



# ESF Member Forum on Evaluation of Funding Schemes and Research Programmes

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

Vienna, 6 October 2008

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# Outline



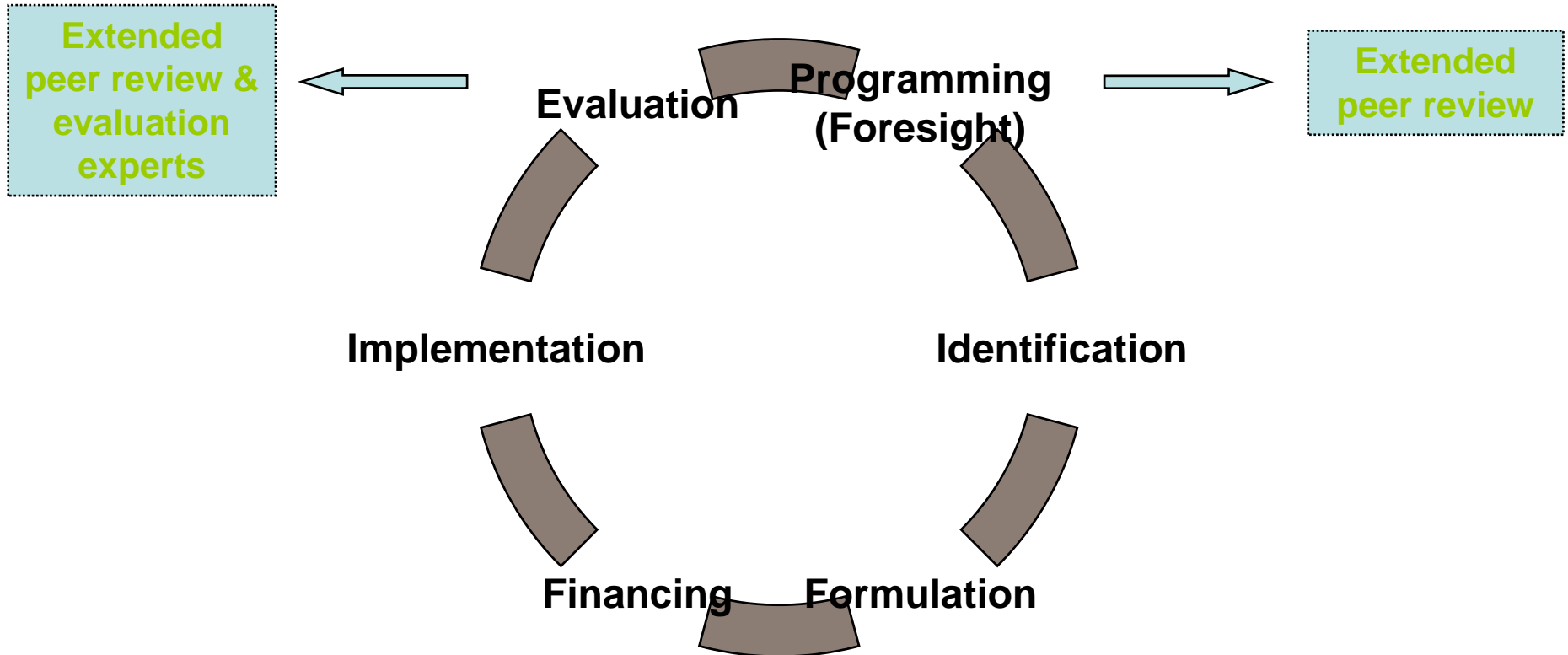
1. FNR & the EAU programme
2. Evaluation on programme and project level at the FNR
3. Why ex-post evaluation?
4. How is ex-post evaluation done? The methodology
5. Potential biais in final evaluation & peer review
6. Guarantee for quality
7. Conclusions

# FNR and the EAU programme

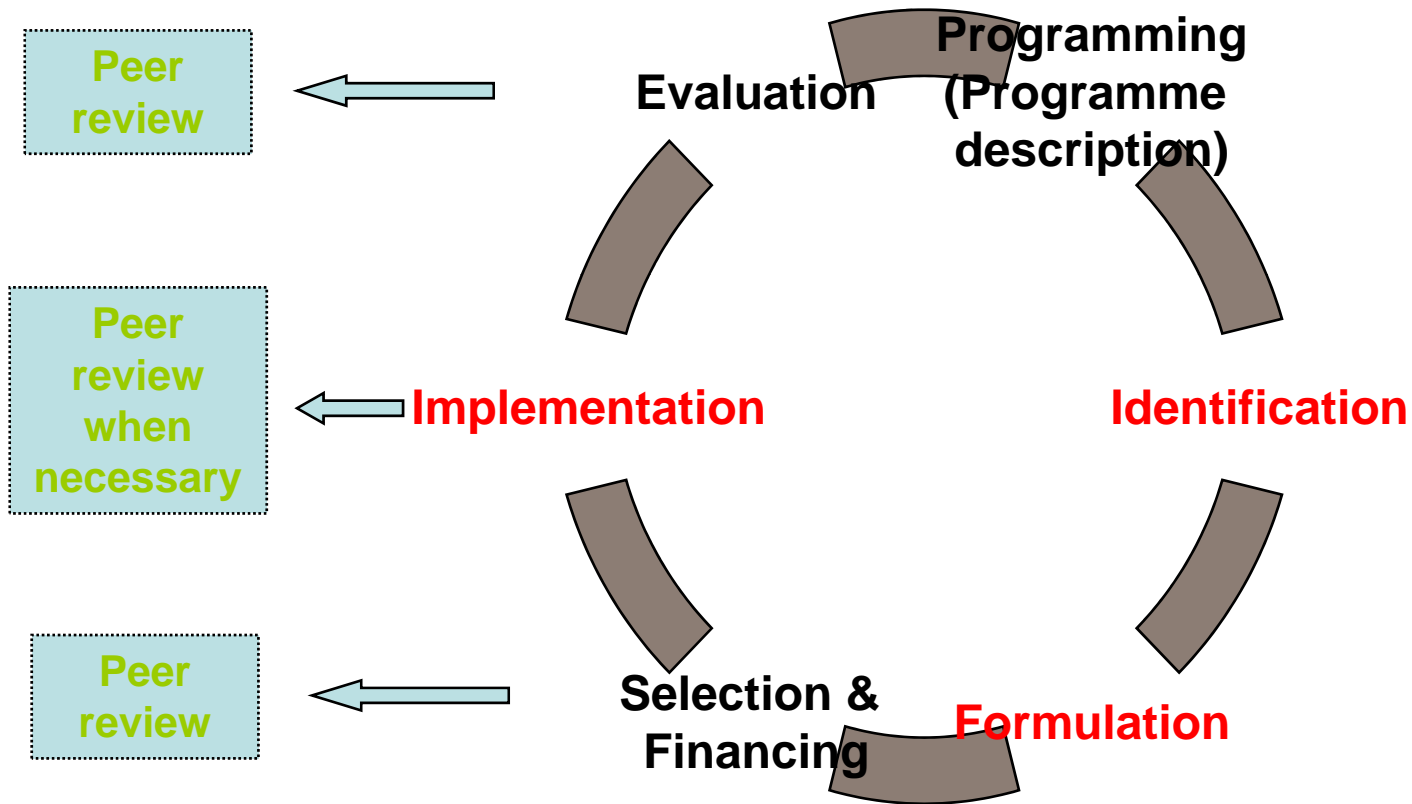


- FNR manages multi-annual R&D priority programmes
- Systematic and continuing evaluation of the results achieved
- The EAU programme (Sustainable use and management of water resources):
  - Evaluation of projects by international peer review
  - Basic & applied research
- EAU programme
  - Duration : 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



# Evaluation on project level



## 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 biases 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

Liv Langfeldt, "Decision-making by expert panels," *Research Evaluation*, 13(1), pp51-62

- Self evaluation sometimes too critic



## 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 than 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 !