

Basic Principles for the Conception and Organisation of Evaluation Procedures

(Decision of the Foundation Board, 12th February 2015)

The notion of “evaluation”

Evaluation is the systematic assessment of defined objects, purposes, and objectives using established, transparent criteria and carried out by independent and unbiased experts.

The assessment is based on the systematic application of various instruments for data collection or the retrieval of sufficient information related to each evaluated subject matter (self-assessment, analysis of statistics, interviews, etc.).

The assessment may be oriented towards an analysis of strengths and weaknesses (quality), towards hypotheses for the (non-)achievement of objectives, and towards impact.

Usually, at the end of the evaluation process, an evaluation report is created, giving recommendations for the further development of the evaluation object.

The evaluation may have both a formative and a summative character.

All relevant stakeholders are involved.

Aligned with international standards

evalag aligns the conception and organisation of evaluation projects with the standards defined by the Gesellschaft für Evaluation e.v. – DeGEval¹ (German Society for Evaluation). Furthermore, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) are mandatory for all evaluation projects in the areas of teaching and learning.²

In order to be able to ensure compliance with the mentioned standards and thus the formal comparability of different evaluations, **evalag** adheres to the principles set forth herein when conceiving and organising evaluations projects.

Service orientation

For **evalag**, it is very important to support the clients of an evaluation, the experts involved, and the unit under evaluation by providing an optimum organisation and comprehensive support and advice (e.g. by supplying working material that is prepared as thoroughly as possible). With respect to this, the use of resources and the result should be in due proportion to each other for all parties involved.

¹ DeGEval – Gesellschaft für Evaluation e.V. (ed.): Standards für Evaluation, 4. unveränderte Auflage, Mainz 2008 (ISBN 3-00-009022-3). The central standards are usefulness, feasibility, fairness, accuracy.

² Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). (2015). Brussels, Belgium (ISBN: 978-9-08-168672-3).

Careful clarification of tasks and targets

The design of each evaluation project depends on the combination of the object, the goal(s) and purpose(s) of the evaluation as well as the choice of methods and instruments best suited to achieve them. Therefore, **evalag** attaches great importance to a careful clarification of tasks and targets with the client. In order to ensure a high quality standard for the clarification of tasks and targets and to provide transparency right from the beginning of the project, **evalag** relies on a basic catalogue of central questions which are mandatory for all evaluation projects.

Regarding evaluation projects in the areas of teaching and learning, ESG Part 1 and 2 are (additionally) applied. This is also contractually agreed.

Adequate methodology

An **informed peer review** is still the preferred evaluation method for the higher education area. This means that the assessment is done by unbiased experts with appropriate professional and methodological skills for the subject matter of evaluation. Modifications of the informed peer review are possible if the objective of the evaluation suggests methodological extensions or the use of other instruments or even modified, possibly reduced procedural steps (but always without violating international standards).

Regarding evaluation projects in the areas of teaching and learning, ESG Part 1 and 2 constitute the main criteria of evaluation.

Methodological aspects and current developments of the evaluation scheme are the subject of internal advanced training at **evalag** on a regular basis. **evalag** project managers attend pertinent national and international professional conferences and take part in specialised committees.

Careful selection of experts, no conflict of interest for the expert panel

Careful research aimed at recruiting competent experts and obtaining an optimum composition of the expert panels are of particular importance for **evalag**.

Central criteria used in the search for experts include professional and methodological skills related to the respective evaluation object and goals, being recognised by the corresponding scientific community, and / or membership in a relevant group of stakeholders (e.g. students), or diversity aspects as well as some experience as an expert, if possible. Moreover, potential experts must formally declare that they are not biased, i.e. there is no conflict of interest, according to defined criteria.

Regarding evaluation projects in the areas of teaching and learning, at least one member of the expert panel is a student.

Thorough information and preparation of the experts

evalag carefully briefs experts both on project-specific aspects and the principles underlying the activities of **evalag** as well as on the international standards relevant to evaluations.

The factual information made available to the experts for each evaluation differs, depending on the object of the evaluation and the methodological approach (informed peer review with / without modifications). However, **evalag** always seeks to gather basic information which, on the one hand, is concise, compact, and easily understand-

able, and, on the other hand, has a high quality and is meaningful so that it enables differentiated, in-depth analyses and assessments. **evalag** staff members will always be pleased to help experts in a competent way if they have queries and / or need further information.

Ensuring factual accuracy

In order to inform the expert panel during the ongoing evaluation and within the scope of the final evaluation report which is intended to keep the interested public up-to-date, **evalag** creates a report on the state of the proceedings based on the factual information disclosed by the unit under evaluation and referencing supplementary or alternative facts, if available. The report on the state of the proceedings is supposed to provide a non-judgemental presentation which is exclusively based on facts, is coherent and independent with respect to its content so that it can be understood without further annexes. As an invariable requirement, the unit under evaluation or the client must check the report on the state of the proceedings for factual accuracy, report any required corrections, and approve the final version of this report.

Consistency and transparency of the evaluation reports

evalag completes all evaluation procedures by creating an evaluation report. To ensure consistency and the formal comparability of evaluation reports with heterogeneous content, general standards must be met. These particularly refer to the introductory, general part of the evaluation reports, where the project basics (including evaluation object, mandate and objective, methodology and assessment criteria, procedural steps and workflow) must be set forth. Moreover, an evaluation report must contain a summary of the most important assessments and recommendations (executive summary) and – formally clearly separated – the report on the state of the proceedings as well as detailed analyses and the conclusions or recommendations referring to these analyses.

Public informing

evalag attaches great importance to the publication of the complete evaluation report on the **evalag** website, provided that no interests worth being protected conflict with the publication. What is more, **evalag** assumes that the client itself will make the report accessible in a suitable way to all relevant stakeholders close to the unit under evaluation – if possible, immediately after completion of the project.

If a publication of the complete report is not possible, **evalag** reserves the right to provide brief information with defined content on the **evalag** website. It contains details on the evaluation object, the goals, and the purposes of the evaluation, on the client, on the schedule, and on the methodology and assessment criteria.

Evaluation reports, concerning the areas of teaching and learning and consequently involving the application of ESG Part 1 and 2, are generally published to the full extent.

Structured follow-up

In view of a sustainable effect of the analyses and conclusions or the recommendations obtained during the evaluation, **evalag** is always committed to initiate and / or support follow-up measures. In order to ensure a structured course of action in this process, **evalag** provides central questions to serve as an orientation when conceiving a follow-up.

Internal quality assurance

In order to assure and develop the quality of the evaluations carried out, surveys are performed with the most important stakeholders after project completion to determine how satisfied they were with the workflow and the results of the evaluation. In addition, they are encouraged to express criticism and make suggestions. This data is evaluated later. This process embraces the client, the unit under evaluation and the expert panel.

evalag submits the evaluation reports to the Foundation Council for a statement. The Foundation Council reviews the reports with respect to methodological and formal aspects and gives recommendations or imposes internal conditions in order to develop or optimise them, if appropriate.

System-wide analysis

evalag compiles annually general, non-project-specific results/outcomes with relevance to a higher context as well as statistical data (number of experts, gender, share of international experts etc.) of the evaluation projects carried out, and publishes the results.