



A Guide to Evaluation Activities in Funding Agencies

Working Group 1: Quality Assurance and Evaluation Guidelines

ESF Member Organisation Forum on Evaluation of Publicly Funded Research

Foreword

Research evaluations have gained increasing importance among activities that funding organisations carry out to increase their knowledge base for developing research and innovation policies and to improve funding schemes. The success of evaluation activities depends on the acceptance of their results among decision makers and the research communities being evaluated. Evaluations must therefore meet the highest quality standards.

Working Group 1: *Quality Assurance and Evaluation Guidelines* took on the task of carving out some 'common ground' for agreements on standards and practices among the European Science Foundation's member organisations (MOs) participating in the Forum on Evaluation of Publicly Funded Research. We hope this guide may be useful and instrumental in developing organisations' strategies on evaluation activities.

Each organisation must consider its own specific needs and local decision making processes. The practice must be adapted to specific in-house competence, and to different options for project organisation. MOs may also want to pay attention to the positive learning aspects attached to working with evaluations, and the benefits to the internal education of staff.

By using a general model of an evaluation process, we present challenges and considerations and summarise our recommendations in a set of *Golden rules for evaluation processes*.

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Golden Rules for Evaluation Processes

1. Discuss why the evaluation should be carried out and how the results will be useful for the agency (stakeholder).
2. Focus the goals of the evaluation and plan for the follow-up. Identify challenges and risks and make sure the evaluation will 'make a difference'.
3. Allocate sufficient time and resources to the planning and design of an evaluation project.
4. Clarify terms and conditions when establishing the contract (if applicable) and project description and make sure they are communicated to the contractor/external experts.
5. Make sure the evaluation is supported and considered legitimate by all relevant stakeholders.
6. Make sure appropriate and state-of-the-art methods are applied.
7. Make sure the evaluators are autonomous.
8. Communicate with relevant target groups throughout the evaluation project.
9. Make sure the most is made of the evaluation results (e.g., publishing the evaluation results).
10. Allocate sufficient time and resources to the follow-up of evaluations.
11. Critically assess the evaluation process to learn from it.

A GUIDE TO EVALUATION ACTIVITIES IN RESEARCH FUNDING AGENCIES

Introduction

According to the *EUROHORCs and ESF Vision for a Globally Competitive ERA and their Road Map for Actions* (ESF 2008), member organisations (MOs) should develop common approaches to ex-post evaluation of funding schemes and research programmes. The main issue is to improve internal operations and external accountability of funding agencies and research organisations.

The previous MO Forum on Ex-Post Evaluation of Funding Schemes and Research Programmes (2007-2009) discussed different aspects of quality assurance related to different kinds of evaluations. To take this work one step further the subsequent Forum on Evaluation of Publicly Funded Research decided to develop some basic guidelines for evaluation activities in MOs, particularly for the evaluation activities in funding agencies. This is applicable to all kinds of research evaluations, whether it be research fields, funding schemes, funding policies, funding agencies or research systems.

For funding agencies to improve their evaluation practice, there seem to be several approaches:

- Integrate evaluation activities with other tools in the knowledge base for governance and decision making;
- Develop strategies and plans of action suitable to the particular organisation in question;
- Organise evaluation activities in an appropriate way;
- Develop good practices on how to carry out individual evaluations.

The development of this guide was supported by a survey among participants of the MO Forum which gave an overview of their evaluation practices (presented in Annex 1).

The evaluation guide consists of three parts: the first part argues for the value of establishing an evaluation strategy, policy or plan for the funding agency, and to apply a systematic approach to evaluation activities; the second part describes the evaluation process; and the third part draws some conclusions from observations in the working group and summarises some basic principles on good evaluation practice - The Golden Rules for Evaluation Processes. They are suitable to feed into an organisation's evaluation 'standard', if that is to be (re-)developed.

1 Systematic use of evaluations in governance and decision making

To funding agencies, evaluation activities represent an important source of information, among others, for the knowledge base that is used to develop research and innovation strategies and policies, to improve funding schemes, and to develop the organisations within the context of learning societies.

Most organisations monitor their activities in one way or another, more or less systematically. And often statistical analysis or evaluations are carried out on an *ad hoc* basis. There is, however, increasing awareness among MOs that organisations will benefit from a more systematic approach to how these activities are integrated in developmental processes. Organisations may draw on several instruments to steer, assess and demonstrate progress towards strategic objectives. In this context we will in particular point to the value of monitoring and evaluation (see Figure 1).

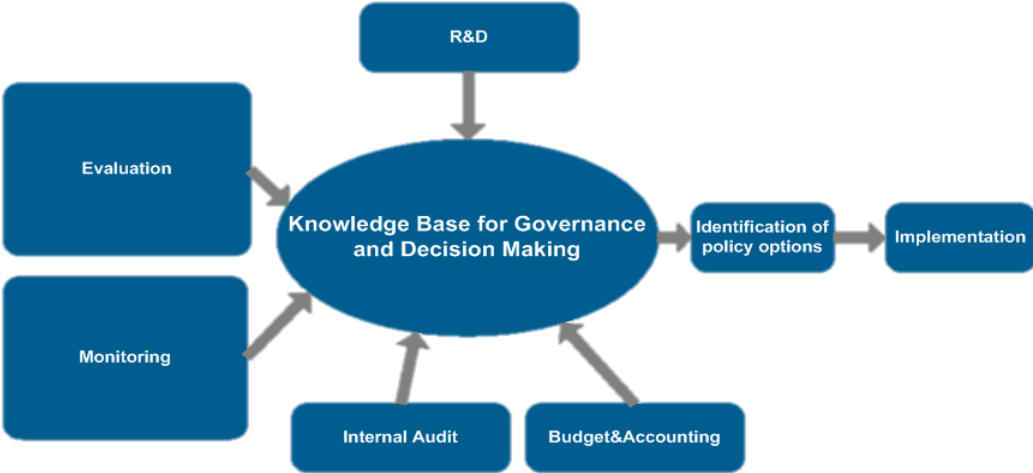


Figure 1: Funding agencies’ knowledge base for governance and decision making (adapted from DFØ, Norway)

Monitoring is the systematic, recurrent collection of data to observe, track and record processes or activities, and it may also serve as a source base for evaluation. Monitoring assumes an independent function in performance management, which goes beyond the scope of this report.

Evaluation is the description, analysis and assessment of projects, programmes, processes or organisational units. Evaluation has a ‘judgmental’ aspect and requires a deeper analysis of underlying mechanisms. Evaluations provide a different type of information and assume more thorough analyses than is normally involved in monitoring. In addition, evaluations may contribute to more long-term perspectives of learning and development that are not easily acquired otherwise.

Bridges between evaluation, monitoring and other activities shown in Figure 1, at an organisational level and between staff involved, will provide additional inputs for evaluations and help to ensure that the latter rely on data of a high quality.

The possible impact of evaluations relies on their quality and timing, but also on how

evaluation activities as such are anchored with the leadership of the organisation. Evaluations should be used strategically and systematically in governance and decision making processes.

In order to get the optimum balance between different tools for governance, when to conduct evaluations, as well as a maximum utilisation of the evaluation results, the funding agencies are recommended to develop documents that describe the goals and intentions for their evaluation activities. These documents could be either evaluation strategies/policies or simply three- to five-year plans for evaluations. A plan for evaluation activities increases predictability for all parties involved, it may improve resource allocation, and it may ensure timeliness for the individual evaluation project.

2 The Evaluation Process

The success of evaluation activities depends on their legitimacy and how the results are accepted among decision makers and also among research communities being evaluated. Therefore, evaluations must meet the highest quality standards.

An evaluation process consists of a number of phases in which different aspects are in focus. In the figure below, four typical phases are introduced: planning, preparation, implementation, and follow-up and dissemination of results (discussion). Each of these phases will be described briefly below, with the emphasis on key elements within each phase.

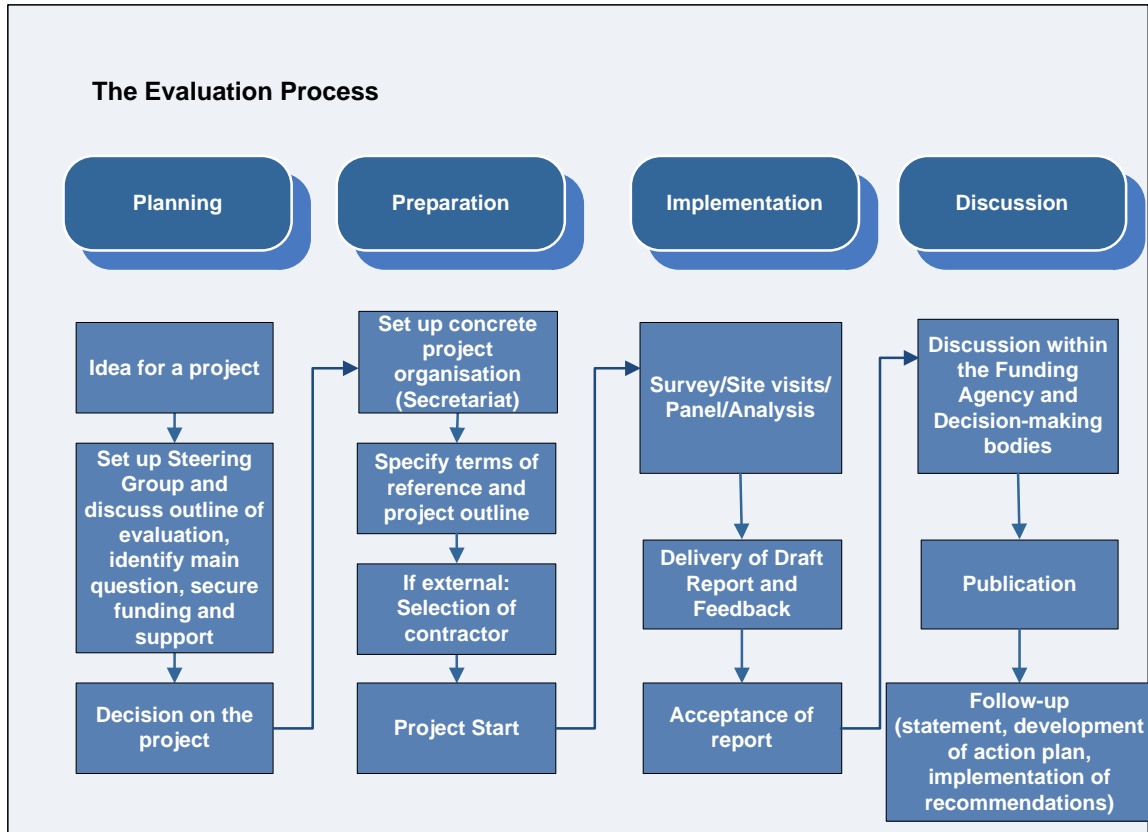


Figure 2: Stages and elements in the evaluation process (adapted from “Research Evaluation Guidelines”, Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation)

2.1 Planning

Planning is an important phase in every evaluation process. In this phase the idea for the evaluation is born and developed. Enquiries are made to identify the main evaluation questions, to reflect on data access and to ensure funding is in place, to develop ideas on how the evaluation project should be organised, and to make sure that the proposed evaluation has the necessary support from the main stakeholders. Often these different aspects are all considered in what is called a *preliminary study*.

The general purpose of the preliminary study is to contribute to qualifying the grounds for a decision on whether or not to initiate an evaluation. The scope of the preliminary study can vary according to which object of evaluation is involved and the time at hand. The study can focus on a number of different elements as mentioned above. The main conclusions are often put in a memorandum, and if it is decided to initiate an evaluation, the memorandum may form the basis for further planning.

- ⇒ Discuss why the evaluation should be carried out and how the results will be useful for the agency (stakeholder).
- ⇒ Focus the goals of the evaluation and plan for the follow-up. Identify challenges and risks and make sure the evaluation will ‘make a difference’.

⇒ *Allocate sufficient time and resources to the planning and design of an evaluation project.*

2.2 Preparation

Essential for the success of the further process is to clearly assign tasks and responsibilities of the relevant stakeholders. An evaluation secretariat is responsible for steering the process. The secretariat must be provided with the necessary resources.

The preparation phase covers a number of different elements, including drawing up terms of reference (ToR), call for tenders, selection of contractors and the actual initiating of the evaluation. The most important element in the preparation phase is the ToR, which will be described in more detail below.

The purpose of the ToR is to define the evaluation framework in order to make clear what is to be evaluated, why it is to be evaluated, how the evaluation is to be carried out, and what the final evaluation is to be used for. Normally a draft will be prepared on the basis of the preliminary study that has been conducted. As a point of departure the ToR will usually contain a short description of the following elements: i) The background for initiating the evaluation; ii) Purpose, target group and utilisation; iii) Scope; iv) Evaluation questions; v) Basis for assessment; vi) Organisation of the evaluation; vii) Methods and data; viii) Timetable and budget; ix) Deliverables; and x) Consultation.

i) The background for initiating the evaluation

The ToR should contain a section that describes why the evaluation was initiated. This section may be based on the grounds stated in the preliminary study. The section should also contain a brief description of the object of evaluation.

ii) Purpose, target group and utilisation

The ToR should contain a description of the purpose of the evaluation, the target group and the anticipated utilisation of the evaluation. If the evaluation object is a funding instrument, for instance, the purpose could be to create both visibility and legitimacy concerning the grants awarded, as well as a possibility to revise the strategy for the utilisation of funding instruments. The target group in this case would be the funding body.

iii) Scope

The ToR should contain a description of whom, what and which time period is included in the evaluation. The scope can take a point of departure in the mapping that has been carried out as part of the preliminary study. The criteria for the specific scope will depend on the object of evaluation.

iv) Evaluation questions

Furthermore, a set of evaluation questions should be formulated in order to obtain focus for the evaluation. The questions constitute the framework, and they should be as concise as

possible. More specific evaluation questions can be derived later (e.g., by a contractor) from the basic evaluation questions.

v) *Basis for assessment*

In order to create openness and transparency, and to avoid assessments being made in a 'black box', the ToR should contain a basis for assessment for the evaluation. The basis for assessment may take the form of a framework of understanding for the evaluation questions. It may also include criteria, indicators or reference material. Thus, the basis for assessment should make it clear to evaluators, to stakeholders and to those who are to be evaluated, what the assessments will relate to.

vi) *Organisation of the evaluation*

The ToR should contain a section describing the organisation of the evaluation. One way to organise the evaluation is to announce a call for tender where the evaluation task is set up as a contract with an institution that undertakes the whole evaluation as a project. Another way would be to appoint a panel of experts which is responsible for the evaluation's academic assessments and recommendations.

Combinations of these models may involve:

- Establishing a secretariat (internal or external), which is to assist a panel of experts with all the practical tasks that the evaluation gives rise to.
- Ask consultants to carry out studies, for example, bibliometric studies or user surveys, that result in reports used as input to a panel of experts.
- Appoint a panel of experts to be responsible for a report being drawn up and for its contents, but hire a secretary to write the report.

vii) *Methods and data*

The ToR may also contain an overview of the data collection methods which are to be used to answer the evaluation questions. It is the specific object of evaluation, the purpose of the evaluation, the evaluation questions, the data available and the underlying theory or logic model of the funding scheme or funding policy that determine the methods for collecting data. Every evaluation will typically contain several data collection methods. The most central and typically utilised methods are used alone or in a combination of several methods:

- Self-evaluation
- Peer review
- Group meetings/interviews/site visits
- Bibliometrics
- Document and data analysis/desk research
- Surveys.

viii) *Timetable and budget*

Timing is a crucial factor in planning and conducting an evaluation. The evaluation should neither be too early (so that projects have not even ended, or a programme has not been running long enough to show results or impacts), nor should it be too late (in which case necessary data/interview partners may no longer be available). Timing also depends on the needs of the decision making processes to be of use.

The timetable for an evaluation project will depend on the object of evaluation and the purpose of the evaluation. The design of the specific evaluation will also play a role. For example, an evaluation involving both self-evaluations and experts' assessments may be expected to take approximately one year from the time the evaluation's ToR have been approved until the evaluation is concluded. Evaluations that are primarily based on existing documentary material may possibly be conducted more quickly.

There is no general procedure on how to allocate a budget for evaluation activities. To perform evaluation studies can be costly, and it depends on the organisation of the evaluation, availability of data, methodologies, integration of stakeholders, etc.

ix) Deliverables

In order to structure the work and help the execution of the evaluation, it is advised to formulate concrete deliverables. The ToR should clearly state what kinds of deliverables are expected. It should also be clear from the outset who is allowed which kind of data after the end of the project. Publication rights connected to the evaluation studies should also be agreed at the beginning of a project.

x) Consultation

A draft of the ToR could be discussed with evaluated parties or stakeholders for consultation to ensure transparency and legitimacy. When the consultation is concluded the final ToR may be drawn up, in light of the comments received.

The choice of evaluator (the contractor or the evaluation panel) is a very important determinant of the evaluation outcome. The selection, therefore, has to be made on the basis of a transparent and clear set of criteria.

⇒ *Clarify terms and conditions when establishing the contract (if applicable) and project description and make sure they are communicated to the contractor/external experts.*

⇒ *Make sure the evaluation is supported and considered legitimate by all relevant stakeholders.*

2.3 Implementation

The implementation phase also covers a number of different elements, including carrying out the different surveys/analyses, writing up the draft report and consulting with the parties involved. It will often be necessary to carry out different studies, surveys, etc. as part of the documentation. To ensure the necessary distance and credibility, these studies will

usually be conducted by qualified national or international research institutions, or firms of consultants, etc. which in some cases also will write up the actual evaluation report. In other cases, an expert panel might write up the evaluation report on the basis of studies, site visits, etc.

The evaluator (e.g., external contractor or evaluation panel) carries out the analysis with a suitable methodology and in the best possible way.

When choosing appropriate methods, an important consideration is to try to reduce the burden on the researchers/objects of evaluation (e.g., by using existing data and not asking for unnecessary information).

i) Evaluation report

The report should be as concise as possible, written in a clear language and, furthermore, be targeted towards the groups defined in the ToR. It is important that the report is drawn up in a manner that makes it possible to see the framework of understanding, as well as the documentation on which assessments, conclusions and recommendations are based. The report should explicitly address the basis for assessment that is indicated in the ToR. When a draft of the report has been drawn up, it (or parts of it) may benefit from consultation with involved parties (commissioning agent/stakeholders/evaluated researchers).

ii) Quality assurance and interaction with external experts

The choice of evaluator or external experts is of utmost importance since the quality and usefulness of the final reports depend on their work. It is important for the use a minimum requirement of quality must be ensured. It is important for the use and legitimacy of the evaluations that the process and results are trustworthy. For this reason, the evaluations should be carried out independently of the bodies that finance the research, the relevant authorities and the research environments that are being evaluated. If the assignment not only comprises an analysis, but also includes an assessment, the reach and consequences of the conclusions and recommendations should additionally be agreed on in advance.

There must be a balance between the interests of the commissioning party (usually the funding agency) and the work of the external experts. The commissioning agent should not overplay its ownership. While it is clear that the expert knowledge of the programme lies with the programme managers, it is essential to provide the external experts with access to data and information on the programmes that are to be evaluated. External experts should be independent and free to present the analysis and conclusions without interference, but on the other hand must guarantee standards of execution.

iii) Feedback

A close interaction between the parties over the process is necessary. It is helpful to have a designated point of contact for the external evaluator. Someone from the funding agency (or a reference group) needs to be able to judge the quality and intervene if something goes wrong. Regular reporting to a steering committee may help to ensure this.

iv) Acceptance of report

It is important that the organisation financing the evaluation makes sure that the report meets the formal requirements and that the terms of reference have been fulfilled.

When the consultation is concluded the final report can be drawn up in the light of the comments received.

⇒ <i>Make sure appropriate and state-of-the-art methods are applied.</i>
⇒ <i>Make sure the evaluators are autonomous.</i>
⇒ <i>Communicate with relevant target groups throughout the evaluation project.</i>

2.4 Discussion: Follow-up and dissemination of results

No evaluation should be commissioned if there is no will to discuss and learn from its results.

i) Discussion within the funding agency and with the decision making bodies

The report must be phrased in a way that makes it possible to draw conclusions and where lessons to be learned are clear. It is important that the assessments and recommendations of the report are followed up. One way to ensure this is to go through the report and draw up an overview of what the individual assessments and recommendations are directed at, and then ask the parties involved to suggest in writing how they expect to act on the individual assessments and recommendations. Whether the recommendations are finally implemented or not, may depend on the political judgment of the 'programme owner' and is in the realm of the decision making bodies.

ii) Publication

It is important that the results of the evaluation are disseminated so that a wider circle can benefit from them. This depends of course on the evaluation questions and possible confidentiality issues which must be taken into consideration. It is useful to prepare an overview of the target groups that could be interested in the evaluation and the appropriate channels for broader dissemination of the evaluation's results. Dissemination of knowledge may take different forms, e.g., publishing the report online or in print, convening conferences, seminars or workshops to further the dialogue between the groups that have been involved in the evaluation, and others who would be interested in the evaluation's results. To ensure the greatest possible impact of the report it is useful to forward the printed report or an abstract to relevant national and international stakeholders.

To allow communication and share the results within the international community reports should preferably be published in English. A first step is to translate at least a short version/abstract in English.

iii) Follow-up

In some cases it would be relevant to assemble those who have been evaluated, and together find good solutions to the different issues identified in the evaluation report.

Finally, it is important to follow up on the methodological and evaluation experiences, and consider to what extent the evaluation that has been carried out gives rise to methodological development and learning.

⇒ <i>Make sure the most is made of the evaluation results (e.g., publishing the evaluation results).</i>
⇒ <i>Allocate sufficient time and resources to the follow-up of evaluations.</i>
⇒ <i>Critically assess the evaluation process to learn from it.</i>

3 Conclusions

Evaluation activities are important tools for funding organisations and they should be done well. Systematic and careful planning is an essential part of quality assurance when evaluations are concerned. Evaluations are resource-demanding activities, both for the evaluation objects, the commissioning body and for the evaluators, so a strong focus on the follow-up is necessary to justify time and money spent on these activities. However, the evaluation process may include important learning experiences for the staff involved and for the organisation as such, and should be considered valuable input to competence building within the organisations.

- ⇒ The MO Forum recommends that MOs develop evaluation strategies/policies to make sure that evaluation activities are well integrated in the development of the organisation.

The Member Organisation Forum on Evaluation of Publicly Funded Research has summarised its discussions and recommendations to the MOs as a set of Golden Rules on Evaluation Processes:

⇒ Discuss why the evaluation should be carried out and how the results will be useful for the agency (stakeholder).
⇒ Focus the goals of the evaluation and plan for the follow-up. Identify challenges and risks and make sure the evaluation will 'make a difference'.
⇒ Allocate sufficient time and resources to the planning and design of an evaluation project.
⇒ Clarify terms and conditions when establishing the contract (if applicable) and project description and make sure they are communicated to the contractor/external experts.
⇒ Make sure the evaluation is supported and considered legitimate by all relevant stakeholders.
⇒ Make sure appropriate and state-of-the-art methods are applied.
⇒ Make sure the evaluators are autonomous.
⇒ Communicate with relevant target groups throughout the evaluation project.
⇒ Make sure the most is made of the evaluation results (e.g., publishing the evaluation results).
⇒ Allocate sufficient time and resources to the follow-up of evaluations.
⇒ Critically assess the evaluation process to learn from it.

Exchanges of ideas and experiences, as well as direct collaborations between MOs, improve the quality and the usefulness of evaluation activities. This means that evaluation studies preferably should be published in English and made available on the internet. *Development* should be a key word for evaluation activities, both in terms of methodology, research questions and evaluation approaches.

Contact and collaboration is important to keep up with methodological trends, and for the identification of new evaluation perspectives. To build on existing knowledge we would advise the MOs to take on the job of developing and updating a knowledge base on evaluation strategies and evaluation studies, e.g., by setting up a web site with links to evaluation web sites in MOs.

⇒ The MO Forum strongly recommends that MOs find ways to keep up the collaborative efforts that have been established over these past years.

Annex I

Survey among MOs on the organisation and practices of evaluations

1 INTRODUCTION

Working Group 1: *Quality Assurance and Evaluation Guidelines* has based its work on the assumption that sound evaluation processes will help improve the quality of ex-post evaluation studies and that the usefulness of and satisfaction with an evaluation study is often determined by the process that generated it. And processes, in turn, are always embedded in an organisational structure and require adherence to internal routines and agreements.

In addition to the exchange of experiences and discussions in the workshops, it seemed helpful to get a more complete picture of how evaluation activities are integrated in the Member Organisations (MOs), both in European research funding organisations and in research performing organisations. A survey among the Forum members on organisation and practices of evaluations was intended to serve as a baseline for our work on guidelines.

While the aim of the survey was to get an overview of the evaluation practices, the results show a great variation of practices and few systematic patterns in the different models chosen. However, the insight gained from the survey emphasises both the need for practices to be heterogeneous and understanding the differences, as well as the need to harmonise practices and improve the quality of evaluations. A better understanding of the organisational set-up of evaluation studies may help to locate the key points that shape and affect the outcome of an evaluation – not in terms of the content, but in terms of quality and usefulness. It is obvious that there are different models for organising evaluations – depending on the institutional set-up of the funding organisation, the specific ‘historical development’ or on conscious decision making.

This report aims to summarise and describe these different approaches.

2 METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPATION

2.1 Drafting the survey

A first draft of the questionnaire was developed during the second workshop meeting of the MO Forum on Evaluation of Publicly Funded Research in November 2010, initiated by questions that were raised during earlier discussions in the Forum.

The draft was circulated among the Working Group members and ‘pre-tested’ by three agencies. Comments on the first draft of the questionnaire were integrated between November 2010 and March 2011. The survey was implemented in March 2011, using the online tool Survey Monkey, that allows an easy set-up and distribution of online questionnaires and chart of the results.

2.2 Distribution and Participation

The ‘field phase’ was between 22 March and 13 April 2011. Forty-one member organisations of the European Science Foundation that were participating in either the Member Organisation Forum on Evaluation of Publicly Funded Research or the Forum on Indicators of Internationalisation were contacted. They represent 20 different countries.

The population that was addressed by the survey is highly biased in different ways: it comprises only organisations that have a certain size and organisational level, allowing them to become members of the European Science Foundation. In 2012 the ESF counts 72 member organisations, including research funding organisations, research performing organisations, academies and learned societies, in 30 countries. Among those members, the call for participation for an issue-oriented Member Organisation Forum like the two on evaluation naturally attracts mostly organisations that have already dealt with evaluation before. The participants of the Forum, and therefore the addressees of the survey, are mostly representatives that are in positions that deal with evaluation on a day-to-day basis.

Of the addressees, 26 organisations from 16 different countries responded. Mainly the funding agencies replied. The answers came from 20 funding agencies, mostly from Western European countries, and 6 research performing organisations.

For the above-mentioned highly selective population, the results give an impression only of organisations that are heavily involved in evaluation, have most likely experience with evaluations and an organisational set-up that responds to that. Therefore, the survey is not at all representative, neither of all research and funding organisations, nor of all ESF MOs and not even of all organisations participating in the Forum. The value of the survey results lies in showing different ways that organisations choose to organise their evaluation procedures. While it largely excludes information from organisations that do not perform evaluations, it gives examples of the ones that are quite experienced.

Evaluations in funding agencies and in research performing agencies share some commonalities. Evaluations are used as a means of quality assessment. However, there are some important differences as well. In research performing organisations, the institutes and their achievements themselves, sometimes also single projects or researchers, are the object of the evaluation. In research funding agencies, it is mainly funding schemes, funding policies and research fields that are evaluated (besides, obviously, the evaluation of grant proposals - grant assessments - which is the main activity of funding organisations, but not the focus of this MO Forum). Researchers/grant holders work in a different organisational structure. These differences have repercussions on how evaluations are conducted and used. For this reason only the survey results from the 20 funding agencies are presented and discussed here.

3 RESULTS

The survey had three main foci: the organisational set-up of evaluations within the funding agency; the logic and course of an evaluation cycle (from idea to follow-up); and the 'policies' of a funding agency regarding evaluation, e.g., an evaluation strategy or rules on the publication of results.

3.1 Types of Evaluation Studies and Organisational Set-up

As a predecessor to this current MO Forum, the MO Forum on ex-post Evaluation of Funding Schemes and Research Programmes mapped evaluation activities of the different member organisations. It identified five types of evaluations that were most frequent: the evaluation of the research funding agency as a whole (overall strategy, performance, place in the national research system); evaluation of funding policies or particular strategic issues (e.g., gender balance); evaluation of research fields or scientific disciplines in the country; the evaluation of funding schemes; and the

evaluation of research grants. Furthermore, other evaluation types such as the evaluation of the performance of external research institutions or evaluation of the state of science in the country were identified.

The survey of the present MO Forum takes up this mapping of evaluation types and asks what kind of evaluations the MOs conduct. It goes further to explore the use of evaluations and the organisational set-up.

We also administer research based evaluations of public reforms, laws, etc. on commission from ministries
The Research Council
Norway

Types of evaluation studies and use of evaluations

We asked the organisations what types of evaluation studies they conducted. In this context the understanding of evaluation studies would be defined as ex-post evaluation of funding schemes, research programmes or research fields, typically resulting in a study employing social sciences methodology (incl. expert/peer review, bibliometrics, data analysis, interviews).

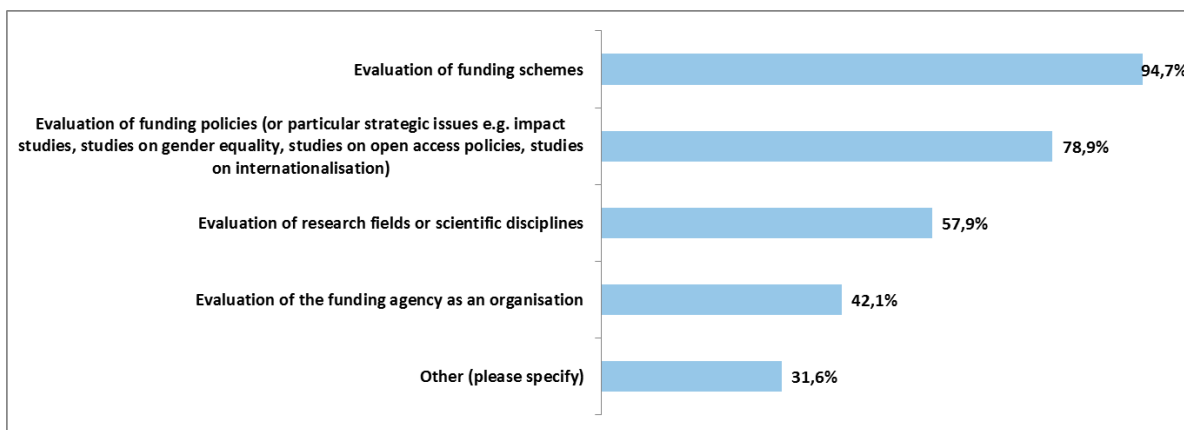


Figure 3: Types of evaluation studies (N=20), several answers possible

It was perhaps obvious that the majority of the evaluation studies conducted by funding agencies would be focused on funding schemes (95%), as this is the major activity for a funding agency. There is also a great number of organisations that put their interest in the outcomes of other types of actions or activities, such as research funding policies. This has been a growing trend recently, especially concerning impact studies and other socioeconomic analysis (gender issues or wider engagement of research in broad society). Working Group 2 of this Forum, on Impact Assessment Studies, goes into greater detail on this type of evaluation. Another typical activity for funding organisations (almost half of the organisations that replied to this question) is the evaluation of research fields or scientific disciplines. The report *Evaluation in National Research Funding*

Our understanding of the evaluation function: the group with responsibility for managing evaluations, reviewing the effectiveness of EPSRC investments and activities.
EPSRC

Evaluations can give us guidance to develop our policies, processes and funding instruments.
Academy of Finland

A central unit that is responsible for the management of evaluative studies - preparation of the project, design of the study, tendering process, collaboration with external agency, discussion process within the organisation. Always in collaboration with a programme manager of the programme to be evaluated.
DFG

Agencies: approaches, experiences and case studies that was published by the ESF in 2009 gives insights into common practices in these evaluations and collects many examples of evaluation studies.

Given this information on the different types of evaluations that the organisations that answered the survey perform, it becomes clear that most evaluation practices evolve around the operation of the funding procedures, either funding schemes or funding policies. The ensuing results have to be interpreted in this light.

What is the purpose of conducting evaluation studies? In Figure 2 we can see the main purpose of an evaluation study for funding agencies.

The most prevalent purpose is the adjustment of funding schemes or research programmes. This is the confirmation of the efficiency feedback loop and how ex-post evaluation has a leading role in this. The focus is on evaluation as a learning experience.

One to two science advisers are deeply involved in the meta evaluations and guidance of the evaluation. However, the evaluations of research programmes and research areas are managed by 8-12 people. They are not experts in evaluation studies.

Academy of Finland

We do not have people in our organisation who are specifically in charge of evaluations. Programme evaluations are conducted by Programme Owners, who also act as Scientific Programme Managers with day-to-day functions in managing the portfolio of investments made by SFI.

SFI

The evaluation function of the policy department is usually combined with other tasks. These can be programme management or policy development, or outside relations, etc.

NWO

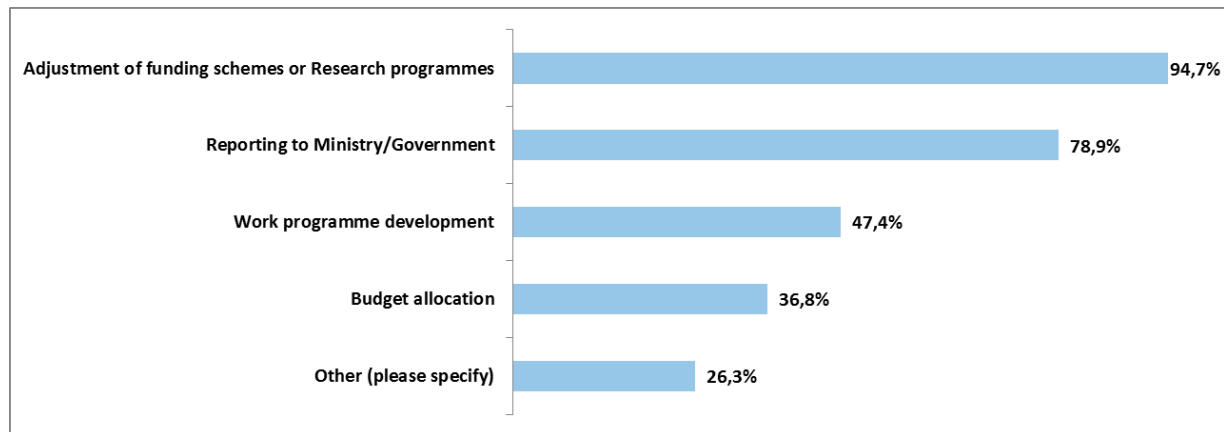


Figure 4: What is your organisation using evaluation studies for? (N=20), several answers possible

It is also important, in the framework of publicly funded research, to note that most of the organisations, obviously, need to report to their external ‘supervisors’ or funders. Evaluation reports are useful tools to accomplish this.

Note that evaluations are only sometimes used for the allocation of resources such as the allocation of budgets (for one-third of the organisations) or Human Resources.

Evaluation function

The main question of the survey was related to the understanding of the ‘evaluation function’ within funding agencies. Sixteen out of the 20 participating funding agencies responded to this question

which was left open ended. The responses can be classified in two main groups: either the evaluation function is understood as part of the organisation structure, i.e., as a unit located in the organisation’s structure that manages evaluation studies and coordinates the evaluation policy and quality assurance; or the evaluation function is understood as a wider concept within the organisation to optimise funding strategies, assess the impact of its activities, steer the learning experience and develop new evaluation policies.

Dedicated unit for the evaluation function

The survey enquired if organisations had a dedicated unit to perform the evaluation function. This was true for more than half of the 20 funding agencies. They employ from 1 to 12 Full-Time Equivalents (FTE) in the unit.

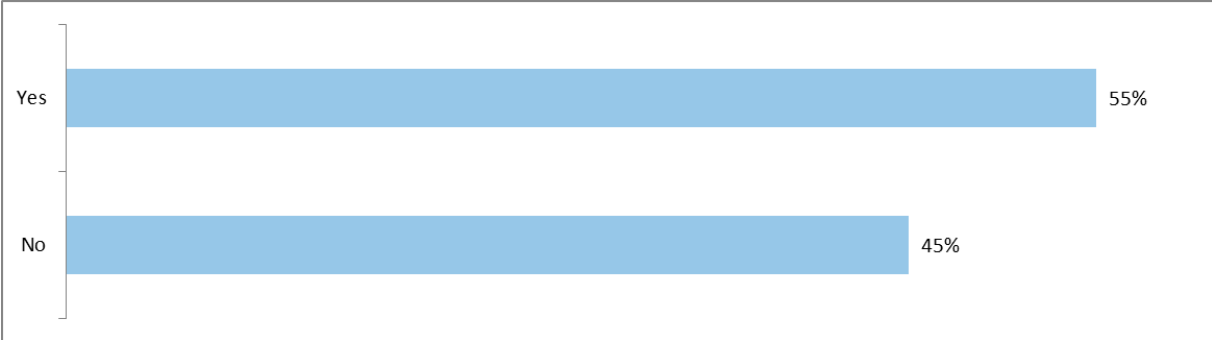


Figure 5: Is there a dedicated Evaluation Unit? (N=20)

Most often (in a third of all cases) the unit is located within the central administration. To a smaller extent (18%) it is within the bodies of a directorate or an executive board (or units that provide them with support) or strategy development (also 18%). Others are located in the unit for research policy analysis or communication. Only in one case (FNRS) is the dedicated evaluation function in the research units (but this might still be a common combination, see below).

Even if no unit is dedicated to the evaluation function, some organisations (45% out of 9) still have one or two people specifically in charge for evaluation studies.

In both cases though, the personnel dedicated to the evaluation function mostly have other tasks as well. There are two common combinations: either the other tasks are in the wider field of policy and strategy development (e.g., SNSF, FWF, Academy of Finland); or they are in programme/project management (e.g., RCN, SFI). The knowledge about programmes is essential for evaluations. In these cases, there is a close link between programme ‘ownership’ and the assessment of the programme. There are also other models for how to incorporate knowledge about the programmes. The DFG, for example, sets up a ‘tandem’ of an evaluation officer and a programme manager.

Other involved actors

The organisational structure is always unique. However, there are typical elements that can be found in many organisations. One of these elements is some body that the people in charge of evaluations report to and that accepts the final report.

The funding agencies participating in the survey were asked to what extent and what types of steering committees were involved in the process of an evaluation study, and whether they were internal or external structures.

To have some kind of 'steering committee' is very frequent. Almost two-thirds of the organisations have an internal steering committee with participants from within the organisation. Almost a third of all organisations have an external steering committee which involves external people (from outside the organisation, e.g., representative of funders, external experts).

There is an external steering committee ad hoc for each project. This is, however, not always the case. If other research funding agencies are involved or interested, representatives from them may be included in a steering committee.

Swedish Research Council

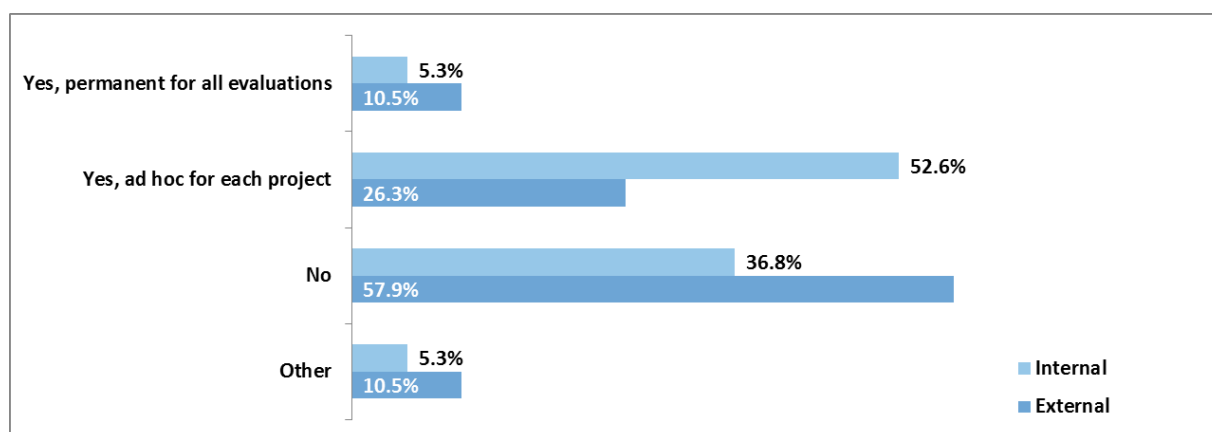


Figure 6: Is there an internal/external steering committee for evaluation studies? (N=20)

In more than half of the cases the steering committee is set up *ad hoc* for each new evaluation project. That can mean, for example, that the programme 'owners', e.g., the head of department of a specific programme, is represented in the specific evaluation steering committee, while for other evaluations it is the person in charge of another programme. In other cases the programmes are funded by different ministries (e.g., research or international affairs) and a representative of the respective funder is in the steering committee.

Numbers of evaluation studies and budgets

The number of evaluation studies performed varies from one to ten projects per year. Only about one-quarter of evaluation units have their own budget. There is no general procedure on how to allocate budget for evaluation activities. The costs of evaluations are most often allocated per evaluation.

The external costs of evaluation projects are usually not that high. It depends on the data set, methodologies, stakeholders' involvement, etc. It is often difficult for organisations to quantify the annual budget dedicated to the evaluation function and only a few of them responded to this question. For those who did, the amount usually does not exceed 300 k€.

We conduct approximately four evaluation studies per year. Besides that we conduct a number of other analyses, e.g., mapping of research areas, etc.

Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation

However, the workload to accompany evaluations internally is high. Mostly, there is no fixed percentage of the programme

cost devoted to evaluation. One agency comments on this in the following way: “I dispute that there is a right percentage for ‘evaluation-type’ activity – it’s all about what is needed and what will be used - [...] – it is important not to “do” evaluation for the sake of it – thus diverting funds from what the core aim of most funders is.”

3.2 The process of an evaluation study

To understand the process that leads to an evaluation study, the funding agencies were asked to provide information regarding who decides to initiate an evaluation study and on what occasions these were conducted.

Initiation of an evaluation study

There are different mechanisms that lead to the idea and a concrete proposal to perform an evaluation of a funding scheme or research programme. Regarding the decision of initiating an evaluation study, it is not clear from the results whether the indicated bodies are those that promote and decide upon an evaluation project or whether they only make a decision upon an appointed proposal within the organisation coming from other sources. This is reflected in the fact that the vast majority of respondents to the survey named more than one of the possible answers. In almost all cases, however, the directorate/executive board is involved.

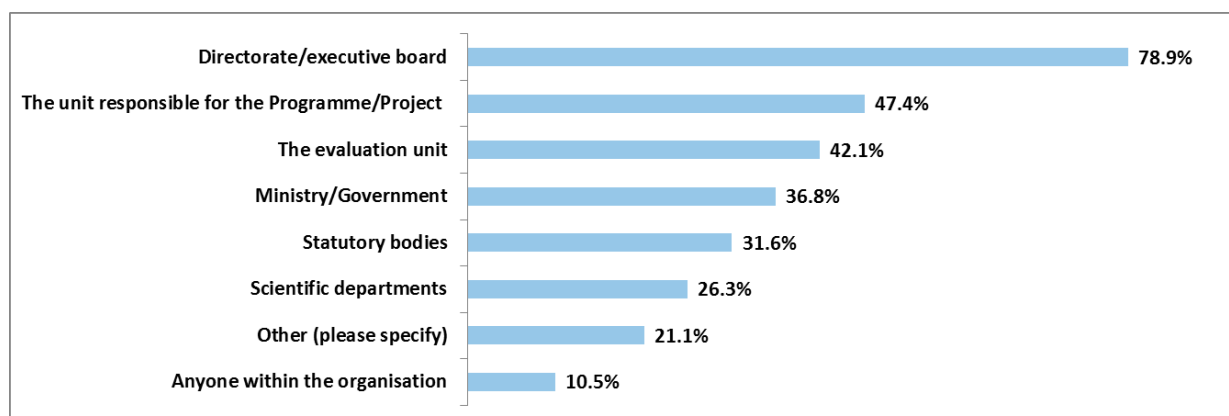


Figure 7: Who decides on initiating an evaluation project? (N=20), several answers possible

There are different constellations possible. The main lines of distinction are whether the decision is taken internally or externally and whether it is taken top-down or bottom-up. All combinations of this are possible:

	External	Internal
Top-Down	Ministry/government	Directorate
Bottom-Up	The evaluation unit	The unit responsible for the programme

Table 1: Who decides on initiating an evaluation project? – Pattern of Answers

All combinations occur, but it seems that it is more likely that the decision to initiate an evaluation study is taken internally, either top-down by the directorate/executive board (almost 80% of the cases) or bottom-up by the unit responsible for the programme (almost 50%). This suggests that evaluations are used as an internal learning process rather than an external controlling instrument.

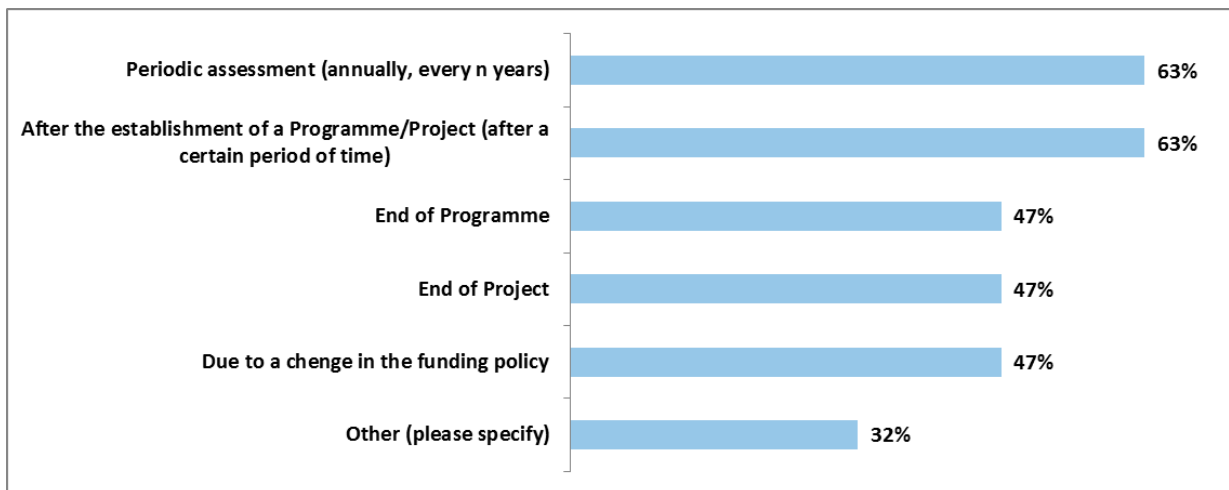


Figure 8: When are evaluation studies conducted? (N=20), several answers possible

For most organisations evaluation studies are conducted periodically. Equally often, an evaluation is initiated a certain period of time after the establishment of a programme or project. These answers point to a routine in evaluations, a built-in-mechanism, to the existence of an evaluation cycle.

The frequency of the response “Due to a change in the funding policy” brings us back to the concept that ex-post evaluation is crucial in the feedback loop to optimise the efficiency of funding strategies.

Performing of the evaluation by external contractors

There are an increasing number of companies that perform evaluation studies and assessments in the research landscape. About two-thirds of the funding agencies have recourse (in all variations: always, sometimes, exclusively or not) to this type of services to assess the results of their activities.

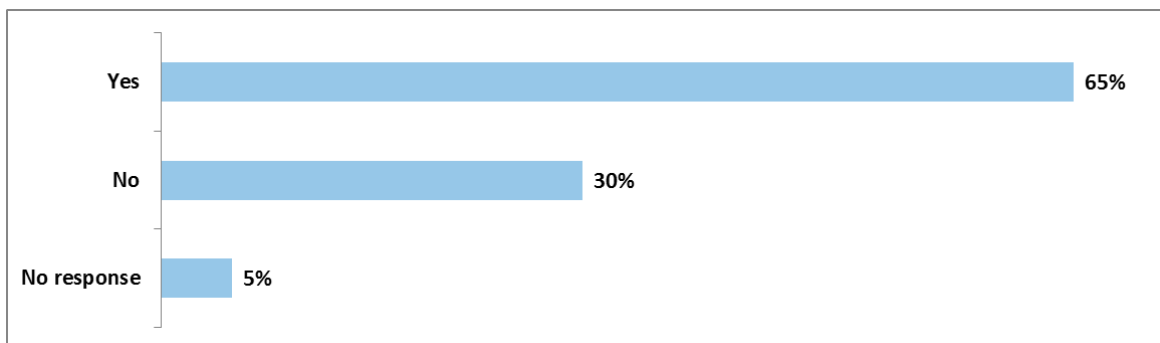


Figure 9: Does your organisation commission evaluation studies to external companies or research institutes? (N=20)

There are several reasons why funding agencies turn to external partners. They might involve:

- the expected expertise in methodology (e.g., bibliometrics, survey analysis)
- the expectation of new ideas and outsider’s views
- recourse to additional resources, and

Every year an action plan for research evaluation is drawn up. The action plan is drawn up with proposals from a wide circle of stakeholders, including the research funding and council system.

Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation

- the legitimacy of an independent and objective assessment.

The comments to this question were mainly that funding agencies have recourse to external companies especially depending on the typology of the study and the stakeholders involved and to guarantee transparency and independence. For example, for NWO in the Netherlands the choice as to whether to commission the evaluation or to carry it out internally depends among other things on whether the evaluation must be fully independent of NWO itself. The Wellcome Trust in the UK raises a similar argument. The Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) mentions the resource argument: larger evaluations call for an external evaluation, while smaller tasks can be accomplished internally. The Health Research Board in Ireland (HRB) points to the expertise in methodology that requires an external partner.

There are arguments in favour of internal evaluations as well. The Wellcome Trust explicitly sees monitoring and evaluations as a “core internal role”: “Commissioning evaluation to external companies as routine can quickly become an expensive distraction”.

Reporting and conclusions

Quite frequently the people administering evaluations have to report about progress and results of the evaluation project to others, e.g., the principal of the evaluation. This is mostly an internal body, e.g., the executive board/directorate or the steering group for evaluations, in some cases a body which is external to the organisation (pertinent ministry).

What do organisations do with the results of an evaluation study? The funding agencies were asked about the follow-up on evaluation studies. In two-thirds of all organisations there is an established process that, through discussion, can lead to a follow-up action.

The report is sent to all the parties involved (the board, programme directors, programme officers) and a meeting is organised where the main conclusions are presented and discussed.

Foundation for Polish Science

reporting to FWF bodies and federal ministries, discussion of consequences, implementation by FWF office.

FWF

The evaluation team (person leading the work) in collaboration with the 'commissioner'. Our monitoring and evaluation is intended to be a partnership, for the organisation and for learning purposes to help inform future strategy and direction. It is not something "done" to others.

Wellcome Trust

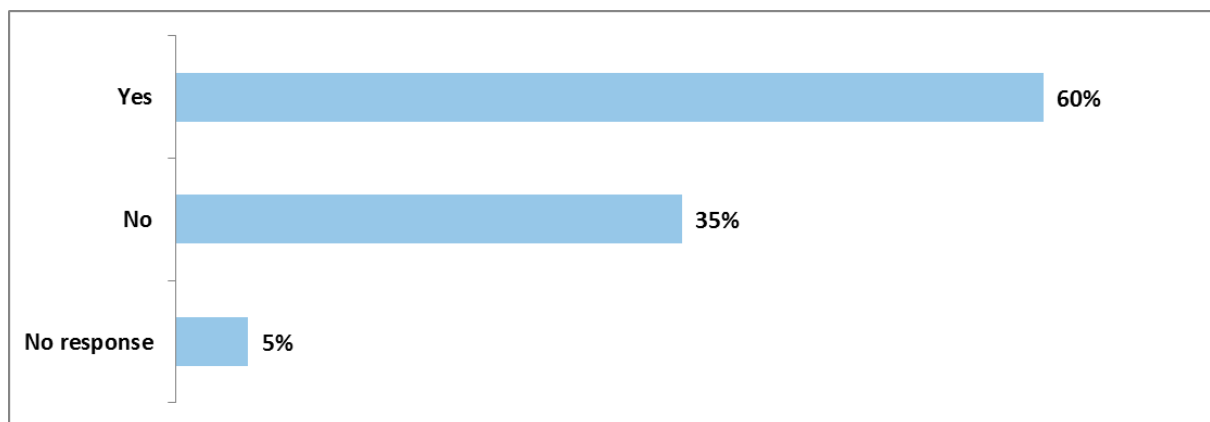


Figure 10: Is there an established process on how to discuss and follow up on the results? (N=20)

Most organisations will present the results of the study through the publication and dissemination of a report that is very frequently the basis of a strategic discussion that involves the higher bodies of the organisation, to eventually decide on the next potential activities. Usually the conclusions of an evaluation study are drawn by the responsible body that has approved the study, plus those who have administered or performed the study (usually the evaluation unit or committees, the project teams/management). As it seems, drawing up the conclusions are mainly the responsibility of internal bodies on an operational level. The final decision is often taken by higher-level, but still internal bodies.

It depends, sometimes evaluation studies are done in house, sometimes fully commissioned to external companies, sometimes a combination of an internal committee and an external bureau. It depends on factors such as: must the evaluation be fully independent of NWO, are there other stakeholders (external to NWO) involved, etc.

NWO

Frequently the discussion processes involve internal discussions on different levels of hierarchy. In some funding agencies, e.g., the Research Council of Norway and the Academy of Finland, the discussion may also involve stakeholders. The decisions on how to follow up and implement recommendations are in some cases published. For example, the DFG publishes a statement on the internet, the Academy of Finland organises press conferences, the European Commission publishes a Commission Communication.

3.3 Evaluation policies

Under the heading ‘evaluation policies’ we will now discuss some approaches, strategic decisions and practices that funding organisations take on evaluations. It also concerns the question of whether evaluation is seen as a ‘professional’ (and maybe expert, aloof) activity or as an activity that can and should be carried out by everyone in the organisation.

Dissemination of evaluation studies

Whether organisations publish their evaluation studies may be either a matter of principle, or it may be decided on a case by case basis.

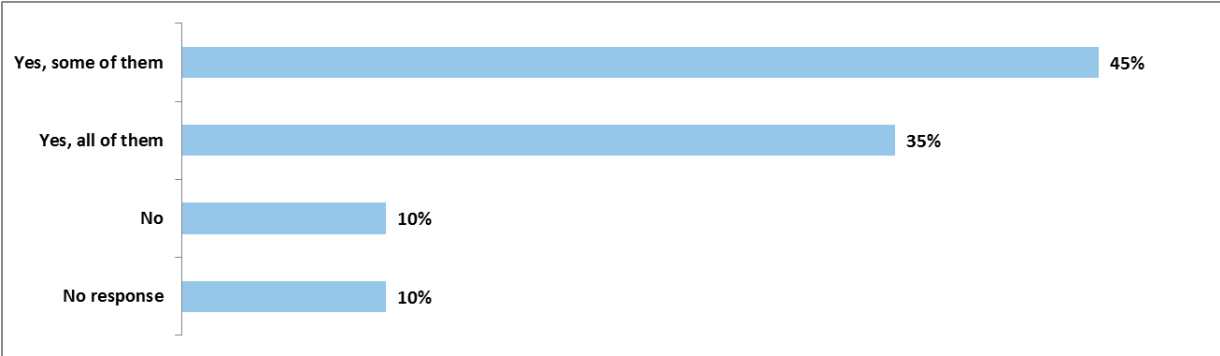


Figure 11: Does your organisation publish evaluation studies? (N=20)

About 90% of the responding funding agencies publish some (53%) or all (37%) of their evaluation studies. Therefore, less than half of the respondents see it as a matter of principle. Publishing an evaluation study is first of all a means of communication with stakeholders. Sometimes, therefore, evaluation studies are only published to funders or internally, not the wider public.

The conditions under which reports are published vary according to the type of evaluation, the stakeholders involved and the sensitivity of the involved data. It is common that only executive summaries are published rather than the full report, especially for English versions of the publications.

The major channel for dissemination of course is publication on the organisation’s website, though it is very common to find hard copies of those reports that are more relevant. The way in which studies are published seems to depend on the type of evaluation.

Another way to disseminate the evaluation activities is to acknowledge them in annual reports. This method of publication is less frequent than the evaluation studies report. Sometimes these documents are produced by the organisation but do not have an English version and are distributed among a small circle of stakeholders (Figure 10).

Evaluation studies are published online as soon as they have been discussed by all relevant bodies.
SNSF

We try to publish either full reports and/or summaries of key projects that have gained the input of a number of our stakeholders. We are careful to make sure we have the correct permissions before any publication and any sensitivities (particularly in relation to individuals) are anonymised and/or removed.
Wellcome Trust

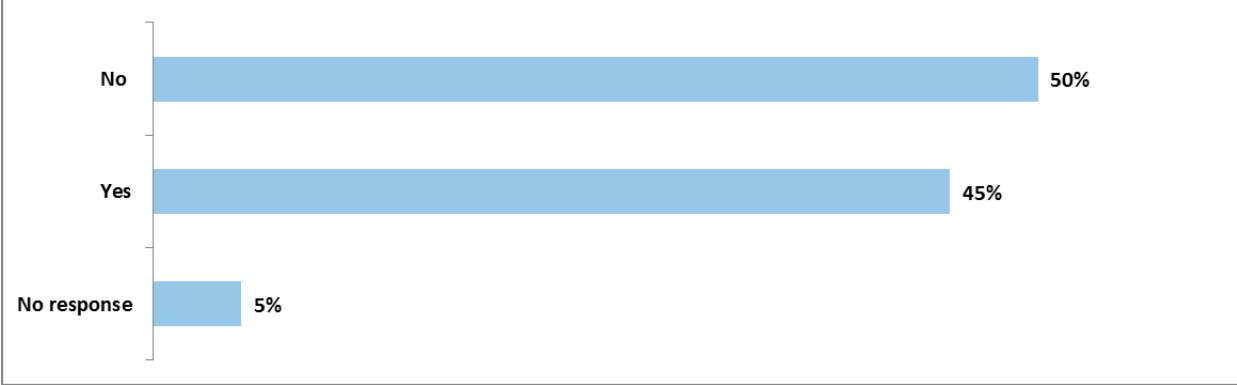


Figure 12: Does your organisation publish the evaluation activities regularly (e.g. in an annual report)? (N=20)

Evaluation policies and evaluation strategies

About two-thirds of all organisations that responded have an ‘evaluation strategy’ or ‘evaluation policy’. ‘Evaluation strategy or policy’ is here defined as a set of rules for the process of evaluation studies or evaluation studies themselves. A programme-wide evaluation strategy defines the overall approach to evaluation that is taken on each evaluation project, for example, it can address each research programme/funding instrument, with a schedule of planned performance monitoring and evaluation activities and the resources set aside for them.

Some of the evaluation policies are only internal and not published. Some organisations have published their evaluation strategy on the internet or in print. It seems that there has been a trend in recent years to develop evaluation strategies, since some organisations have announced that they will publish their strategy in the near future.

Quality guidelines

About 60% of the organisations follow quality guidelines on evaluation. Mostly these are internal/self-imposed quality guidelines. They encompass mostly regulations on standardised procedures and are recorded, sometimes also published. Some organisations also adhere to external

quality guidelines, e.g., the UK market research society principles, or guidelines that are self-imposed but cover more than one organisation, e.g., the FT Eval Standards in Austria or, in the case of the European Commission, the Central Evaluation Quality standards applicable to all policy evaluations across the European Commission.

Networks and qualification

Ex-post evaluation is a timely item to be discussed at national, European and international level. There is a growing interest in understanding different procedures and methodologies, and in sharing views related to issues such as quality assurance, broader impact, data collection, pluridisciplinarity. As has been shown concerning the evaluation function, in every organisation there are few people who are deeply and/or exclusively concerned with evaluation. To learn from others, they have to turn to people outside their organisation.

In almost all organisations a person in the ‘evaluation function’ is a member of evaluation networks that comprise people outside the organisations.

Apart from a number of national evaluation networks (Austria, Ireland, Germany, Norway, Sweden, UK) and evaluation societies (e.g., Austria, Denmark, Germany, Norway, UK) the funding agencies mentioned the European RDT Evaluation Network, EuroCRIS, the G8 Heads of Research Assessment and some academic networks. Of course, the evaluation related ESF Member Organisation Fora were also mentioned.

We follow a set of internal guidelines / a checklist to carry out evaluation studies. The quality of the study itself is mainly in the hands of the committee which carries out or coordinates the evaluation.
NWO

Regarding specific qualifications in evaluation for those involved in the evaluation function of their organisations, about half have a specific qualification. These are a PhD in social or political science focused on evaluation and science policy, specific courses (e.g., offered by the Universities of Twente, Manchester, Leiden), and, of course, work experience, either as on-the-job training or in previous jobs.

4 Summary of findings

The survey was conducted in order to get an overview of evaluation practices in the member organisations. The results gave few indications of consistent patterns concerning organisation and quality in evaluation activities. However, the varied practices gave input to our working group discussions and inspired the direction for the development of a set of evaluation guidelines.

What does the survey tell us about the funding agencies?

I Organisational set-up

- All 20 funding agencies that responded are engaged in evaluation activities.
- About half of these organise the evaluation function in a unit, the other half does not.

- Very few organisations have people employed who have evaluation activities as their only task.
- The decision making processes for initiating evaluations vary.

II Logic and course of evaluation cycle

- The main purpose of evaluation activities in funding organisations is adjustments of funding schemes/research programmes (16 out of 20).
- Quite a number of funding agencies (13 out of 20) use evaluations to report to ministry/government.
- About one-third also mention budget allocation purposes.
- More than half of the funding agencies would set up a steering committee for an evaluation study.
- Only one organisation has a permanent evaluation steering committee.
- About two-thirds would commission evaluation studies from institutes or companies, the other third would probably use peer reviews.

III Policy on evaluation

- Twelve funding agencies have developed an evaluation strategy or policy.
- Only one funding agency does not publish evaluation studies.
- About half of the funding agencies publish ongoing evaluation activities in annual reports (this probably means they think the evaluation activities are important).
- Very few have a specific budget allocation – costs vary – three-quarters do not have their own budget.
- About 60 per cent of the agencies follow standardised or self-imposed quality guidelines.

Annex II

References

American Evaluation Association (2004): Guiding principles for evaluators. Available at:

<http://www.eval.org/Publications/GuidingPrinciples.asp>

Austria's Platform Research and Technology Policy Evaluation (2012): Evaluation standards. Available at: <http://fteval.at/en/platform/>

Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation (2011): Research Evaluation Guidelines Available at: <http://en.fi.dk/research/research-evaluation/guidelines-for-research-evaluation>

EU Commission (2007): Evaluation standards. Available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/secretariat_general/evaluation/documents_en.htm

European Science Foundation (2009): Evaluation in National Research Funding Agencies: approaches, experiences and case studies: A report of the ESF Member Organisation Forum on Ex-Post Evaluation of Funding Schemes and Research Programmes. Available at: <http://www.esf.org/activities/mo-fora/completed-mo-fora/evaluation-of-funding-schemes-and-research-programmes.html>

Annex III

List of Members of the Working Group 1

Chair:	Gro Maehle Helgesen	Research Council of Norway
Members:	Juan de Damborenea	Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas (CSIC)
	Claus Beck-Tange	Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation
	Pierre Gilliot	IPCMS/CNRS, France
	Veronika Paleckova	Czech Science Foundation
	Anke Reinhardt	Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)
	Poul Schjørring	Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, Denmark
	Gyula Péter Szigeti	Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA)
	Anko Wiegel	Nederlandse Organisatie voor wetenschappelijk onderzoek (NWO), Netherlands
	Farzan Ranjbaran	ESF, observer

Links to evaluation strategies, policies, etc. (Funding Agencies)

	Does your organisation have an “Evaluation strategy” or “Evaluation policy”**?	Does your organisation adhere to quality guidelines?	Does your organisation publish the evaluation activities regularly (e.g., in an annual report)?
European Commission DG Research and Innovation	http://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/index_en.cfm?pg=system		http://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/index_en.cfm?pg=archive
Swedish Research Council	http://www.vr.se/download/18.44482f6612355bb5ee780003073/1252058177543/Evaluation%2BStrategy.pdf		See chapter 2.4 in the Annual report (link) from the Council (in swedish) www.vr.se/download/18.e01f6fe12e29bb8aa180003827/Vetenskapsr%C3%A5det+s+%C3%A5rsredovisning+2010.pdf
Economic and Social Research Council	Please see http://www.esrc.ac.uk/images/ESRC-Evaluation-Strategy_tcm8-4852.pdf		Not publicly available
NWO			Yes, some of them. This often happens, but depends on the type of evaluation (e.g., institutional evaluations are often published on the website).
DFG	http://www.dfg.de/en/dfg_profile/evaluation_statistic		http://www.dfg.de/en/dfg_profile/evaluation_statistics/pr

	s/programme_evaluation/evaluation_standards/index.html		ogramme_evaluation/studies/index.html
EPSRC			
Health Research Board of Ireland			On the website
The Research Council of Norway			As part of the RCN's annual report to the ministries (in Norwegian only. Also published on RCN web site: http://www.forskningsradet.no/en/Evaluations/1233557971664
Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation	http://en.fi.dk/research/research-evaluation/guidelines-for-research-evaluation		
Foundation for Polish Science	http://www.fnp.org.pl/about_us/evaluation	FNP's CODE OF ETHICS - competition winners and beneficiaries (PDF)	http://www.fnp.org.pl/about_us/our_publications/annual_reports
FWF Austrian Science Fund	http://www.fwf.ac.at/en/downloads/pdf/evaluation-fwf.pdf	see FWF portrait http://www.fwf.ac.at/en/portrait/portrait.html	http://www.fwf.ac.at/de/public_relations/publikationen/publikationen.html
Academy of Finland			The publications are available in the series 'Publications of the Academy of Finland' at www.aka.fi .
Danish National Research Foundation	e.g. http://www.dg.dk/en/to-reviewers/	http://www.dg.dk/en/to-reviewers	http://www.dg.dk/en/about-us/publications/

Table 2: Evaluation strategies, evaluation guidelines and publication of evaluation activities

Acknowledgements

This report has been compiled by Gro E.M. Helgesen (Research Council of Norway) and Anke Reinhardt (DFG). ESF is grateful to them - Chair of the Working Group and Chair of the Forum - and to the significant input from working group members who contributed to lively and informative discussion in the ESF Member Organisation Forum over the last four years as well as for its management to Laura Marin (ESF). In particular, the drafting of this document relied upon the contributions of J.K. Wiegel (NL), José González (ES), Anette Jessen (DK), Claus Beck-Tange, Poul Schjørring (DK), Veronika Paleckova (CZ) and Gyula Szigeti (HU) and on the special contribution of Sarah Chen (CNR, IT) for the survey analysis.