Evaluation brief: *Value For Money Review of Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)* (Ireland)

Key words: ex-post evaluation, value for money, combination of methods

1. Introductory information

- Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) is an Irish funding agency for research in strategic areas related to Ireland's future industrial and enterprise development.
- The evaluation is presented in an English-language report published under the title of: *Value For Money Review of Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)*.
- This is an ex-post strategic evaluation of the range of research funding programmes operated by SFI, with a focus on two specific programmes, namely: (1) the Principal Investigator Programmes and the (2) Centres for Science, Engineering and Technology (CSET).
- The evaluation was carried out by Indecon International Economic Consultants (IE) for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (now the 'Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation'), Office of Science, Technology and Innovation (OSTI).
- The Review was conducted in 14 months and published in 2008. The total budget (exclusive of VAT) was €153,230.

2. Summary

The Review examines the two most significant funding programmes operated by the Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) over the period 2001 to 2006 – the Centres for Science, Engineering and Technology (CSETs) and the Principal Investigator (PI) programmes. SFI was established in 2000, to develop Ireland as a centre of research excellence in strategic areas relevant to economic development, specifically the areas of Biotechnology and Information Communication Technology. The area of Sustainable Energy and Energy Efficient Technologies was subsequently added. While none of the SFI measures/programmes were ERDF co-funded during the period covered by the evaluation, they were included in Operational Programme of the Irish Border, Midland & Western region in 2007.

The study was conducted as part of the Irish Government's Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative. It examines the overall effectiveness of the agency support in building a world-class research system in Ireland, with a focus on whether the programmes, as operated, constituted value for money and efficient use of public funds, finding evidence of the existence of outputs and outcomes arising from the implementation of the SFI activities, as well as assessing the magnitude of these outputs and outcomes. Furthermore, it assesses the relevance of the schemes, their coherence with regard to national and EU policies and their efficiency, and reviews beneficiaries' satisfaction with programme administration and operation.

An range of tools was applied to completing the evaluation, which engaged with a wide stakeholder group involved in the two SFI programmes reviewed. It includes the use of the following tools designed to assess the impacts of the programme: documentary analysis, descriptive statistics based on monitoring data, the use of bibliometric analysis, three questionnaire surveys addressed to beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, individual interviews with programme managers and beneficiaries, case studies and the use of international experts.

Overall, the review delivered a positive assessment of future SFI prospects in delivering value for money, assuming that the emerging progress is maintained and that the recommendations issued in the study's final report are addressed.

This evaluation represents a best practice model, giving a clear insight into the challenges and issues related to the evaluation of such programmes, focusing on the assessment of the outcomes and impacts of research and innovation policies. It displays a range of good practices, including the application during the evaluation process of a wide range of methods and key sources (e.g. documents, data, stakeholders) and the definition of indicators based on SFI supported activities and their potential impacts. These indicators were defined during the evaluation process and are applied throughout the study's final report. A notable outcome from the review has been the adoption by SFI of a centrally-managed annual census to gather data on a range of input, output and impact indicators.

3. Further information

- The full case study may be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/projects/practices/index_en.cfm
- Link to the evaluation study:

  www.djei.ie/publications/science/2008/value_for_money_review_sfi.pdf
- Link to the managing authority that commissioned the evaluation: http://www.djei.ie/science/technology/contact.htm