

## **Learning and teaching evaluation framework**

1. From autumn 2006 we have adopted a learning and teaching evaluation framework to inform the evaluation of our policies and programmes. The framework comprises a set of principles of good practice that we will use to improve the design and implementation of both our in-house and commissioned evaluations.

### **Background**

2. In 2004 we commissioned a review from the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI) of the future research and evaluation needs of our Learning and Teaching Directorate. The review commented on our past evaluations of policy initiatives. It recommended that we develop a more rigorous approach to evaluation that would provide a better basis for securing good analysis and evidence to inform both our understanding of the impact of policy interventions in learning and teaching, and our approach to policy development.

3. To help us develop a more informed and rigorous approach, we appointed a small expert reference group, composed of academic and other public policy evaluation specialists, to advise on how we might build a generic framework for commissioning and implementing evaluations in learning and teaching. The group completed its work in April 2005, recommending an approach based on certain principles that we have developed and adopted as a framework for good practice.

### **Aims**

4. Our aims in developing and applying the framework are to:

- a. Ensure we commission high quality, systematic evaluation studies.
- b. Enable evaluators to deploy approaches that best address the activity in question.
- c. Enable HEFCE to make better use of the outcomes.

5. Our expert panel drew our attention to some overarching features of good evaluative work drawn from their experience of a wide range of studies that we aim to use as a general benchmark in the planning and conduct of future evaluations:

- clear communication of purpose to all participants in an evaluation process is crucial
- an evaluation framework should allow for learning across a range of programme evaluations
- evaluation needs to be and seen to be independent
- commissioning evaluations should encourage proposers to consider a range of methodologies, appropriately diverse and responsive to stakeholders' information needs
- the primary function of evaluation in a policy context is description and analysis to support policy decision-making and development

- the scope, design and implementation of an evaluation should enable information about the realities of practice to be conveyed to the policy community and stakeholders
- proposals for evaluation design, including suggested methodologies, should be open to peer assessment
- externally commissioned evaluations should meet high professional and scholarly expectations, and provision should be made to involve experienced evaluators in commenting on evaluation briefs and submitted evaluation proposals, steering commissioned evaluations, and assessing evaluation reports.

### Principles of the framework

6. We have now adopted an 'evaluation framework for learning and teaching comprising a set of principles for good practice and a representation of key stages in our commissioning of external evaluations. The framework's principles are shown below.

#### Learning and teaching evaluation framework

1. **Policy 'climate'** Evaluation should be an intrinsic part of our policies, from conception of project.
2. **Conception of programme** Expert advice should be sought from the outset, to help clarify our understanding of the aims, objectives and usage of an evaluation, inform the invitation to tender stage and identify the key issues which an evaluation could usefully address.
3. **Invitations to tender (ITTs)** A template for tender submissions should be drawn up, ensuring that all applications include sections on the theoretical justification of the proposed design, a methodology and rationale for the approach taken, and a consideration of ethical issues.
4. **Tenders received** Peer review of tenders should be undertaken to allow a more robust and expert examination of each tender to inform the selection decision.
5. **Tender accepted** Peer review of the findings should be undertaken to enhance the credibility and status of evaluations commissioned by HEFCE.
6. **Evaluation process** HEFCE staff should receive training in the policy evaluation process, and good practice guidelines should be developed.
7. **Dissemination of evaluation findings** Findings from evaluations should be systematically referenced internally to form a knowledge base for future work, and be made publicly available.

7. Figure 1 illustrates and expands on these principles.

8. We are committed to using this generic evaluation framework to guide and inform our evaluations of major initiatives, including Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and our policy objectives in relation to the Higher Education Academy.

**Figure 1**  
**Summary of the learning and teaching evaluation framework**

