

## EVALUATION STANDARDS

### **Context and purpose**

Evaluation involves a judgement of interventions according to their results, impacts and needs they aim to satisfy. It is a systematic tool which provides a rigorous evidence base to inform decision-making and contributing to making Commission activities more effective, coherent, useful, relevant and efficient. Evaluation also enhances transparency, learning and accountability. To achieve this, the Commission's evaluation standards aim to ensure relevant and timely evaluations of high quality and that evaluation results are communicated to decision-makers and other relevant stakeholders in a clear and transparent manner to facilitate the use of evaluation results.

In light of the above objectives, the standards are grouped into five categories:

- Resources and organisation of evaluation activities (A1-A3),
- Planning evaluation activities (B1-B5),
- Designing evaluations (C1-C3),
- Conducting evaluations (D1-D5), and
- Dissemination and utilisation of evaluation results (E1-E5).

The standards are expressed as a set of guiding principles. For each guiding principle, a number of baseline requirements (forming an integral part of the standards) have been defined which should contribute to achieving compliance with the overriding principle. Meeting the baseline requirements will hence be important, but not necessarily sufficient, to ensure full compliance with the guiding principles.<sup>1</sup>

The standards are an integral part of the Commission's Internal Control Standard n°23 on evaluation, which means that they are binding and that the way they are implemented may be audited on this basis.

### **Scope**

The standards apply to Commission evaluations of policy instruments such as expenditure programmes, legislation and other non-spending activities.<sup>2</sup> The standards are binding upon all DGs and Services of the Commission with activities that affect entities outside the European institutions (e.g. organisations, companies and citizens).

The standards also apply where a DG performs evaluation of internal policies or service provision. However, additional organisational structures are not necessarily needed in these cases. The key issue is to clarify *who* is responsible for *what* and it is the responsibility of the Director General to consider the most appropriate way of organising evaluation activities in accordance with their needs.

The standards apply to the different temporal types of evaluations. However, whilst the *guiding principles* for designing and conducting evaluations and dissemination and utilisation of evaluation results apply to all types of evaluation, the corresponding *baseline requirements* refer only to retrospective or combinations of retrospective evaluations (interim, final and ex-

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<sup>1</sup> The implementation of the baseline requirements will normally need to be complemented by additional measures, such as developing and implementing good practices or the various actions set out in the present Communication.

<sup>2</sup> Separate evaluations of individual projects financed under programmes are not subject to these standards. However, project evaluations required by specific provisions, for example pilot projects, are covered by the standards.

post). By contrast, purely prospective evaluations (ex-ante and impact assessments) must be carried out in accordance with DG Budget's guide for ex-ante evaluation<sup>3</sup> or the Commission's Impact Assessment Guidelines to ensure adequate quality.

Moreover, the standards apply irrespective of the nature of the author of the evaluation, i.e. to both internal and external evaluations (and combinations thereof).

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<sup>3</sup> The existing ex-ante guidelines will be updated and developed to be more complementary to the impact assessment guidelines (action 12.1).

## A) RESOURCES AND ORGANISATION OF EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

**Evaluation activities must be appropriately organised and resourced to meet their purposes.**

1. Each Directorate General must have an evaluation function with a clearly defined responsibility for co-ordinating and monitoring evaluation activities of the Directorate General (from the planning of evaluations until their dissemination and use), promoting quality of evaluation and organisational learning, and assisting the central services in the implementation of the Commission Evaluation Policy.
2. Each Directorate General must ensure that human and financial resources are clearly identified and proportionately allocated for evaluation activities to be carried out.<sup>4</sup>
3. Each Director General must clearly define the tasks, responsibilities, organisation and procedures for all actors involved in planning, designing and conducting evaluations, and disseminating and using evaluation results.

## B) PLANNING EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

**Evaluation activities must be planned in a transparent and consistent way so that relevant evaluation results are available in due time for operational and strategic decision-making and reporting needs.**

1. An annual evaluation plan and an indicative multi-annual evaluation programme are to be prepared by the evaluation function in consultation with the other units in the Directorate General and integrated in the Annual Management Plan.
2. The multi-annual evaluation programme must be drawn up on the basis of the life cycle of the interventions, the operational and strategic decision-making needs of the Directorate General, general requirements for evaluation, and any specific requirement for evaluation as set out in the legal base of the intervention.
3. All activities addressed to external parties must be periodically evaluated in proportion with the allocated resources and the expected impact.
4. The timing of evaluations must enable the results to be fed into decisions on the design, renewal, modification or suspension of activities.
5. All relevant services (in particular the evaluation function, SPP/policy planning co-ordinators, IA co-ordinators and key operational units) must contribute to or be consulted on the annual evaluation plan and the indicative multi-annual evaluation programme.

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<sup>4</sup> Especially in the SPP cycle within the APS and AMP exercises.

## C) DESIGNING EVALUATIONS

**Evaluation design must provide clear and specific objectives, and appropriate methods and means for managing the evaluation process and its results.**

1. Save in duly justified cases, a steering group must be set up for each evaluation to advise on the terms of reference, support the evaluation work and take part in assessing the quality of the evaluation at the appropriate regularity; its composition must be adjusted to the specific needs and circumstances of each evaluation and the evaluation function must be advised thereon.
2. Terms of reference must be established for each external evaluation and a corresponding document/mandate must be established for each internal evaluation, which must at least specify the following points: purpose and objectives, key questions, scope, expected outputs, deadlines, and quality criteria.<sup>5</sup>
3. Issues of relevance to all services concerned must be considered for the terms of reference.

## D) CONDUCTING EVALUATIONS

**Evaluation activities must be conducted to provide reliable, robust and complete results.**

1. The evaluation must be conducted in such a way that the results are supported by evidence and rigorous analysis.
2. All actors involved in evaluation activities must comply with principles and rules regarding conflict of interest.
3. Evaluators must be free to present their results without compromise or interference, although they should take account of the steering group's comments on evaluation quality and accuracy.
4. The final evaluation reports must as a minimum set out the purpose, context, objectives, questions, information sources, methods used, evidence and conclusions.
5. The quality of the evaluation must be assessed on the basis of the pre-established criteria throughout the evaluation process and the quality criteria must as a minimum relate to relevant scope, appropriate methods, reliable data, sound analysis, credible results, valuable conclusions and clarity of the deliverables.

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<sup>5</sup> The evaluation questions should reflect the following evaluation issues whenever relevant: effectiveness, efficiency/cost-effectiveness, relevance, coherence, sustainability, utility and/or community added value, and where relevant the contribution to broader strategic objectives. Additional evaluation issues may also have to be added to the terms of reference.

## E) DISSEMINATION AND UTILISATION OF EVALUATION RESULTS

**Evaluation results must be communicated in such a way that it ensures the maximum use of the results and that they meet the needs of decision-makers and stakeholders.**

1. The evaluation results must be examined by the services concerned, who must outline the actions they propose to take towards the formulation, planning and/or revision of the relevant interventions, in accordance with procedures set out by the Director General (cf. standard A1).
2. Evaluation results must be communicated effectively to all relevant decision-makers and other interested stakeholders/parties.
3. The evaluation results must be made publicly available<sup>6</sup> and targeted summary information should be prepared to facilitate communication to the general public.
4. The evaluation function must promote the use of evaluation in decision-making and organisational learning by ensuring that policy implications and lessons learnt from (and across) evaluations are synthesised and disseminated.
5. The use of the evaluation results must be regularly monitored by the evaluation function.

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<sup>6</sup> Unless a case for confidentiality can be made under one of the exceptions provided for in article 4 of Regulation 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and the Council, 30 May 2001