



**EUROPEAN
EVALUATION
SOCIETY**

DRAFT

Towards a Voluntary Evaluator Peer Review (VEPR) System

Results of a joint UKES-EES Workshop held in London on April 8th 2014

The professionalization challenge

For more than a decade evaluation societies have explored specific ways to enhance professionalism in evaluation. They have developed ethical standards, good practice guidelines and capability frameworks that specify the knowledge base, practical skills and professional dispositions required as a basis for quality evaluation.

More recently, and as a logical next step, the focus of debate has shifted towards the pros and cons of alternative approaches to 'designation' (or 'credentialing') in order to further promote professional accountability, evaluation excellence and the systematic acquisition of knowledge and skills by evaluation practitioners. Distinctive approaches have been implemented in Canada and Japan. Their experience confirms the need to adapt credentialing approaches to unique national and regional contexts.

The VEPR project

Helped by an EvalPartners' grant, UKES and EES worked together to set up a workshop geared to the design of a coherent approach responsive to the expectations of their respective memberships with respect to evaluation professionalization. The workshop was held in London on April 8th 2014 - a day ahead of the UKES Conference. It was jointly sponsored by UKES and EES. Shaped by members' concerns it explored the rationale and identified the specifications of a Voluntary Evaluator Peer Review (VEPR) system geared to the enhancement of evaluation quality and professional development - at the national level by UKES and at the European level by EES.

Prior to the workshop, following the joint preparation of a concept note, UKES and EES had surveyed their members to ascertain their support for the proposed VEPR initiative and to explore the objectives, modalities and specifications of pilots that would allow identification and effective management of potential risks associated with the proposed scheme at national and regional levels.

The surveys were conducted in both societies using similar questions to analyse issues and examine potential connections. They confirmed support for the initiative and raised important questions that required review. The expert workshop was structured based on this valuable feedback. The emerging schemes are expected to consist of voluntary professional development and registration processes conducted by peer review panels set up by each Society.

The workshop

The workshop was very successful. It brought together evaluation leaders and experienced practitioners selected by UKES and EES. The workshop delved into the four major dimensions of a VEPR scheme - governance, the peer review system itself, administration and outreach. It was agreed that the schemes to be piloted should consist of peer review mechanisms operating under the aegis of UKES and EES. Peer reviewers would be accredited by each of the two societies. The criteria would be aligned with the capabilities frameworks developed in parallel by each of the two societies.

Sufficient funding would have to be secured to ensure effective management and oversight. Fulsome support from all segments of the evaluation community, including commissioners, was viewed as critical. However it was up to the Societies to guarantee the legitimacy, integrity and independence of the process. They would endorse budgets, criteria and processes; ensure oversight and retain VEPR Directors with evaluation expertise to manage the pilots.

The process would be entirely voluntary. It would be guided by ethical principles and be fully independent and devoid of conflict of interest. While the system would be kept as simple as possible it would require rigorous quality assurance, IT backup, strong management and eventually distinct criteria for different levels of expertise (e.g. novice and advance practitioner).

Next steps

Last but not least the workshop concluded that a broad based and well considered piloting phase would be needed to firm up the design. The lessons learnt would be taken into account before up-scaled implementation. Both societies would keep their members fully engaged. A critical mass of volunteers would have to be mobilized.

Based on the above principles, the workshop recommended that UKES and EES should proceed with a pilot in each society. The recommendation was subsequently endorsed by the UKES and EES boards. The design and implementation of each of the two pilots would be informed by workshop results. A joint steering committee across the two societies would be set up to oversee pilot design and implementation.