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EVALUATION SOCIETY

UKES Evaluation Capabilities Framework

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Introduction

This document outlines the UKES *Evaluation Capabilities Framework* for the conduct of quality evaluation. It is a further step (following on from the UKES *Guidelines for Good Practice in Evaluation*) in promoting a culture of professionalism to enhance good practice in evaluation.

The first part of the document locates this UKES initiative within a broader context of debate about competencies for evaluation and the rationale and purposes they can serve. The second part outlines the UKES *Evaluation Capabilities Framework* itself, its scope and context of use[1]. An Appendix outlines the precise steps that were taken.

Background

In the last decade competency frameworks for evaluation have been advanced by several professional evaluation societies. Foremost in this movement has been the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES)[2] which has developed a set of competencies related to professional designation, though stopping short of accreditation. The German Evaluation Society, DeGEval[3] has generated a framework of competencies to guide the design of evaluation training programs. The European Evaluation Society (EES) has posted a framework of competencies on its website, using the terminology capabilities, together with the results of a survey conducted in 2011[4] that validated its structure and content. The International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) produced a set of competencies in January 2012[5]. Various other organisations with responsibilities for evaluation have also developed sets of competencies (See, for example, DFID[6] and UNEG[7]).

Purposes vary e.g. for professional designation (see CES above), training (DeGEval) selection, professional development (DFID) and there has been a great deal of debate about the virtue of such sets of competencies. However it is clear that a zeitgeist of competency generation has taken hold in the professional evaluation community. In line with this development, the UKES have been discussing the pros and cons of establishing a framework of evaluation competencies since 2009.

Rationale

The rationale for the emergence of sets of evaluation competencies at this point in time seems to have arisen in two specific interconnected contexts, one professional, and the other political.

The first extends the pursuance of evaluation quality beyond the promotion of ethical guidelines / principles / standards / codes[8], which have been the guiding frameworks for quality evaluation developed by evaluation societies during the past two decades. Such guidelines (see the EES website for an extensive list) have helped to build an evaluation culture and enhance the professionalism of evaluation. However they do not specify what particular competencies evaluators should have to appropriately conduct useful, credible evaluations. A more specific competency framework, it has been argued, appropriately and sensitively used, would further the professionalism of evaluation.

The second is a reaction to the increasing dominance of one of the major purposes of evaluation - accountability. As the evaluation field has evolved over the past forty years, practitioners, commissioners and clients alike have become more knowledgeable about its uses, including its potential role in policy making and more discerning and/or demanding about the quality of evaluation and the competency of those who conduct it. In the absence of formal qualifications for evaluators and registration to practice, competency frameworks appear to offer a useful, further check on the quality of evaluation and on those who conduct it.

UKES Evaluation Capabilities Framework

The UKES *Evaluation Capabilities Framework* follows the recent trend noted above during the last five years in prominent evaluation societies and other organisations towards establishing competency frameworks for evaluation. Not everyone agrees on the purposes of such frameworks and different societies have emphasized different functions, as noted in the background section. But all have taken place within a debate on professionalisation of evaluation as a social practice[9]. Though developed within and influenced by the wider discussion of competencies in professionalisation of evaluation, the terminology of capabilities is used in this document to parallel the EES adoption of the term and to signal a broader interpretation and possible use.

Purpose

The Framework has as its major purpose the professionalisation of evaluation as a social practice. It builds on and extends the work of the UKES *Guidelines for Good Practice in Evaluation* which the UKES Council endorsed in 2002[10] and published in 2003. These guidelines were the outcome of debate around standards and ethics and took the form of guidelines of good practice in the field (rather than standards or codes, for example) to highlight their aspiration to be of practical use. The Guidelines speak to the quality of the commissioning and conduct of evaluation and the reciprocal roles and responsibilities of the different partners in the evaluation enterprise. However they do not address specific competencies evaluators or evaluations need to have. The current framework takes this next step in outlining broadly the competencies /capabilities required to ensure quality evaluation.

Contexts of use

The framework of core capabilities outlined here continues the intent of the UKES *Guidelines for Good Practice* which is educational, not prescriptive. Its aim is to raise awareness of the skills and capabilities required to conduct a quality evaluation. It also takes into account the fact that the responsibility for ensuring quality evaluation does not rest solely with an individual evaluator. Teams are often involved in the conduct of evaluation in which evaluators have different strengths and different levels of experience. Social and political circumstances often impact on evaluation practice in ways unforeseen and independent of the precise skills of individual evaluators. It is useful to keep these broader factors in mind when thinking about how to make use of a framework of capabilities. Some potential uses are noted below.

Individual evaluators, for example (whether recently appointed or not) can reflect upon whether they require further professional development to enhance their professional skills and competence. Commissioners of evaluation can reflect upon the competencies they require in an evaluation and consider how these can be met (by one person, a team or a partnership between institutions which have different strengths). Organisations and evaluation societies can consider building a training programme around the competencies/capabilities to provide a basis for 'new' evaluators or advanced training for mid-career professional evaluators. The capabilities framework can also act as a quality assurance process for participants, managers and stakeholders as well as convince audiences of evaluation that the outcome will be a credible, quality evaluation.

Scope of the Framework

In parallel with other evaluation competency frameworks the generic competencies listed in the UKES *Evaluation Capabilities Framework* fall into three main categories (i) evaluation knowledge; (ii) professional practice; and (iii) qualities and attitudes or dispositions. In some frameworks, the SRA Competency framework[11], for example, which has seven key competences, each is specified slightly differently for different levels of experience.

Evaluation knowledge refers both to the knowledge base of philosophy and method evaluation brings from the social sciences, disciplines and professions and the specific knowledge generated within the field of evaluation. This includes knowledge of evaluation theories, methodologies and their political implications, of evaluation designs, purposes and approaches and of the social and political role evaluation plays in society.

Professional practice refers to competencies in the field; the competencies evaluators need to ensure not only that they can conduct a credible, valid evaluation but that they have the interpersonal and political skills to manage the process. These include the ability to change course in a highly politicised evaluation context where the conditions to effectively implement a well-designed evaluation do not exist; to negotiate mutually conflicting interests and demands for different kinds of data; and to report conflicting evidence in sensitive ways. While knowledge of how to conduct evaluation is essential, quality evaluation depends equally on how evaluators act in the field.

Qualities and dispositions refers to the personal characteristics that enable evaluators to function in difficult circumstances e.g. not to be thrown off task, to maintain an impartial, independent stance, to manage complexity and to tolerate ambiguity and dissonance. It may not be possible to identify all such personal attributes (and they may differ from person to person and in different contexts). However it is often just such attributes that ensure, however technically skilled and knowledgeable an evaluator is, that evaluation fulfils its public function in a democracy to provide useful, relevant and timely evidence to inform decision making.

1.   **EVALUATION KNOWLEDGE**
1.1   Understands the social and political role of evaluation
1.11   Awareness of the history of evaluation and its emergence as a distinct field of inquiry
1.12   Appreciates the linkages and differences between evaluation and social research
1.13   Indicates familiarity with the use of program theory in evaluation
1.14   Understands the political implications of different evaluation theories and their use

1.2   **Familiarity with evaluation designs and approaches**
1.21   Is familiar with a range of evaluation theories and approaches
1.22   Knows how to engage effectively with evaluation stakeholders
1.23   Identifies relevant evaluation questions
1.24   Knows how to design an evaluation appropriate to the evaluation task
1.24   Takes account of the policy context in designing evaluations

1.3   **Comprehends and makes effective use of evaluation methodologies**
1.31   Appreciates advantages and potential constraints of qualitative and quantitative methods
1.32   Appreciates different uses of monitoring systems and indicators and their role in evaluation
1.33   Understands participatory approaches and the contexts in which most appropriate
1.34   Realises which methods are appropriate for formative/ summative purposes
1.35   Comprehends that criteria for validity and reliability differ according to method

2.   **PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE**
2.1   Demonstrates ability to manage and deliver evaluations
2.11   Ascertains the social /political context and program logic
2.12   Conforms to relevant ethical standards and guidelines
2.13   Identifies data gathering instruments appropriate to the task
2.14   Gathers relevant evidence, analyses and interprets in context
2.15   Conducts robust data analysis, whether qualitative or quantitative
2.16   Reports fairly and justly to agreed audiences in the public interest
2.17   Disseminates evaluation findings and promotes their use

2.2   **Demonstrates interpersonal skills**
2.21   Writes fluently and communicates clearly
2.22   Shows ethical sensitivity in specific socio/political contexts
2.23   Uses sound negotiating skills
2.24   Demonstrates cultural and gender awareness
2.25   Displays impartiality in conducting and reporting evaluation
2.26   Manages conflicts of interests and values fairly

3.   **QUALITIES AND DISPOSITIONS**
3.1   Demonstrates ability to adapt to changing circumstances in a principled manner
3.2   Exercises sound, rigorous and fair judgment
3.3   Contributes to the professional evaluation community
3.4   Displays independence of mind and integrity especially when evaluation challenged
3.5   Upholds democratic values in conducting and reporting evaluations
3.6   Displays self-knowledge and pursues professional development

The above Framework is the outcome of much debate within the society over three years (see Appendix for details of the process and how the framework evolved). It has been revised four times and was ratified by UKES Council, June 2012. It is important to state that, as with the Guidelines developed previously, the Framework is to be regarded as a working document. UKES will be very pleased to receive comments on its use and suggestions for future development.

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Convenor of Competency Development Working Group
On behalf of UKES June 2012

References

1. *The UKES* Evaluation Capabilities Framework *was developed by Helen Simons, convener of the UKES Competency Development Working Group, and UKES members in consultation with Robert Picciotto, EES board member, and convener of the EES 'quality of evaluation activity stream' and the EES Capabilities Survey*
2. *See http://bit.ly/WtiC6h*
3. *See www.degeval,de. DeGEval,* Recommendations on Education and Training in Evaluation, Requirement Profiles for Evaluators, *Mainz, Germany, 2008*
4. *See http://www.europeanevaluation.org/files/EES_Capabilities_Survey_Evaluation.pdf*
5. *http://bit.ly/VMq6m7*
6. *DFID Core Competency Framework, http://bit.ly/4hbiJi*
    DFID Core Competencies for Advisers, http://bit.ly/UFVKIX
7. *United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) (2009)* Core Competencies for Evaluators of the UN System, *UNEG. http://bit.ly/ZqV7wH*
8. *See Simons, H (2006) in Shaw. I., Greene, J.C., & Mark, M (eds.) The Sage Handbook of Evaluation, London Sage, pp243-265 for an overview of the evolution of this move towards professional ethics, their foci and purposes*
9. *For a professionalisation rationale, see Picciotto, R. (2011), The logic of evaluation professionalism, Evaluation, 17(2) 165-80, Sage Publications*
10. *The UKES* Guidelines for Good Practice in Evaluation *may be found at http://www.evaluation.org.uk/resources/guidelines.aspx*
11. *www.the-sra.org.uk Social Research Skills and Competency Framework*
12. *For a summary and collation of results of the questionnaire survey, special thanks are given to Kari Hadjivassiliou, a member of UKES Council*

Note on the evolution of the UKES Evaluation Capabilities Framework

Gaining consensus among members for a UKES Framework of Evaluation Capabilities has taken three years, much as it did a decade earlier when producing a set of UKES ethical guidelines. The discussion which preceded its acceptance has taken both members' concerns and the international debate on competencies and professionalism of evaluation into account. It seems important here to outline the steps taken to gain consensus for the development of the Framework.

- Work started on a Framework for Competencies in early 2009 with discussions in Council meetings on the virtue of such a development.
- A questionnaire was sent to all UKES members, May 2009, outlining rationales for and seeking support or otherwise for a competency framework and set of specific competencies. The results indicated broad agreement to continue work on this initiative, though with differences of view on the precise competencies to include. The suggested framework was redrafted on the basis of members' responses.
- The questionnaire results[12] and revised framework was presented at the UKES Conference November 2009, where the competency idea and draft framework received so much debate and dissent that a proposal was put to the AGM that year to seek support (or not) for continuance with this initiative. Support was confirmed.
- However, the following year 2010 at a March Council meeting, further objection to the initiative was raised on the grounds that general lists of competencies were open to misuse and control. A different route to ensuring quality was proposed located more in practice. This was not elaborated however and the Council supported the furtherance of the initiative already underway.
- The Framework was then refined by a group who, in the initial questionnaire, had agreed to help develop it.
- This revised set of competencies was further elaborated in a workshop on Competencies organized by the UKES London Network, June 2010.
- Further presentations of the results of the original questionnaire and the revised draft framework were given at the EES (European Evaluation Society) Conference 2010 and NESE (Network of Evaluation Societies in Europe) October, 2010.
- The revised draft framework was once again thrown open to UKES members for their consideration at the UKES Conference, November 2010 and further helpful revisions made.
- The Framework proposed in the foregoing document is the outcome of all the above discussions. It has been revised four times. It was ratified by UKES Council, June 2012.

For printed copies of the UKES Evaluation Capabilities Framework, please contact
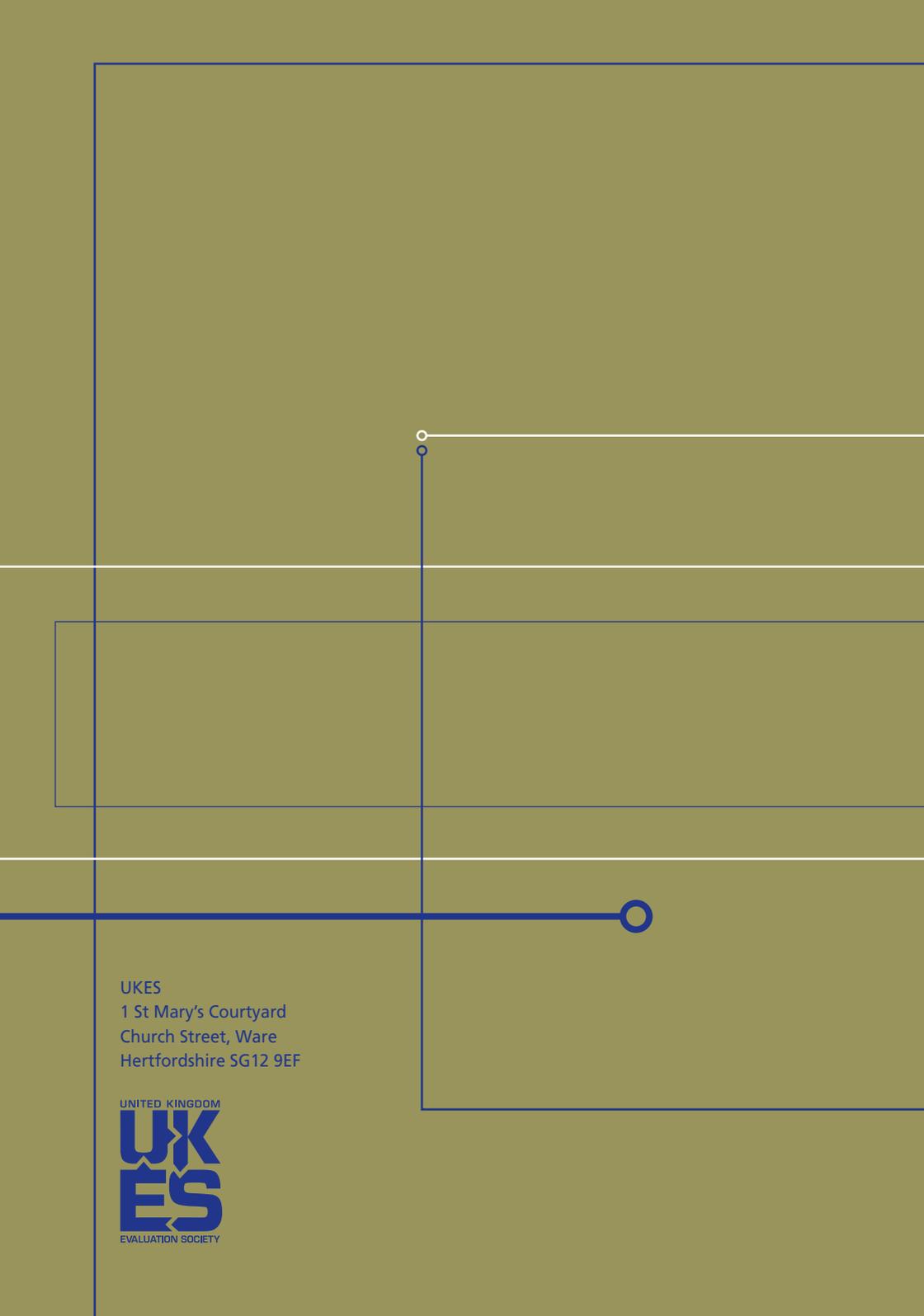
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