:

- better feedback provided to applicants, thus increasing the likelihood of good-quality resubmissions;
- the compilation and maintenance of a definitive and up-to-date contacts database to provide the basis for more systematic communication between the Commission and projects; and
- more active and systematic dissemination activity, including:
 - i) development of Culture 2000 publications highlighting the achievements and activities of the Programme; and
 - ii) enhanced content on the website, supporting a dialogue with projects and dissemination activities.

With regard to the Cultural Contact Points (CCPs), their activity profile was found to be variable. Importantly, little evidence was found of CCPs being used as 'listening posts' as recommended by the previous interim evaluation.

One measure of the efficiency of CCPs is the number of applications that fail on technicalities rather than on content (although it is important to note that the high proportion of applications rejected for technical reasons may be because applicants did not seek the assistance of their CCP). Between 2001 and 2004, the proportion of applications rejected for technical reasons declined, but remains high at between a fifth and a quarter of all applications.

The First Interim Evaluation concluded that there was a need for a clearer dissemination strategy that targeted core beneficiary groups. The view of the Commission was that it already had a clear dissemination strategy in place, and it was not considered appropriate to target specific beneficiaries (in respect of the principle of a level playing field). Our report concludes in this area that there is little evidence of systematic gathering and promotion of project achievements and their proactive dissemination. Experimental or innovative projects are an important feature of Culture 2000 and need to be backed up by effective dissemination if the benefits of the Programme are to be maximised.

Appropriateness of the frequency and timing of calls for proposals

The frequency and timing of calls for proposals raise some difficulties for cultural operators, particularly those involved in annual projects. Calls are generally launched before the summer break, with an October deadline. This makes partnership formation difficult. Contracting takes place just before the summer, which presents a challenge for organising events that would take place over the summer months. However, it is unlikely that there is much flexibility to enable these timings to be altered.

Efficiency of the selection process

An important measure of efficiency is the extent to which the selection process is understood by participants. Two-thirds of survey respondents said that they fully understood the process, and nearly three-quarters thought that the information provided about project application and selection was useful. Only one in 10 projects said that the information needed improvement.

With regard to the application form, the level of detail required varies and in some cases is hard to complete (e.g. seminars have to be broken down in great detail). It is understood from the Commission that the new SYMMETRY project database should make it possible to simplify the form.

Feedback to unsuccessful applicants seems to present an unnecessary hurdle by comprising a two-stage process that requires applicants to request further details. While this approach decreases the initial administrative burden on the Commission, it probably also reduces the likelihood of applicants (who are by now familiar with the Programme) reapplying. The experience of some other programmes is that applicants who have already made an application but have narrowly missed out on selection can be encouraged to improve the quality of their bids next time round, thereby expanding the pool of good-quality bids from which the Commission can select the best.

It is reported that CCPs are not always informed about which projects have been successful before the general newsletter is issued, which places them in a difficult position with respect to applicants. Under EC rules it is not possible to inform CCPs of the selected projects until all the contracts have been signed, as CCPs are officially external to the Commission. However, as CCPs receive email updates on progress towards the signing of all contracts,

with estimates for final completion dates, the CCPs should be adequately prepared to refer queries to the Commission.

With regard to the role of expert assessors, opportunities are being lost to improve the selection process and the quality of bid resubmissions. This is because assessors are not required to provide detailed qualitative feedback to applicants; the number of experts assessing each application (six) is very high; and individuals are not appointed on a multi-annual basis (although a minority return for two or three years). While no issues have been raised as to the quality of the current assessments, actions to address these issues would improve current arrangements.

Efficiency of monitoring and evaluation

In general, Culture 2000 adopts a ‘light touch’ in the area of monitoring and evaluation. Although the Commission’s project managers are in regular contact with projects throughout their lifespan, monitoring is informal and limited to final and, in the case of multi-annual projects, interim activity reports. A particularly important feature of this approach is that the quality of project outputs is not effectively monitored. There are no systematic, programme-wide mechanisms for collecting information or assessing results other than final activity reports, where the main focus is on financial accounting and checking that activities undertaken are or were consistent with the submitted application form. This means that information on project results is not systematically available in the public domain, and there is no way of ensuring that high-quality artistic content is produced in the end.

Fit between programme resources and intended outputs and results

The previous interim evaluation concluded that the scale of the resources available was inadequate in view of the objectives of the Programme, and recommended suppressing the objectives relating to socio-economic disadvantage and/or target groups. The Commission took this into account in setting objectives for Culture 2007.

Our conclusions in this area, however, are that: at the most strategic level the question of whether resources are sufficient to achieve the objectives cannot be quantified; and having broad objectives and a comparatively small budget are not necessarily incompatible if small-scale projects are designed to show how to use cultural activities in new and creative ways. As Culture 2000 is not intended to be a high-volume programme, the limited resources are intended to be used in innovative and/or experimental ways to achieve high impact and visibility. In this context, the challenge is not securing high volumes of activity but putting in place highly effective dissemination mechanisms to enable the benefits of the programme to be shared and further developed or exploited (valorised).

More significant is the fact that Culture 2000 projects are extremely diverse (owing to the great scope allowed by the objectives), and because of this a coherent set (or coherent sets) of inter-related projects have not been developed which would give the Programme critical impact or momentum. Given the modest budget available, it is not possible for Culture 2000

or Culture 2007 to achieve critical impact through sheer volume or scale of project activity. Rather, efforts to disseminate the activities and achievements of the Programme should be intensified, generating greater visibility and enabling the Commission to achieve ‘critical impact’.

There are also two important subsidiary issues with regard to resource sufficiency. First, there is a question mark over the adequacy of resources for CCPs, especially in larger countries where the task before them seems greater despite the allocation of funding on the basis of population. Secondly, there is a widespread view that cultural operators from New Member States are likely to suffer from lack of resources to a much greater extent than others. Although we could not quantify this assertion, the relative cost of transnational activity in terms of travel and accommodation may be higher for these operators. To counter these problems, many participating countries have established co-financing support for participants. However, as the situation in each participating country varies it would not be appropriate to oblige national administrations to provide co-financing. In this instance, the subsidiarity principle should be followed, allowing national administrations to implement a system most appropriate to their own needs.

Utility, added value and sustainability

To what extent has the Programme been of benefit to the organisations involved?

There is evidence for a range of benefits to organisations and individuals involved in Culture 2000, including: gaining broader experience in the cultural field and in participating in European projects; increased professionalism because of the management skills needed; improved organisational and individual capacity; and increased dialogue among cultural actors.

A number of benefits of transnationality have been identified, including the stimulation of new concepts for projects, the encouragement of new forms of cultural expression, and the development of new skills and experiences.

These benefits and the European dimension of the Programme have given rise to a range of added values, including: strengthened cultural links among countries; increased perception of European identity; and better integration of the New Member States.

Sustainability of results beyond the project lifespan

Culture 2000 has clearly generated significant additionality: most survey respondents indicated that they would not have started their project without the Programme, but perhaps even more significantly half would not even have conceptualised their project. The Programme has therefore been important in catalysing ideas. One in five projects reported that they had never worked with any of their project partners before, and a further half reported that they had worked with only some of them. One in four projects reported new links and one

in three stronger links with cultural operators in other countries. Many respondents to the survey also indicated that they would continue their co-operation activities in some way.

Culture 2000 registers high levels of potential sustainability.¹ Nearly two-thirds of survey respondents indicated that they would continue the links with partnerships they had formed. Two-thirds of projects also indicated that they would continue their activities after funding has come to an end.

Would another kind of action or policy instrument have been more useful to support cultural co-operation in Europe?

It is unlikely that any other instrument would have been any more useful than Culture 2000 in promoting cultural co-operation. The breadth of the objectives affords broad scope to participants, while the focus on experimentation and innovation encourages creativity and new forms of cultural expression. The alternatives would be a more targeted programme, a focus on a high throughput of activities or participants, or a mobility programme that funds the exchange of individuals. Both targeting and an emphasis on volume would seem inappropriate in the cultural field at the present time, while an individual mobility programme would not generate the same level of cultural cross-fertilisation.

Subsidiarity and the development of synergies with national/regional policies

Synergies with national/regional cultural policies appear limited. Many interviewees stressed that Culture 2000 is the only mechanism for supporting transnational co-operation projects, as their national/regional authorities tend to focus on their respective domestic priorities.

As Culture 2000 is filling a gap, there is little scope for duplication of activities that are already supported elsewhere. In addition, some participating countries have established co-financing initiatives to support cultural operators involved in the Programme, and others have allocated additional resources to their CCPs to support and expand their operations.

Recommendations

Relevance

The Programme currently allocates funds to projects according to their Action and cultural sector by setting broad quotas of projects to be funded under each cultural field and Action. The Commission has indicated that the quotas are a result of negotiations among the Member States in 1999, but this point is not explicit in programme documentation. It is recommended that the Commission should:

¹ It has not been possible to test for actual sustainability.

- **clearly state the allocation of funding available under each cultural field and Action in the annual call for applications, in order to enhance transparency in this aspect of the selection process.**

The current approach of obliging applicants to select a single artistic field does not always allow them to accurately reflect their activities, which may be multidisciplinary in nature. The lack of clear definitions of each artistic field can also make it difficult for applicants to accurately categorise their projects. As the new Culture 2007 Programme does not currently propose using artistic fields, these perceived problems may be resolved. However, should artistic fields be retained in, or return to, the next schedule of cultural programmes, it is recommended that the Commission should:

- **develop broad definitions of each artistic field to enable applicants to accurately categorise their projects; and**
- **change programme administrative structures, such as the application form, to allow applicants to select a main artistic field and relevant minor fields as appropriate.**

Effectiveness and impact

At present, data on outputs and outcomes is not systematically collected or reported, and although it is possible to say whether the Programme has met its broad objectives, it is not possible to quantify the extent to which it has done so.

The content and quality of the narrative portion of projects' interim and final reports are highly variable. The Commission's focus on the financial portion of interim and final reports is to the detriment of potentially rich qualitative and quantitative material available in the project narratives. Therefore, it is recommended that the Commission should:

- **develop and adopt a standardised template for interim and final project reports; and**
- **adopt a set of key performance indicators for each programme and action objective against which the extent and impact of the Programme can be measured.**

The programme-level dissemination strategy is unclear. Although activity does take place, the Commission's dissemination activity could be improved. A clearer focus would enable the Culture Unit to focus resources on appropriate high-visibility activities, and would support attempts to achieve critical impact. It is recommended that:

- **a programme dissemination strategy be developed and published.**

The Commission should assist projects in searching for suitable partners with whom to develop and submit co-operation project applications. It is recommended that the Commission should:

- **develop an on-line, searchable, partner-matching database to enable cultural operators to search for potential partners and to submit their own organisational details and interests; and**
- **provide links to similar partner-matching databases provided by CCPs from the Culture 2000 webpages.**

It has been suggested by stakeholders in interviews that some cultural operators, and small operators in particular, struggle to become involved as project leaders or co-organisers because of the requirements of the 5% rule. It is likely that the rule does pose a barrier to some organisations, but this effect must be balanced with the rule's intention – to ensure the commitment of cultural operators involved in the Programme as key project partners. Owing to the limited funds available to the Programme, it would appear impractical to allocate additional funds to small operators or to exempt them from the 5% rule; national co-financing for participants may be the most suitable means of supporting their involvement in the Programme.

Efficiency and cost-effectiveness

The current application processing system takes too long and should be considerably shortened. This does not appear to be because of any greater inherent complexity with the application process but, rather, because of a lack of administrative resources at times of high workloads. Therefore, it is recommended that the Commission should:

- **increase the short-term staffing levels of the BAT (Technical Assistance Bureau) to enable applications to be processed and checked for basic eligibility more quickly.**

The timing of project start dates has proved problematic for annual projects, which struggle to develop and implement activities in the key summer season. By reducing the time taken on basic eligibility checking, the Commission could bring project start dates forward, enabling projects to plan activity in time for the summer season. Additionally, a three-month window during which projects must start could be established, to allow projects flexibility to set a start date most appropriate for them. This may also assist the Commission by spreading the workload associated with project start-up and implementation over the same three-month period. Therefore it is recommended that the Commission should:

- **bring forward the start date of projects and implement a flexible project start window, or if this is not possible under current legislative arrangements, the potential for doing so in future programmes should be explored.**

Better use should be made of the time and expertise of the national cultural experts. It is recommended that the Commission should:

- **reduce the number of times each application is assessed and introduce a short narrative that justifies scores given and summarises the strengths and weaknesses of the application; and**
- **implement a briefing day for the expert evaluators before or during the application assessment week in Brussels.**

The high turnover of experts negates available potential for improvements in efficiency and quality. Therefore, it is recommended that the Commission should:

- **gather feedback from national authorities in order to understand why experts do not often return in subsequent years and to improve the assessment process;**
- **retain experts on a multi-annual basis where possible; and**
- **continue to provide experts with general feedback on the quality of their work at the end of the assessment week and ensure that the work of each expert is adequate; if necessary, under-performing experts should be removed from subsequent selection processes.**

Aside from the two interim evaluations, the Commission does not systematically collect and analyse the views of project participants on the relevance and implementation of the Programme. It is recommended that the Commission should:

- **ask all project leaders to complete and submit a short questionnaire with their interim and final report; a similar voluntary questionnaire could also be sent to unsuccessful applicants with their feedback.**

The current system of providing feedback to applicants is inefficient, as applicants have to specifically request feedback in order to receive it, thereby occupying the staffing resource of the Culture Unit. It is also ineffective, as applicants are firstly given their overall score, followed by a breakdown of their score after a further request for information. However, the lack of qualitative detail explaining the scores means that the information is of little use to applicants and does not enable them to develop an improved application for future submission. Therefore, it is recommended that the Commission should:

- **provide every applicant with detailed written feedback on their application, along with an official letter stating the outcome.**

Utility, added value and sustainability

A key element of the Programme, as expressed in the establishing Decision, is to add value to and complement national activity. At present, a clear overview of national cultural policies and activities is not available, although the CCPs are contractually required to provide information on relevant developments in their countries. However, as this information is not readily available, it is difficult to assess the added value and complementarity of the Programme with national initiatives. Therefore, it is recommended that:

- **the Commission should provide on the Culture webpages short summaries on the state of cultural policy and activity in each participating country, highlighting the complementarity of national policy with the Culture 2000 Programme and its successor.**

Resourcing the recommended activity

Many of the recommendations detailed above will require the reallocation of resources within the Programme.

The analysis of the balance of allocated expenditure from 2000-2004 indicates that less has been spent on programme administration than envisaged and more has been spent on projects. Therefore, within Decision 508/2000/EC there exists the scope to increase the balance of funds allocated to EC administration at programme level. This would necessarily require a reduction in the amount of funding available to projects, but as the focus is on the **quality** rather than the **quantity** of activity, this should be acceptable. Indeed, it may be necessary to do so in order to conform to the spending guidelines in Decision 508/2000/EC.

Under the terms of the Decision, the proportion of funding available for administration is fixed at around 10% of the total programme budget. Therefore, depending on the availability of funds, there should be scope to vary the balance of funds allocated to the CCPs and Commission in exchange for more (or fewer) tasks. CCP resources could also be improved if national administrations commit greater resources to them, as some have already done.

Finally, efficiency savings could be used to resource and implement some of the changes. In particular, altering the number of assessments undertaken by each expert would allow efficiency savings.