

Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs): approaches to evaluation

June 2007 update: Paragraphs 24-28 have been updated and Annex A is new.

This note provides information and guidance to CETLs and their host institutions on the evaluation of CETLs. It covers HEFCE's expectations of what might be covered and shared in each CETL's self-managed evaluation, information on the coverage of HEFCE's commissioned evaluation of the CETL programme as a whole and how we envisage that the CETLs' self-evaluations will contribute to this wider evaluation process.

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Contact at HEFCE:

For further information contact Alan Palmer, a.palmer@hefce.ac.uk, tel 0117 931 7340.

Evaluation of Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs)

For whom is this guidance written?

1. This guidance note on evaluating CETLs is written primarily for the lead and partner institutions involved in the 74 CETLs that HEFCE is funding for five years from 2005 to 2010. The key objective of the CETL initiative is to recognise, reward and advance excellence in learning and teaching in higher education through substantial investment in excellent teaching, encouraging innovative approaches to learning and supporting related pedagogic research. The evaluation activity described in this note will address this objective in various ways.
2. We hope this guidance will be useful to all those involved or interested in evaluative work on the contribution and outcomes of CETLs, and, in particular, for:
 - CETL directors, managers and other team members
 - Pro Vice-Chancellors and other senior managers in institutions that host CETLs
 - internal and external evaluators
 - educational developers and researchers

We are also making this guidance available online at the CETL page of HEFCE's website (<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/tinits/cetl/>) as we recognise that it may be of wider interest to stakeholders and institutions.

How will CETLs be evaluated?

3. CETLs will be evaluated in two ways: by each CETL designing and managing its own evaluation and, in parallel, by an external evaluation of the whole CETL programme commissioned by HEFCE in autumn 2006. The programme-wide evaluation and the CETL self-evaluations will have a formative emphasis in phase one, and a summative emphasis in phase two. The evaluation timetable, covering both the phase one and phase two reports, is set out in paragraphs 20-22 below. The programme-wide evaluation will draw upon the findings and material from each CETL's interim evaluations while viewing the aims and objectives of the CETL programme as a whole in the context of HEFCE's wider learning and teaching and strategic objectives. This guidance note covers the CETL self-evaluations and the scope of the programme-wide evaluation, including the overlapping areas that are of mutual interest to both. We will provide more detailed information about the commissioned CETL programme evaluation later in autumn 2006.

How are CETLs approaching their own evaluations?

4. At the second stage of the bidding process, each CETL was required to outline its proposed approach to self-evaluation. HEFCE did not prescribe a methodology or focus for the self-evaluations as we expect each CETL to choose an approach that is appropriate to its individual needs.

5. Some CETLs have appointed evaluators from within the CETL team and/or from elsewhere in the lead institution; some have appointed evaluators from within the collaborative CETL, while others have appointed evaluators external to the institution or collaborative partnership (and some are seeking evaluation perspectives from outside the UK). We note that some CETLs are designing their own evaluation within a framework set by their own institution's requirements while others are developing evaluation strategies jointly with other CETLs that share similar subject or pedagogic interests.

What is the difference between monitoring and evaluating CETLs?

6. Monitoring should not be confused with evaluation. For monitoring purposes, we have asked institutions with CETLs to keep us informed of progress on the CETL business plan and financial matters through the Annual Monitoring Statement to HEFCE. This allows us to pick up on any issues arise in this context, such as a significant underspend or failing to meet business plan targets, directly with institutions and CETL teams. We also described an exceptional reporting route in our CETL grant letter, March 2005, to deal with any other serious problems affecting a CETL, its staffing and any other significant matters that might prejudice achievement of its objectives.

7. We understand that CETLs are also likely to be monitored through their institutions' monitoring systems and expect the information and data collected through these internal reporting mechanisms will contribute to each CETL's own evaluation.

Is the Higher Education Academy involved in evaluation of CETLs?

8. CETLs are being supported in their evaluation work by the Higher Education Academy. The Academy is providing general support to all CETLs on evaluation through national workshops and seminars and through Subject Centre level support to individual CETLs and CETL clusters that share common subject or pedagogic interests.

9. We hope that the programme-wide evaluation will also draw on the Higher Education Academy's reflections on its own work with the CETLs, including furthering excellence through pedagogic research and scholarship and facilitating the wider dissemination and take-up of good practice across the sector.

10. Further information about the Higher Education Academy's work with CETLs can be found at the Higher Education Academy's web-site, <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/CETL.htm>

How will HEFCE evaluate the CETL programme as a whole?

11. The CETL programme represents a major investment by HEFCE to support excellence and innovation in learning and teaching. We will evaluate the influence and impact of the CETL programme against the aims and objectives set for the programme itself and in the broader context of HEFCE's learning and teaching and the Council's overall strategic priorities. We will tender for this evaluation in the autumn 2006 and will

use its findings to inform further development of the CETL initiative and to support HEFCE's broader objectives in enhancing quality and developing excellence from 2008 onwards.

12. One of our key objectives in designing the programme-wide evaluation is to ensure that it takes account of the complexity of the learning and teaching process and of how excellence is viewed and disseminated. The CETLs do not stand alone. They are potential catalysts for change and innovation within institutions and throughout higher education; they bring both opportunities and risks in their recognition and reward for excellence. We believe it is important that evaluation of the CETL programme should examine intended *and* unintended consequences, and seek to uncover processes that will support better understanding of the relationship between excellent teaching and student learning, and the interplay between pedagogic research and scholarship and learning and teaching 'on the ground'.

13. We also need to ensure that the design and execution of the programme-wide evaluation reflect sound principles and good practice in policy evaluation more generally. We are especially keen to ensure that the evaluative process is a shared learning process, that it brings together information and data to capture the diversity of excellence in learning and teaching, and that we recognise that reflective evaluation may sometimes involve uncomfortable and unexpected experiences. We are committed to approaching this in a positive and open-minded way.

14. Evaluation of the CETL programme is informed by principles espoused in an evaluation framework developed for learning and teaching at HEFCE. Its key principles are:

- that the purpose of evaluation should be clear to all parties
- that evaluation should be independent and undertaken independently of HEFCE
- that evaluation methodologies are appropriate to the data and activities involving CETLs and responsive to stakeholders' information needs
- that the scope, design and implementation of evaluation should enable the realities of practice on the ground to be conveyed to stakeholders and the wider HE community and inform policy development.

15. Further information about the Learning and Teaching Evaluation Framework can be found at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/evaluation/>

How does the programme-wide evaluation connect with individual CETL evaluations?

16. Though the CETL self-evaluations and HEFCE's programme-wide evaluation are separate and different in scope, they also intersect. Both the interim self-evaluations and the interim programme evaluation will have a formative emphasis. They share a common purpose, to learn from the experience of the first two years of CETLs' operations and gather information and data on on-going processes and projects to inform further development. Some interim evaluation outcomes may lead individual CETLs to reconsider their focus or priorities.

17. Interim, formative evaluations will raise wider questions about the impact of CETLs more generally on learning and teaching. These might include, for example, whether reward and recognition of excellent teachers are always positive and of wider benefit; whether CETLs have a wider influence on institutions' learning and teaching strategies; whether a selective approach to excellence seems to be having the impact – at individual, institutional and sectoral levels – as we hoped. While these questions are also relevant to the second, summative phase of the evaluations covering the period April 2007 to March 2010, we expect the interim evaluations also to shed some light on them.

18. At the Higher Education Academy's CETL evaluation workshop/seminar in May 2006, we discussed the merits of defining core evaluation questions that could link the two levels of CETL evaluations without narrowing or constraining individual CETL evaluations in capturing their own unique and distinctive features. Since each CETL is likely to bring its own epistemological and methodological approach to its evaluation, we expect these to influence the way in which each CETL explores the core areas below. We invite each CETL to give a brief outline in its self-evaluation (see paragraph 27 below) of its methodological framework and to highlight any distinctive features in order to facilitate analysis and awareness of these differences across the CETL programme.

19. The areas that we see as core to both levels of evaluation are set out below:

- a. clearly depicting the process of change and development, for example by specifying the conceptual and actual starting points for each CETL and for the initiative as a whole.
- b. understanding reward and recognition processes, for example whether they are influential in:
 - incentivising individuals and teams to change or further develop their work in teaching and supporting student learning
 - promoting individual career development
 - persuading other staff (in other subjects, institutions, levels of teaching) to 'innovate, or develop their own pedagogic knowledge and practice
 - benefiting student learning within and beyond the immediate area of excellence
 - strengthening an institution's standing in a competitive student recruitment market
- c. identifying capacity and scope for pedagogic research and scholarship arising from CETLs
- d. examining the wider impact of CETLs on the learning and teaching strategies of their institutions. This linkage is also covered in HEFCE's recently published guidance for institutions on self-assessment of the impact of enhancement funding on their learning and teaching strategies, *Embedding Learning and Teaching Strategies: an approach to self assessment by higher education institutions* (HEFCE 2006/35)

- e. understanding how capital investment is being used to further specific teaching and learning objectives
- f. depicting the developing relationship between CETLs and the Higher Education Academy to build, disseminate and influence take-up of good practice
- g. identifying unintended consequences of CETLs.

What is the evaluation timetable?

20. HEFCE's funding of existing CETLs runs for five years to March 2010. The individual CETLs and the programme-wide evaluation will both produce interim evaluation reports in 2007 (after two years of funding) and full evaluation reports in 2010 (the end of HEFCE's funding, though this does not, of course, necessarily mark the end of the CETLs themselves). The individual CETL evaluations are a key resource for the programme-wide evaluation. **We are therefore asking CETLs to complete and send their interim evaluation reports to HEFCE by the end of July 2007. The interim programme-wide evaluation report will be completed by December 2007 for circulation early in 2008.**

21. The interim evaluations will be formative for each CETL and also provide information and data from the set-up period and early phase of operation to the programme-wide evaluation. It is quite possible that the interim findings may adjust HEFCE's and the CETLs' expectations of what might develop and change as a consequence of CETL investment.

22. We expect the evaluation reports in 2010 to provide a fuller analysis and a wide range of data relating to the impact of this major investment in excellence in teaching and learning. The evaluation reports should provide a rich source of information and data on which subsequent quality enhancement initiatives, including future CETL rounds, can draw.

What will the evaluation reports look like and who will see them?

23. At the Higher Education Academy's Evaluation Seminar for CETLs in May 2006, we discussed a range of practical measures that could support and encourage networking amongst CETL evaluators and facilitate connections between local CETL evaluations and the programme-wide evaluation. We hope that key aspects of each CETL's evaluation and the programme-wide evaluation reach the widest possible audience and that information about unintended as well as intended outcomes support and challenge knowledge and understanding of change processes in learning and teaching.

24. To this end, we suggest that individual CETL evaluations can have different audiences and uses in mind when preparing their interim and final reports. A CETL may

choose to use an 'outward facing' approach; such a report would contain information and findings on the core CETL evaluation questions and a summary of the key points and outcomes from each CETL's own evaluation. Such an evaluation would be appropriate for making publicly available, such as by placing them on the CETL's web-site as a downloadable document.

25. Alternatively the evaluation could be internally focused, incorporating the CETL's evaluation design, findings, evidence and data. Circulation of these aspects to external audiences (other than HEFCE, the HE Academy, and evaluators working for either of these organisations) would be for each CETL and its institutional/partnership hosts to determine. A useful strategy may be to write a single report for the self-evaluative reporting, then to decide which parts could be made publicly available.

26. Guidance and a suggested report structure are offered as Annex A.

27. Ethical issues will undoubtedly arise in the design and implementation of evaluative studies. We will expect the CETL self-evaluations and the programme-wide evaluation to develop and observe clear ethical frameworks that determine how evaluation is undertaken, the communication, behaviour and reporting protocols involving all contributors and participants, ownership of data and the safety of the 'learning space' in which the evaluation experience is developed.

Where do we go from here?

28. We do not require any response from institutions to this guidance note..

Annex A

Self-evaluation report to HEFCE: guidance notes

This guidance was produced by the evaluation team at the Centre for the Study of Education and Training (CSET), based at Lancaster University. More information on the self-evaluation reports is available on the Open University Knowledge Network site at <http://kn.open.ac.uk/public/index.cfm?wpid=7076> .

This guidance considers the relationship between the self-evaluation reports that HEFCE requires and the formative evaluation of the CETL programme. It also provides a reminder of the principles of procedure associated with the reports which emphasise the learning rather than regulatory function of the reports.

The self-evaluation reports and the programme evaluation

The CETL evaluation network meeting in Birmingham on 28 February 2007, hosted by the Centre for Stakeholder Learning Partnerships, helped develop our thinking about the CETL self-evaluation reports to HEFCE.

Those reports will be one of our data sources we use to produce the final report.

- The starting point, from our point of view, is that we are evaluating the CETL *programme*, not individual Centres.
- CETLs' self-evaluation reports need to be open, in the sense that good, indifferent and bad stories should all be reported. There is no intention on HEFCE's part or ours (CSET) to assess or judge CETLs that have had negative experiences or unsuccessful outcomes.
- Reports need to be open. With formative evaluation, the idea is to disclose difficulties so that all concerned can think about ways of dealing with them. Formative evaluation thrives on disclosure; it is poisoned by 'spin'.
- Reports need to be evidence-based. That means substantiating claims with evidence. However, the evidence itself need not always be set out in full in the report. Hyperlinks and other forms of reference may be used. The important thing is that claims should be testable against evidence, which is simply good academic practice. That is not the same as saying that all claims will be tested, only that they need to be testable.
- It may be helpful to avoid colourful language (such as outstanding, superb) unless such statements are substantiated by evidence.
- Keep reports short and focused: it is anticipated that they need be no longer than 20 pages.

- The focus should be on the learning that has taken place on the part of all stakeholders, backed by evidence and analysis, rather than lists of activities.

CETLs are invited to produce reports in ways that they think give an honest and evidence-based account of their achievements, difficulties, plans and prospects. There is no compulsory format. That said, we offer a format that some CETLs may choose to use, and this does specify areas that *all* reports should address, regardless of preferred format. We believe that you should also consider the overarching aims of the CETL initiative, originally published in HEFCE 2004/05 and reproduced below.

Aims of the CETL initiative

- To reward practice that demonstrates excellent learning outcomes for students.
- To enable practitioners to lead and embed change by implementing approaches that address the diversity of learners' needs, the requirements of different learning contexts, the possibilities for innovation and the expectations of employers and others concerned with the quality of student learning.
- To enable institutions to support and develop practice that encourages deeper understanding across the sector of ways of addressing students' learning effectively.
- To recognize and give greater prominence to clusters of excellence that are capable of influencing practice and raising the profile of teaching excellence within and beyond their institutions.
- To demonstrate collaboration and sharing of good practice and so enhance the standard of teaching and effective learning throughout the sector.
- To raise student awareness of effectiveness in teaching and learning in order to inform student choice and maximize student performance.

Title of CETL

Lead and partner institutions

Interim Evaluation Report

July 2007

(Note: this format is illustrative but contains the kind of headings that might be used. The expectation is that the report will be brief – around 15 pages – which suggests that each category will be presented in headline form with a reference to more detailed sources if necessary. The emphasis is on analysis of impact rather than descriptions of activities.)

1.0 Executive summary

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Structure and audience (what is in the report and the intended audience/readership)

2.2 Connection with other reports (other reports undertaken and a reference to the final summative report at the end of the funding period)

2.3 Purpose (refers to the evaluation report)

2.4 Overview of the evidential base (a brief overview of the evidence on which analyses in the report is based can contain both informal and formal evidence bases)

3.0 Brief description of the aims and scope of the CETL

3.1 Purposes

3.2 Specific goals

3.3 Activities

3.4 Roles and participants

4.0 Evaluation framework and approach

4.1 For example, use RUFDATA or equivalent evaluation framework to produce a statement about overall approach

4.2 Reflections on the evaluation process

5.0 Findings

Findings should address the priority areas for evaluation as identified in the evaluation framework used.

5.1 Student experience (effects on students, student feedback etc on activities/technologies or space sponsored by the CETL)

5.2 Connections with external partners (networks, local and national partners)

5.4 Internal strategic impact (the way the CETL is used strategically by the institution)

5.5 Effects on teachers (opportunities for experimentation, research, development etc)

5.6 Effects on learning designs (new curricula, learning activities, use of technologies, use of space)

6.0 Lessons learned and future adjustments

6.1 Overview of new knowledge about how student learning might be enriched, enhanced etc

- 6.2 Emerging teaching practices (new practices undertaken, developed or planned)
- 6.3 Implications for University systems and practices (sustainability issues, new systems, procedures)
- 6.4 Any sector wide multiplier effects (effects of the CETL's work on a wider constituency, in the discipline, cross disciplinary effects etc)
- 6.5 Adjustments and future plans
- 6.6 Reflections on the idea of a CETL as a change strategy (reflections on CETLs as a national strategy)

Figures

Appendices (suggested examples below)

Appendix 1 Data Sources

Appendix 2 Reference to Web sites/resources and other embodiments

Appendix 3 Reference to events

Bibliography