What are the main aims, stages and actors involved in the Quality Assessment process?

Assessing the quality of an evaluation can help to:

- encourage the evaluator(s) to conform to the terms of reference and to professional standards;
- ensure transparency about the quality of the evaluation to all potential users;
- enable organisational learning about the evaluation process.

Accordingly, the assessment must be part of the evaluation process right from the start, i.e., not just added on once to the final report becomes available.

Firstly, the terms of reference must from the onset make (external) evaluators aware of the quality assessment criteria (standard C4) that will be applied and about the possibility that the assessment will be made public. The criteria should hence be attached or hyperlinked to the terms of reference.

Throughout the evaluation process, the official(s) managing the evaluation and the steering group should alert the evaluator (standard C7) about potential quality problems.

A preliminary quality assessment should be prepared based on the draft final report and the results of this exercise must be communicated and explained to the evaluator(s) so they are offered the possibility of improving the work (clarity of drafting; conclusions/recommendations that aren’t sufficiently underpinned by data and analysis etc).

The actual quality assessment needs to be prepared once the final report becomes available. It may be prepared by the evaluation function or, where appropriate, by other officials involved in the management of the evaluation, but it should be validated by the entire steering group (standard C7). To ensure credible and transparent quality assessments, the responsibility for managing the activity being evaluated, for managing the evaluation and for preparing the quality assessment should not all be accumulated.

How to fill in the Quality Assessment form?

The first box of the Quality Assessment Form should be filled-in with information that identifies the object being evaluated, the evaluator and the participants in the assessment exercise.

For each criterion, a first section provides space for the score and the arguments for it. The second section is optional and is meant to provide contextual information (e.g. lack of data or of access to data base) about the evaluation process and contractual constraints (e.g. resources). The aim of this section is to make the scoring independent from these constraints. Besides, it can be used to collect information for organisational learning about the evaluation process. The quality assessment exercise concerns how the conclusions and recommendations were obtained and presented, but must not compromise the evaluators ability to present their results.

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1 This guide is not intended for assessing the quality of prospective evaluations
2 This does not concern the context in which the object being evaluated is implemented, only the context in which the evaluation is carried out.
The overall assessment at the end of the form summarises key elements of the overall quality as detailed in the eight preceding criteria. It will be helpful to potential readers of the quality assessment if the overall assessment highlights the consequences of this for different types of use (contract management; accountability and internal (partial) use of the findings. This rubric also contains space for synthesising the information on contextual and contractual constraints, so general lessons can be drawn for improving future evaluations. As a caveat, it should be noted that the purpose of the assessment form is to assess the quality of the evaluation report not the evaluation process.

How to do the scoring?

The Guide on Scoring the Criteria provides a set of indicators for each criterion. The aim is to facilitate a correct and consistent scoring, and to help the assessor(s) to develop a comprehensive and coherent argumentation to underpin the score given for each criterion.

The indicators are, roughly speaking, presented in order of importance (i.e., those at the start of the list are crucial even for a moderate score), and they may not all be relevant to specific evaluation.

The application of the indicators to a particular quality assessment should be adapted to the specificities of the evaluation. The weight attached to, or attention paid to each indicator should be proportionate to their relevance for the evaluation being assessed, and additional indicators may be necessary to capture the specificity of the evaluation.

Publishing the Quality Assessment report?

The directorate general managing the evaluation decides on whether the quality assessment should be published. Publication, along with the evaluation report, can reinforce some of the purposes of the Quality Assessment exercise. In general, publication offers the advantages of:

- ensuring transparency about the reliability of the evaluation results to external users and stakeholders
  (a generalised policy of publishing all assessments, regardless of the quality of the evaluations, may also safeguard against external stakeholders who expect routine implementation of recommendation).
- encouraging the evaluator to conform to the terms of reference and to professional standards.

However, such publication also reinforces the need to maintain a consistent application of the quality criteria between different evaluations and over time.

Publication may involve the full Quality Assessment report; parts of it (in particular criteria 5: ‘credible findings’, 6: ‘valid conclusions’, and probably 7: ‘helpful recommendations’) or publication of a global statement on the quality.

The evaluation function should in any case make the quality assessment available to all relevant internal stakeholders.