ESF Member Forum on Evaluation of Funding Schemes and Research Programmes

Strand 3: Ex-post evaluation of EAU, a FNR thematic programme

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Outline

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FNR and the EAU programme

- FNR manages multi-annual R&D priority programmes
- Systematic and continuing evaluation of the results achieved
- The EAU programme (Sustainable use and management of water resources):
  - Evaluation of projects by international peer review
  - Basic & applied research
- EAU programme
  - Duration: 2000 - 2007
  - 5.000.000 EUR
- Projects
  - 9 projects selected in 2 calls for proposal;
  - Project duration: 2 - 5 years
  - FNR financial contribution/project: 58.000 – 920.000 EUR
- Project owners: Public research centres, University of Luxembourg, Public administrations
Evaluation on programme level

Extended peer review & evaluation experts

Extended peer review

Evaluation
Programming (Foresight)

Implementation
Identification

Financing
Formulation
Evaluation on project level

Projects: Steps in red managed by researchers
Review process: from the existing multiannual programmes to a new programme

- Since 2000: **Multi-annual research programmes** in specific domains
  - Drafted by experts & selected by the FNR’s Sc.Council and Board of Admin.
  - 1 stage selection process of project proposals based on reviews by international scientific experts (written reviews)
  - Project monitoring: annual scientific and financial reports + final project evaluation (peer review).
  - Project with 5 year duration had a mid-term evaluation
  - EAU Programme monitoring in 2 Steering Committees on 15 January 2004 and on 13 January 2006 with international peers
    - No evaluation expert → too much focus on project mid-term evaluation
    - Inadequate timing for actual steering of programme (not before call)
  - First ex-post programme evaluation of an FNR programme: 8+9/07/2008

- From 2008 on: **Framework programme** with different research domains
  - Developed through a Foresight exercise with the involvement of all stakeholders in Luxembourg (research, economy, politics)
  - 2 stage selection process with written reviews and panel meetings
  - Project monitoring: Light + final project evaluation (peer review).
  - Continuous evaluation of the framework programme or sub-domains
Why ex-post evaluation?

Rationale to perform-end-of programme evaluation (early ex-post):

1. Accountability (legal requirement)
   - The final evaluation report provides various stakeholders with transparency on the way the funds provided for the EAU programme have been used.

2. Learning from evaluation
   - The lessons learnt from programme evaluation are used to the definition of future calls.

3. Political advice
   - The FNR needs to have data on the outcomes and impacts of its programmes serving as a basis for political decision-making if needed.
How is ex-post evaluation done at FNR?

- Terms of reference drafted by FNR
- Direct negotiation with different evaluation experts/companies
  - Evaluation expert = team leader and looking for adequate peers
  - Team composition
  - Methodology open
- Extended peer review (3 steps of programme evaluation)
  - Initial phase: acquisition of deeper understanding of the programme
  - Field phase:
    - On site visits both at the funding agency and the research organisations
      - Interviews with the research teams without FNR participation
    - Interviews with the programme management
  - Reporting phase
Methodology - Issues to be addressed (ToR)

1. Relevance of the programme
   Were the programme’s objectives relevant to the FNR priorities?

2. Efficiency
   How economically have the various inputs been converted into outputs and results?

3. Effectiveness:
   How far have the programme’s impacts contributed to achieving its specific and general objectives?

4. Impact:
   How do the programme’s impacts compare with the needs of the beneficiaries and the target population in the framework of the objectives of the programme?

5. Sustainability:
   To what extent can the positive changes be expected to last after the programme will be terminated?

→ Adequate methodology in order to address these elements in the most efficient manner
Potential biais in final evaluation

• Insufficiently stated programme objectives
  – Making objectives up at the end (no clear intervention logic)
  – No clear indicators defined at the beginning
• Communication of programme objectives + indicators
  – to applicants
  – to reviewers
  – to final evaluators
→ leads to differing evaluations at different stages (peer review of project / steering committee / final evaluation)
Potential biases in peer review (Technopolis)

- Selection of panel in/excludes ‘schools’ of thought
- Time limits set by the organisers affect outcomes
- Tacit negotiations and compromises affect decisions - disagreements among peers get swept under the carpet
- Those who feel they have less knowledge rate more positively
- Division of labour within panels means some judgements are made by individuals, not the full panel


- Self evaluation sometimes too critical
1. Selection of evaluators

- Tender: 7 external companies/experts specialised in evaluation
- Specific terms of reference (ToRs)
- Only International experts
- Methodology left open
- 2 senior international evaluation experts (team leaders!) lead the methodology of the review process and make the reporting
- 2 scientific peers (ideally 3) renowned scientists met the PIs and discussed on the scientific issues
2. Evaluation process

- Data provided to evaluation team previous to evaluation
  - Programme description
  - Project descriptions
  - Peer reviews of projects
  - Best publications
- Visit of PI & team in their institutions by evaluation team
- Interviews
  - Oral self evaluations of project team during meetings (>< written)
  - Individual interviews
  - No common meetings between programme managers and project owners during the evaluation process
2. Evaluation process

- FNR management evaluated
- Exhaustive: no sampling needed (specificity of Lux. context)
  - All participating principal investigators have been interviewed
- Interviews with end users (impact of the programme)
Conclusion (1)

• Observation by the peers:
  – Discrepancy between written scientific reports and interviews: some researchers are better in explaining their outcomes that writing them into reports

• Recommendations for improvement from the peer review side:
  – Peer review for this kind of evaluation: suited but it only provides a first impression
  – Peer review could be improved by additional preparation of material: e.g. bibliometric analysis, critical self-evaluations of the projects
  – More interviews with stakeholders and programme management
  – Survey among project leaders
Conclusion (2)

- Independent evaluation (international experts)
- Outsourcing the programme evaluation
  - Selection of best experts
  - Master the process
- Leader of the team is evaluation specialist (peers not left alone)
- Open methodology
- Visit the project teams and end-users
- Know what you want / be specific on your ToRs!