



Final Report

Improving Evaluation Practices for Better Policy Making

25 February 2020



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1. Introduction

This document provides a summary of the findings from the research undertaken into international experiences with evaluation systems and practices to improve policy making. The research was carried out by the Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services LLP (CSES) in the second half of 2019 for the Dutch Ministry of Finance through a contract with the European Commission under its Structural Reform Support Programme. The aim was to provide the Netherlands with international examples of evaluation systems and practices that could be relevant to the ‘Operation Insight into Quality’.

1.1 Research questions

The main research question addressed in this report is what can be learned from international experience with regard to developing evaluation systems and practices that are effective in promoting better policymaking? To answer this question, several issues have been investigated:

- How have countries and international institutions developed their evaluation systems in terms of the regulatory framework and organization of the evaluation function and how is evaluation capacity building promoted?
- How do these evaluation systems work in practice to improve policymaking according to available studies and evaluation experts?
- How do countries and international organisations evaluate specific policy areas of interest to the Netherlands?

The results of the research have been set out in this report under four headings: regulatory framework; organisation of the evaluation function; capacity building and development of an evaluation culture; and evaluation approaches. The main report is supported by an appendix providing a list of interviews and secondary sources.

1.2 Definitions

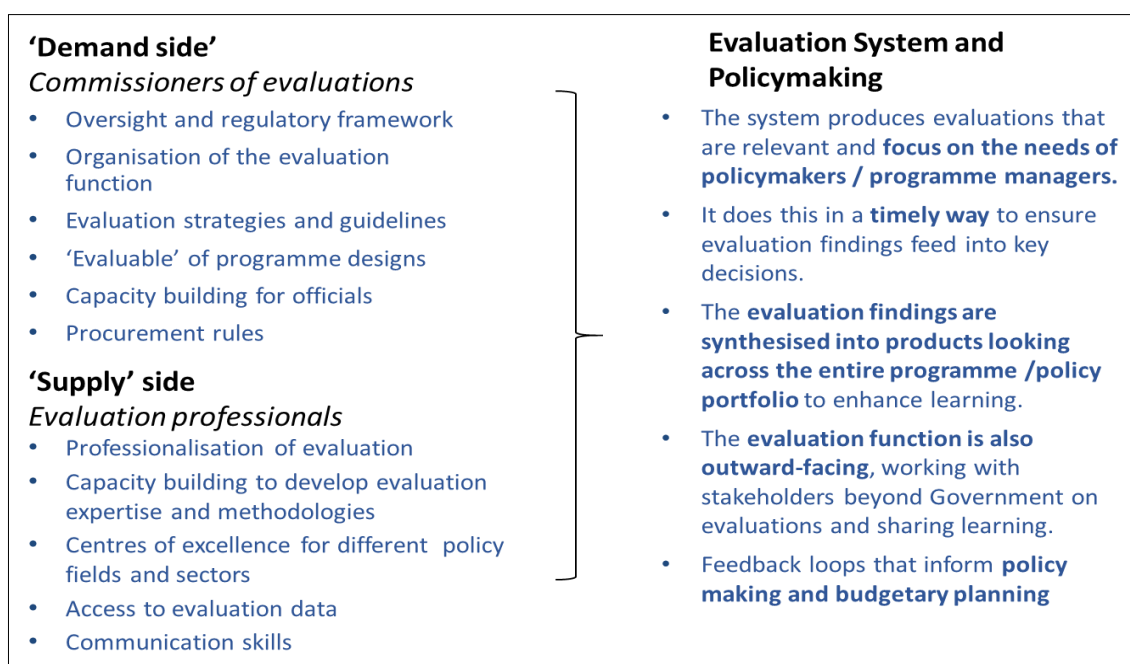
For the purposes of this study, we have adopted the OECD’s definition of evaluation: “Policy evaluation can be defined as the structured and objective assessment of the design, implementation and/or results of a future, ongoing or completed policy initiative. The goal of an evaluation could be to assess the efficiency, effectiveness, impact or sustainability of a given policy. Evaluation provides an insight into why and how a policy was successful or not and can lead to understanding how the links between decisions and outcomes can be strengthened. As such, it is a crucial element of evidence-informed policy making, and thus of good governance.”

An evaluation system brings together the various elements that are needed to carry out evaluations and evaluation-related activities in a way that contributes usefully to policymaking and other end-user requirements. In this study a distinction has been made between aspects of the system relating to the commissioners of evaluations (the ‘demand-side’) and aspects relating to evaluation professionals who carry out assignments (the ‘supply-side’). Both dimensions are important to an evaluation system and it is through the interaction between the two that an overall evaluation culture develops.

1.3 Building blocks of an evaluation system

A total of 10 ‘building blocks have been identified that make up an evaluation system. These ‘building blocks (summarised in the chart below) were derived from a literature review at the outset of the assignment and have been used to help guide the research. The appendix includes a list of the key primary and secondary sources.

Building Blocks of an Evaluation System



The ‘demand-side’ issues highlighted above are mainly addressed in Sections 2 and 3 of the report. It should be noted that we have not directly addressed issues concerning the ‘evaluability’ of programmes and procurement rules in the assessment although some of the government guidelines we have examined in Section 3 do address these issues. Section 4 addresses ‘supply-side’ questions. Several issues on the ‘supply-side’ highlighted in the chart (access to evaluation data, communications skills) are also issues covered by evaluation guidelines and standards.

1.4 Selection of countries and institutions

A total of eight cases were selected for the research – six countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Canada and the USA) and two international institutions (the United Nations and World Bank). There were various reasons for this selection. Firstly, all the cases have well-developed evaluation systems. Secondly, some (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) have similar political set-ups to the Netherlands with a tradition of coalition governments which is relevant given the role of evaluation in policymaking.

Other cases were thought likely to demonstrate particularly interesting features in relation to specific aspects of their evaluation systems. For example, Canada has a system of professional accreditation that is in many respects unique and a new regulatory framework known as ‘Policy on Results’ which has many interesting features. Likewise, the USA also has a new regulatory framework with the 2019 Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act which is interesting given its emphasis on the role of evaluation in promoting learning, and the UN and World Bank have very well-developed evaluation functions and networks. The case study research was not aimed at comparing all the selected countries in relation to all the building blocks, but rather used to highlight interesting experiences and practices in the different cases.

2. Evaluation Regulations

An overarching regulatory framework to guide evaluation activities and to help ensure coordination between different stakeholders only exists in a small number of countries. It could be argued that, ideally, regulation should not be necessary because an evaluation culture might develop from a self-realisation that evaluation has benefits. However, even in this ideal situation, an overall framework is likely to be helpful in ensuring a degree of overall coordination. The research suggests that where they exist, regulatory frameworks define the basic evaluation obligations of government departments and agencies, usually supported by more detailed guidelines and plans that can help to operationalise the regulations. Beyond these basic features, the nature and extent of regulation varies. Thus, regulations in some countries (e.g. Canada, Sweden) focus more on the organisation of the evaluation function whereas others (e.g. the US) place more emphasis on the purpose of evaluation activities or how they should be carried out (UK).

The new regulatory framework that the Canadian Government introduced in 2016 ('Policy on Results') is an interesting example. The new framework replaced three separate Canadian Treasury Board policies (the most important of which was the 'Policy on Evaluation'). In their place, the 2016 'Policy on Results' sets out a common framework for federal departments that is overseen by the Treasury Board's Secretariat (Results Division). The legislation sets out a detailed description of departmental obligations with regard to evaluation.¹ The framework is made up of three main components - 'Core Responsibilities', 'Departmental Results' and 'Departmental Result Indicators'. Each Department is expected to appoint a 'Performance Measurement and Evaluation Committee' comprising senior officials to oversee evaluation activities.

Supporting the Canadian framework is a system of 'Programme Inventories' which identify all of a department's programmes and describe how resources are organised to contribute to the department's 'Core Responsibilities' and 'Results'. In addition to appointing a Performance Measurement and Evaluation Committee, each Department under the Canadian system is required to appoint a head of performance measurement, and a head of evaluation. The head of performance measurement is responsible for establishing, implementing and maintaining the 'Program Inventory' and overseeing 'Performance Information Profiles'. Under the system, each Department is required to prepare a five-year, rolling departmental evaluation plan.

In the USA, the organisation of the evaluation function is also largely driven by legislation. The 2019 Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act ("Evidence Act") provides a regulatory framework that emphasises the purpose of evaluation as contributing to learning.² Prior to this legislation there was no overall framework for evaluation and evidence-based policymaking practices among U.S. Departments and their agencies. The 2019 Evidence Act mandates the 24 US Government agencies (departments) covered by the Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-576) to develop a more strategic approach to evaluation and to strengthen evidence-building activities.

¹ Departmental obligations include: Departments are clear on what they are trying to achieve and how they assess success; Departments measure and evaluate their performance, using the resulting information to manage and improve programs, policies and services; resources are allocated based on performance to optimize results, including through Treasury Board submissions, through resource alignment reviews, and internally by departments themselves; and Parliamentarians and the public receive transparent, clear and useful information on the results that departments have achieved and the resources used to do so.

² The Act resulted from the work of the US Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking (also referred to as the Evidence Commission) in 2016. The Commission, which was comprised of 15 members from a range of academic disciplines, reviewed available evidence, and provided recommendations on how the government could use existing data to inform decisions and policies. Its final report, "The Promise of Evidence-Based Policymaking", lay the foundation for the 2018 Evidence Act.

In a rather similar way to the Canadian ‘Policy on Results, under the US Evidence Act, each Government department or agency is required to appoint an evaluation officer whose responsibility is to prepare and oversee a four-year evaluation plan and to undertake other tasks such as organising evaluation training for officials. Although the precise approach can vary from agency to other, all are required once a year (in September) to set out the evaluations they intend to carry out in the coming 12 months in an Annual Evaluation Plan and to report on the results for the previous year. Central oversight is provided by the Office of Management and Budget (part of the President’s Office) which will publish the various evaluation plans and results.

In addition to its other provisions, the Evidence Act places an emphasis on the learning function of evaluation by calling for the development of ‘Learning Agendas’ which are at the core of the two main activities that all agencies are required to carry out - evaluation plans and capacity assessments. ‘Capacity assessments’ help agencies obtain a better understanding of their evaluation expertise and resources to undertake evidence-building activities, of which programme evaluation is a crucial component. These assessments encourage agencies to reflect on their “coverage quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of their statistics, evaluation, research and analysis efforts.” ‘Learning Agendas’ are comprised of prioritised research questions and evidence-building activities, specific to each agency’s purposes and needs that will better guide their future practices and decision-making processes.

The UK demonstrates an alternative, non-regulation-based approach to promoting the role of evaluation in policymaking. In this cases, HM Treasury is responsible for providing centralised guidance to other departments on how they should carry out evaluation activities individual departments have considerable discretion to customise the guidance to their specific circumstances and requirement. The two key sets of HM Treasury guidelines (the ‘Green Book’ and the ‘Magenta Book’ – see Section 4) cover many of the requirements to be found in Canadian and US legislation but rely on a trust-based approach, i.e. while there is pressure on departments to follow the guidelines, they are not prescribed in a regulation.

3. Organisation of the Evaluation Function

In addition to the overall framework for evaluation, the research examined differing approaches to organising the evaluation function.

The research indicates that while some countries (e.g. Canada and Finland) have centralised systems with one Government department or agency coordinating evaluation activities across government, other countries (e.g. Denmark) have very decentralised approaches. Below we outline these different models and their advantages and disadvantages.

3.1 Organisational models

Finland is a good example of an evaluation function that is being dealt with centrally at the highest level by the Prime Minister’s Office. In 2015 the ‘Project to Reform the Government’s Steering Framework’ was launched with the purpose of improving the impact and effectiveness of Government actions. The project was supported by the four largest political parties. Five strategic policy priorities were defined as a framework for key Government projects with each priority being managed by a group of Ministers and each key project being linked to an individual minister. The Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) oversees and coordinates this system which has evaluation built into it as a central component. PMO-led evaluation activities are linked to the five strategic priorities and 30 key performance indicators with a traffic light system being used to trigger assessments. Given its position at the centre of government, the PMO acts as a link between evaluation and policymaking. It has a EUR 15m fund available to support evaluations. A separate Strategic Research Council also helps to

identify priorities. In addition to the PMO's activities, line ministries in Finland also carry out evaluations relating to their own policy areas.

In Sweden proposals are currently being considered to strengthen the evaluation function by introducing a stronger degree of centralisation and reducing the number of agencies with a role in carrying out evaluations. At present there are seven agencies that make up the Government's overall resources for evaluation.³ The cost of the evaluation agencies is estimated at SEK 330 million p.a. (about EUR 32 million p.a.) excluding statistical production. This corresponds to some 0.3% of the Government's overall budget. A review carried out by a Government committee in 2017 concluded that the way of organising evaluation activities in Sweden was too 'ad hoc' and fragmented with very little coverage of certain important policy areas (and yet no appetite for more agencies to be created). The committee therefore recommended that three larger agencies should be created to replace the seven existing ones (these new agencies would cover labour market and welfare analysis, growth and 'community building', and safety and security). Other recommendations included stronger networking between the agencies and a formalisation of evaluation requirements. The committee's recommendations were still being considered at the time when this report was written.

Both Canada and the USA (as explained in the previous section) have now developed quite centralised evaluation system with the organisation of the evaluation function being largely driven by legislation. In both cases, recent legislation has empowered a single Government department (the Treasury Board in Canada and the Office for Management and Budget in the USA) to coordinate activities across the other departments and agencies in their countries. In both cases, this centralised coordination role is supported by an obligation on individual departments to appoint evaluation officers and to develop evaluation plans with in-built review mechanisms that are supervised by the coordinating entity. Both countries have strong evaluation traditions that predate the recent legislation. In effect, the legislation introduces a more coordinated and uniform system of the evaluation function across different parts of the federal Government whereas previously evaluation approaches varied and were largely a matter to be decided by individual departments and agencies. It should, however, be noted that in both countries, the legislation that has recently been introduced only applies at the federal level.

A contrasting model is provided by Denmark which does not have any centralised evaluation policy or authority. Nevertheless, this has not prevented a tendency among most public bodies in the country in the last 10 years or so to stress 'evidence-based policymaking'. This reflects a growing understanding that evaluation should not be a control tool or an auditing process but should focus on learning and development. To help institutionalise this approach, a number of sector-orientated public research and evaluation centres have been established over the years to promote evidence-based research and evaluations. An example is the 'Danish Clearinghouse for Educational Research' ('Dansk Clearinghouse for Uddannelsesforskning'). This has now been integrated into Aarhus University's Danish School of Education.⁴

³ The Swedish Social Insurance Inspectorate (Inspektionen för socialförsäkringen); Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis (Kulturanalys); Swedish Agency for Growth Policy Analysis (Tillväxtanalys); Transport Analysis (Trafikanalys); Swedish Agency for Health and Care Services Analysis (Vårdanalys); Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå); and the Institute for evaluation of labour market and education policy (IFAU).

⁴ When it was established in 2006, the aim was to have an institution that could provide politicians with the latest and best research and evidence-based knowledge on education and teaching. Several synthesizing methods were used such as model-based synthesizing (analysis of causal logics), narrative synthesizing (summarizing conclusions in the reviewed studies and evaluations), meta-analysis (statistical analysis of data from different studies and evaluations) and additive synthesizing where the reviewed studies and evaluation are given a numerical value according their relevance and quality.

Overall, the study suggests that are advantages and disadvantages with a centralised and decentralised approach. A centralised system is more likely to mean that a common evaluation approach can be promoted across Government with different ministries adopting similar practices with regard to the planning, implementation and use of evaluations. The research suggests that a degree of centralised coordination is also a prerequisite for a more strategic approach to evaluation (see Section 5), i.e. being able to look across a number of evaluations that cover different aspects of the same policy area (e.g. different aspects of SME internationalisation or policies to combat climate change) to arrive at overall conclusions and to identify common learning points.

However, most countries covered by this study have a more decentralised approach to organising the evaluation function. This has advantages in making it easier for individual ministries to customise evaluation methods and practices to their own specific requirements. However, the drawback is that this can lead to evaluation being neglected or being undertaken in a way that does not benefit from the sharing of experience and know-how. A more decentralised or fragmented approach also makes it more difficult to adopt a strategic approach to evaluation or to aggregate evaluation results across different parts of government that share common policy objectives.

Adopting a ‘hybrid’ approach is another option, i.e. a centralised framework with flexibility for individual Government departments to customise the framework to their specific programmes and priorities. The role of the UK’s HM Treasury in coordinating evaluation is a good example of this ‘hybrid’ approach. The Treasury’s role is not defined in any legislation but has evolved over time. Similarly, while there is no Government-wide strategy for evaluation, HM Treasury (as noted earlier) provides detailed evaluation guidance. This guidance (the ‘Green Book’, ‘Magenta Book’ and ‘Aqua Book’) covers not only methodological issues but also practical questions relating to the types of evaluations that should be undertaken by Government Departments at different stages in the policy cycle, and other issues such as public procurement procedures for selecting evaluators, and the use of evaluation results by policymakers. UK Government Departments are expected to follow the guidelines but they have the flexibility to adapt them to their specific needs as long as they comply with the basic principles. Within this overall framework, each Government department has responsibility for developing its own evaluation strategy and evaluating its own policies. Some do this using inhouse evaluators while others rely mainly on external contractors.

3.2 Evaluation units and networks

Irrespective of the Government evaluation function set-up (centralised or decentralised), the research suggests that there is a strong argument for individual departments and agencies to have their own evaluation units. The research suggests that such an approach helps to ensure that evaluation can be customised more precisely to the needs of different policy areas and stakeholders. It can also strengthen the ‘ownership’ and independence of the evaluation function and improve the communication of results to policymakers.

The UN and World Bank provide good examples of how evaluation units operate. In the case of the World Bank, for example, its network of evaluation units across the world combines the centralised support of the IEG (Independent Evaluation Group) with locally-based professionals who commission, and in some cases carry out, evaluations on the ground. The IEG provides support on evaluation methods, training and knowledge sharing across the system. In addition to carrying out evaluations, the evaluation units have an important capacity-building function in their regions with an emphasis on promoting ‘self-evaluation’.

At a national level, amongst the comparators for this research, there is a mixed picture. Government ministries dealing with policy areas such as development aid, education and health - i.e. high spending areas – generally have their own evaluation units but other departments and agencies often do not. There is also a difference in how departmental evaluation units operate with some (e.g. in the UK)

using their own personnel to carry out evaluations while others contract out the research to evaluation professionals in the academic or commercial sector.

3.3 Role of other organisations in the evaluation function

In addition to the role of Government departments and agencies, Parliaments and in some cases the Courts of Auditors have a role in the evaluation function, i.e. helping to define regulatory aspects of evaluation, monitoring its implementation and providing oversight. To the extent that Parliaments initiate evaluations, this research suggests that the approach tends to be ad hoc rather than strategic. Parliaments also provide an important link in the feedback loop by using evaluation results to help inform policymaking. But in some countries, there is a tendency to mainly use evaluation results to demonstrate accountability rather than as a tool for policymaking. Courts of Auditors also have an important role in evaluation systems with their focus on examining public expenditure value-for-money.

Non-governmental stakeholders including NGOs, universities and centres of excellence, the media and evaluation societies have an important role in promoting an evaluation culture. There are interesting examples of sector-specific ‘centers of excellence’ conducting evaluations and other research or adapting evaluation results to the needs of policymakers and other stakeholders. Examples in Denmark, Finland and Sweden have already been mentioned. The ‘What Works Centres’ in the UK are also an example of a decentralized research and evaluation system of this type, in this case focusing on identifying how research and evaluation results can be best applied in practice. The initiative, which was launched in 2013, is described as “supporting government to make policy in a fundamentally different way - deliberately testing variations in approach, vigorously evaluating, and stopping things that don’t work.”⁵ A total of 10 ‘What Works Centres’ have so far established.⁶ The Centres are funded by a combination of government and non-government sources including the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Big Lottery Fund.

According to a 2018 assessment, there is mixed evidence regarding their effectiveness with some (e.g. the What Works Centre for crime reduction) performing well but others less so.⁷ Taking the What Works Centre for crime reduction as an example, this is supported by a consortium of universities and has reviewed some 300 evaluations and other studies to identify practical lessons (e.g. relating to electronic monitoring of offenders, asset-focused measures to tackle organised crime) for the police and other law enforcement agencies, and NGOs that are active in crime prevention. It is supported by a £10m Police Knowledge Fund that finances evaluations and other types of research. More generally, the Government’s What Works Team (part of the Cabinet Office) operates across government to share findings from the What Works Centres and to support officials in developing and using methods to assess whether programmes and services are delivering results.

⁵ This includes: running a cross-Government ‘Trial Advice Panel’ with experts from across academia and government providing a free service for officials to help test whether policies are working; sharing findings from the What Works Centres across government and promoting discussion on ‘what works’; supporting the development of a civil service with the skills, capability and commitment to use evidence effectively; and helping policy makers to make informed judgements on investment in services that lead to impact and value for money for citizens.

⁶ The What Works Centres so far established cover the following fields: crime reduction, education, higher education, homelessness, early intervention (policies for children); youth employment, local economic development; health and social care, improving the quality of life for older citizens; and wellbeing.

⁷ Birkbeck, University of London, ‘The What Works Network Five Years On’, January 2018.

4. Capacity building and developing an evaluation culture

Evaluation capacity-building involves helping individuals and organizations to develop professional evaluation systems and practices including the various competencies required to effectively design, manage, implement and use evaluations for better policymaking. Training courses, evaluation guidelines and standards, public procurement practices, and the development of networks to help share expertise and learning all have an important role in capacity building and, more generally, nurturing an evaluation culture.

4.1 Evaluation guidelines and standards

Evaluation guidelines are generally produced by Governments (unlike standards which are mostly produced by the evaluation community itself). In the countries covered by this study, the type of guidance produced by Governments is threefold in nature: some of the guidelines (e.g. Canada) focus on explaining how evaluations should be carried out from an organisational and procedural point of view; other types of guidelines (e.g. the UK) focus more on different types of evaluations and methodological issues; there are also examples (e.g. ILO, World Bank) that combine both elements, albeit in varying degrees. User groups also vary with some evaluations designed mainly for officials while others have a wider target group that includes evaluation professionals. Government officials are often required to follow the guidelines in commissioning evaluations. Although not mandatory, there is also a strong incentive amongst evaluation professionals to use them in carrying out assignments as confirmation of this in tenders can influence the award decision.

The UK has perhaps the most comprehensive set of guidelines on evaluation methods and procedures. As noted earlier, guidance on how to carry out evaluations is provided centrally by HM Treasury with separate and detailed guidelines for officials on how to design and manage evaluations as well as for evaluators. The two sets of guidance are complementary: the ‘Green Book’ emphasising the economic principles that should be applied to both appraisal and evaluation, and the ‘Magenta Book’ providing in-depth guidance on how evaluation should be designed and undertaken.⁸

The ‘Green Book’ presents the recommended framework for the appraisal and evaluation of all policies, programmes and projects. This framework is known as the “ROAMEF” policy cycle⁹ and sets out the key stages in the development of a proposal, from the articulation of the rationale for intervention and the setting of objectives, through to options appraisal and, eventually, implementation and evaluation, including the feeding back of evaluation evidence into the policy cycle. The ‘Magenta Book’ provides further guidance on the evaluation stage of this policy process and central government departments and agencies should ensure that their own manuals or guidelines are consistent with the ‘Magenta Book’ principles. The latest revision of the ‘Magenta Book’ shifted the emphasis away from the ‘analyst’s manual’ of the previous edition to a broader guidance document aimed at both analysts and government policymakers.

There are also good examples of evaluation guidelines that have been developed by the UN and World Bank. Thus, the UN’s International Labour Organisation (ILO) has detailed guidelines on how to carry out different types of evaluations in its publication ‘ILO Policy Guidelines for Evaluation: Principles, Rationale, Planning and Managing for Evaluations.’¹⁰ This 56-page document provides

⁸ HM Treasury, ‘The Green Book: appraisal and evaluation in central government’ (updated in March 2019) and ‘HM Treasury guidance on what to consider when designing an evaluation’ (April 2011).

⁹ Policies, programmes and projects are meant to be assessed and managed through the ROAMEF Cycle. The Rationale, Objectives, Appraisal, Monitoring, Evaluation, Feedback cycle is promoted by the UK Government to ensure policymakers receive evidence of whether change programmes are achieving their aims and objectives.

¹⁰ This publication is subdivided into a number of chapters: Chapter 1 provides an overview of the principles and rationale guiding evaluations in the ILO and aims to clarify basic concepts. It serves as an introduction to explain

guidance to ILO officials and evaluators on how assignments should be carried out from a methodological and organisational perspective. Also interesting is the ILO's concept of strategic (or 'high level') evaluations, i.e. reviews of major policies or institutional issues to assess the impact, effectiveness and benefits of ILO core strategies. The World Bank Group has also published a large number of different evaluation guidelines and other tools aimed to support practitioners, officials, evaluators and staff in the process of monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and projects and with an emphasis in enhancing learning for evidence-based decision-making.

Evaluation standards set out more general ethical principles applying to evaluation activities rather than detailed methodological guidance. Whilst evaluation guidelines are generally produced by Governments and international organisations, evaluation standards are usually produced by evaluation professionals themselves. In many countries (e.g. Switzerland, USA) it is evaluation societies that have played the key role in developing such standards. The World Bank's standards, which are built around the three principles of independence (of the evaluation), credibility (of the research) and utility (of the results) are a good example of the sort of evaluation standards that exist.¹¹ Thus, the Canadian competencies focus on a similar set of principles and have been in effect since 2013 (with a revision in 2018). Like the others, the Canadian Evaluation Society's code is voluntary. Other good examples are the American Evaluation Association's standards, which can be traced back to 1992, and the UK Evaluation Society's professional standards (the 'Guidelines for Good Practice in Evaluation'). Perhaps the most detailed of all are the Swiss Evaluation Society's 20-page code of conduct.¹²

Although there is only limited evidence, evaluation guidelines and standards are not always put into practice in a way that improves evaluation results. It should be said that establishing a direct link between the existence of guidelines and standards, and the quality and usefulness of evaluation studies is inherently problematic. This is because there are many factors in addition to the existence or otherwise of guidelines that influence how well an evaluation is conducted.

Notwithstanding these considerations, some of the issues relating to the practical application of the best practices set out in evaluation guidelines are highlighted by research in the UK. According to a 2016 National Audit Office (NAO) assessment, fewer than half the evaluations it examined in the UK (14 out of 34) "were of a sufficient standard to give confidence in the effects attributed to policy because they had a robust counterfactual." It concluded that evaluations covering spatial policy and business support were generally weaker than those relating to employment and education policies. The NAO found some evidence that evaluations that were weaker in identifying causality tended to be more positive in assessing what the intervention achieved. Several problems were highlighted: firstly, independent evaluators outside of the Government often experience difficulties accessing the necessary official data that is needed to evaluate the impact of programmes and policies. Secondly, evaluation timescales can be unrealistic which makes it more difficult to deliver high quality evaluations. Last but not least, the NAO argued that there is often a lack of demand from policymakers for evaluations with few incentives for Government departments to generate and use evaluation evidence, and few adverse consequences for failing to do so.

the added value of evaluation to the organization in the context of results-based management (RBM); Chapter 2 focuses on the ILO's operational approach to evaluations, both centralized and decentralized; Chapter 3 guides the reader through the processes of planning and managing evaluations; Chapter 4 lays out the framework for conducting an evaluation; Chapter 5 identifies means for communicating evaluation results and knowledge dissemination.

¹¹ World Bank, World Bank Evaluation Principles, 2019.

¹² The SEVAL standards are divided into three groups: general principles that are fundamentally important for evaluations, regardless of specific activities being evaluated; practical planning and planning issues in carrying out an evaluation; and standards for evaluation and the use of results.

4.2 Capacity building methods

Evaluation capacity-building takes place in all the countries and international institutions covered by the study and a variety of activities including training, networking and the sharing of know-how, and accreditation. Developing evaluation capacity is important for both Government officials and evaluation professionals. The research highlights many initiatives aimed at helping to develop the know-how that officials should have to commission and manage evaluation studies. The international institutions are also of interest in this respect and their experience is especially relevant to capacity building across networks of evaluation units in a diverse institutional set-up. In the case of the World Bank, for example, training is compulsory for those involved in evaluation activities. The IEG operates an ‘academy’ that provides training to officials in designing an evaluation, constructing a ‘theory of change’ and other subjects. The IEG also has a ‘Methods Advisory Team’ to support evaluators in the field. Its capacity-building activities go beyond the World Bank itself and through the International Programme for Evaluation Training provides training and other support for evaluators in the countries where interventions take place. Networking is promoted through the ‘Centre for Learning from Evaluation and Results’ (CLEAR).

Canada is the only example in this study of a country where it is possible to obtain accreditation as an evaluator. The Canadian Evaluation Society offers ‘Credentialed Evaluator Designation’ (CE) to individuals who fulfil certain requirements with regard to 36 competencies across five domains. The CE designation is not a certificate or license but is written into some job descriptions. To maintain the CE accreditation, it is necessary to accumulate continuing education credits. So far, over 350 individuals have acquired CE accreditation. The evaluation societies in other countries offer training courses and workshops on evaluation but do not operate accreditation systems. As the research shows, however, there are now many Masters courses on evaluation and evaluation-related subjects being offered by several universities. For example, evaluation is taught by over 60 US universities at Masters level and by six UK universities and one in Germany. It is also a module in many other university courses (e.g. courses relating to education and healthcare).

5. Evaluation Approaches

As part of the research, five policy case studies were undertaken to examine approaches to evaluation in different policy areas in different countries. The cases covered policies relating to police effectiveness, digitalisation, the circular economy, climate change and SME internationalisation. In each case, a number of key issues were agreed with the relevant ministries and also the countries that should be covered by the research. In addition to insights into the evaluation approaches to tackle specific programme evaluation issues, the policy case studies highlight a trend towards more ‘strategic evaluation’, increased stakeholder involvement in evaluation and a shift in the focus of evaluation activities from accountability to learning.

5.1 Strategic evaluation

The term ‘strategic evaluation’ involves planning and carrying out evaluations across Government departments and agencies in a coordinated way, thereby enabling the results to be synthesised into products transversing the entire evaluation portfolio to enhance cumulative learning and policymaking. The policy case studies highlight evaluation approaches that are cross-departmental and extend across different policy areas. This reflects an increasing recognition of the interdependence of policy actions implemented by different bodies and the fact that policies cannot usually be effectively implemented and evaluated in silos. For example, in the policing field, evaluations in Canada consider the interactions between the police and the wider justice system and the public’s perceptions of that system. A strategic approach to evaluation has implications for the way in which evaluations are planned and implemented that raise issues regarding the regulatory

framework and organisation of the evaluation function as well as issues of a methodological nature (e.g. developing meta-evaluation techniques).

Regulatory frameworks for evaluation (see Section 2) place an emphasis on promoting strategic evaluations. Thus, in Canada, the 2016 Policy on Results legislation set out a framework which goes into some detail on how Government departments should undertake strategic planning, and how and when evaluations should be carried out. In the USA (as also noted in Section 2) the 2019 Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act introduced a new regulatory framework which seeks to ensure that federal agencies develop a more a strategic approach to evaluation in their respective areas of policy. This involves developing an Annual Evaluation Plan, Annual Performance Plan, Capacity Assessment and Open Data Plan. Each federal department or agency is also required by the OMB to appoint key senior officials in order to meet the requirements set out in the Evidence Act 2018.

There are several examples from the policy case studies illustrating a more strategic approach to evaluation. In Canada, this is shown in the case study on police effectiveness. Contemporary policing includes a broad range of responsibilities, from law enforcement, emergency response, crime prevention, to providing assistance to victims and collaborating with external organisations.¹³ As a result, the conventional structure and operational demands placed on Canada’s police services are being fundamentally challenged given the changing context of police work.¹⁴ In fact, police services are increasingly being called to respond to issues that fall outside of core police work at a time where police forces are faced with fiscal restraints and budgeting decisions.

In 2013, all Federal, Provincial and Territorial (FPT) Ministers responsible for Justice and Public Safety approved the “Shared Forward Agenda”, which covers Canada’s strategy for policing. The strategy is built on three pillars, one of them focusing on improving the efficiency of the interaction between police and areas of the criminal justice system. This is reflected in the Canadian Police Performance Metrics Framework (CPPMF) which defines police performance indicators that can be used to assess progress towards strategic priorities and the spectrum of contemporary policing responsibilities. Equally, the CPPMF indicators are intended to provide a national framework, comparable across jurisdictions and feasible for all police forces to report on.

Another example is provided by Germany’s Climate Action Plan 2050 which foresees a baseline evaluation for each programme that allows subsequent evaluations to compare progress achieved, not only in relation to the individual programmes but also across them. In the circular economy field, there is recognition that evaluations need to encompass all relevant policy areas. But since this is a relatively new field, evaluation frameworks are still in development. A strategic approach to evaluations requires a structured approach to the forward planning of evaluations. For example, Finland has published a roadmap, which foresees interim and final evaluations of its circular economy policy. Similarly, Sweden’s Agency for Economic and Regional Growth is working on developing a roadmap for systematic planning of monitoring and evaluation to be used across the board on the policies under the Agency’s auspices, including digitalisation.

These and other examples reflect an increasing recognition of the interdependence of policy actions implemented by different parts of Government and the fact that policies cannot usually be effectively implemented and evaluated in silos. The above examples, and others in the policy case studies, cannot be directly attributed to the greater emphasis on strategic evaluation in regulatory frameworks but these frameworks have created an environment that is conducive to such an approach.

The development of common evaluation guidelines, KPIs and monitoring frameworks has also promoted a more strategic approach to the evaluation of policies. Thus, Denmark, Sweden and the

¹³ Montgomery, R. and C.T. Griffiths. 2017. Contemporary Policing Responsibilities. Public Safety Canada.

¹⁴ Council of Canadian Academies. 2014. “Policing Canada in the 21st Century: New policing for new challenges.” The Expert Panel on the Future of Canadian Policing Models, Council of Canadian Academies

UK each have comprehensive overarching frameworks for their public sector digitalisation policies covering all Government departments. The strategies consist of practical initiatives organised around a few key goals, such as security, growth, infrastructure or skills, accompanied by a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) help to measure progress towards policy goals. KPIs can be an important part of common evaluation guidelines and monitoring frameworks. One advantage of indicators is that they can be co-owned by the different Government departments or bodies responsible for a policy field and can provide consistency in monitoring and evaluation. For example, both Germany and Finland use national KPIs to track progress towards circular economy aims. However, the risk is that indicators tend to be quite broadly-based and therefore it can be difficult to show a direct causal link between, for example, jobs creation or economic growth and circular economy strategies.

The use of KPIs can also facilitate international benchmarking and thus support evaluation of a country's progress relative to other countries. For example, Finland's circular economy roadmap includes 19 KPIs to measure progress with a strong reliance on OECD indicators. Similarly, the indicators included in the digitalisation policies of Denmark, Sweden and the UK are frequently aligned with the OECD's and the EU's international monitoring and assessment frameworks for digitalisation. The frameworks define elaborate indicator systems which the cases to varying degrees make use of to position themselves against other member countries and to inspire their strategies. The EU's DESI index is seen as an important benchmark for progress in achieving public sector digitalisation and the comparators and the EU and OECD frameworks have a powerful effect, especially in highlighting areas of comparative weakness and encouraging responses to them. The OECD furthermore carries out regular Digital Government Studies analyses trends in digital government policies and practices across the OECD.

In addition to common KPIs and other aspects of programme design, appropriate evaluation methodologies are also needed to capture evidence from multiple sources (whether different organisations or programmes) and to combine the results in a way that can be used by policymakers. In general, these methodologies are various types of meta-evaluation. Such tools are designed to cope with large amounts of evidence in a situation where there is a requirement for evaluation to make a fast and timely contribution to policymaking. Several forms of evaluation that are used quite extensively in the UK are relevant in this respect. Rapid Evidence Assessments, Systematic Reviews and meta-evaluation are advocated in UK Government guidance ('Magenta Book') as ways of maximising the contribution that evaluation can make to policymaking. Rapid Evidence Assessments (REAs) respond to the need that policymakers have for a timely input of evaluation evidence to their deliberations. REAs have become a well-established technique in the UK Government and are used extensively across most policy areas to provide a quick response to issues.¹⁵

5.2 Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement is an increasingly important way of helping to ensure that evaluation improves policymaking. There is evidence from the research of increasing involvement or consultation of stakeholders, including users and citizens, in evaluations. For example, public satisfaction surveys are becoming accepted as an important component in the evaluation of police

¹⁵ REAs involve collating descriptive outlines of the available evidence on a topic, critically appraising them, sifting out studies of poor quality, and providing a succinct overview of what the evidence says and what is missing from it. REAs are based on desk research to analyse existing information rather than new research. They are, in effect, a simplified version of Systematic Reviews employing the same general principles but in a lighter-touch manner to enable reviews to be undertaken more quickly. Systematic Reviews (SRs) are in effect a more in-depth version of REAs. They are designed to address the problem that in any given policy area there can be so many different evaluations of specific aspects that it is difficult if not impossible to gain a comprehensive overview.

effectiveness in many countries, partly because of the need to engage with communities in helping to define priorities and implement policies. In the UK, the results of the large-scale annual public survey are published and made accessible for the public and form part of the PEEL (police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy) assessments.

Similarly, in the field of climate change, public satisfaction surveys have informed the monitoring and evaluation of the transition towards clean energy. This has taken the form of a ‘Social Sustainability Barometer’ for the German ‘Energiewende’ which has been developed by the Institute of Advanced Sustainability Studies.¹⁶ User satisfaction surveys are also important in the digitalisation field, particularly in relation to communications and awareness-raising activities. For example, in Denmark, user satisfaction surveys, using quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods, are an important tool for the design and evaluation of digital services since a large proportion of the population use these services.

5.3 Promoting Learning

The question of how evaluation results can be used to promote learning as well as to inform policymakers is also an important issue examined by the study. Part of the rationale for evaluation is to learn lessons and thus improve the future design and implementation of policy. Evidence from the policy case studies highlights several mechanisms to help ensure that evaluations inform future policymaking. Thus, policy learning can be ensured by nominating specific individuals or a specific body to take forward the findings of evaluations. Examples of effective approaches include Denmark’s digitalisation policy, which is overseen by a steering committee comprised of representatives of different government ministries as well as regional and local government. The committee has an important function in contributing to and adjusting the strategic direction of the country’s digitalisation policy, which is informed by evidence from evaluations. Similarly, in the SME internationalisation policy field, the International Trade Centre (ITC) produces annual summaries of evaluation reports which include a section describing actions taken to implement recommendations from the previous year. In the UK, the Crime Reduction What Works Centre’s evidence has been cited extensively in the National Police Chief’s Council’s Policing Vision for 2025.

6. Overall Conclusions

The research suggests that across all countries there is still some way to go in making evaluation as useful as it could and should be to policymakers. Some countries are doing better than others in developing effective evaluations systems, but none of those covered by this research can be said to have yet put all the ‘pieces of the jigsaw’ in place.

A regulatory framework to guide evaluation activities exists in only small number of countries (e.g. Canada, USA). As we have argued earlier, regulation should not be necessary in an ideal world because an evaluation culture might develop from a self-realisation that evaluation has benefits. However, this is not yet the case in any of the countries or institutions covered by the research. Regulatory frameworks typically define the purpose of evaluation, how it should be carried out and the role of a coordinating Government department or agency and line ministries. Regulations promote evaluation in situations where practices are still weak and support a coordination of planning and implementing evaluation activities across Government departments. This has benefits to policymakers in helping to ensure that evaluation activities are synchronised with the policy cycle, and in providing a more complete picture of how policies are performing.

¹⁶ Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, [Monitoring the Energiewende: Expert Commission Draws on Social Sustainability Barometer](#) (6 June 2018)

Whilst an overarching regulatory framework can be helpful in strengthening the role of evaluation in policymaking, there are alternative trust-based approaches to achieving this goal. The research highlights the role of the UK Treasury's 'Green' and 'Magenta' Books in providing guidance to other departments and evaluation professionals, and the strong pressure that exists to follow the guidelines. However, a trust-based system does presuppose that an evaluation culture has already taken root. It also assumes that evaluation guidelines will be followed, at least in terms of the essentials, and this is not always the case.

Different models exist regarding the organisation of the evaluation function ranging from quite centralised set-ups to very decentralised systems. Thus, while some countries (e.g. Canada and Finland) have centralised systems with one Government department or agency coordinating evaluation activities across government as a whole, other countries (e.g. Denmark) have very decentralised approaches. The research suggests that a degree of centralization in the organisation of the evaluation function can be helpful in ensuring that a strategic approach to evaluation is adopted with consistent methods and procedures being used across different Government departments and agencies. Centralised coordination is also helpful in ensuring that evaluation makes a timely input to policymaking and to ensure that learning takes place and is widely shared. Defining the respective roles of the coordinating Governmental entity for evaluation and individual departments is a key issue in any system. Various approaches are examined in the study.

Irrespective of the overall evaluation function set-up (centralised or decentralised), the study suggests that there is a strong argument for individual Government departments to have their own evaluation capacity and institutionalised evaluation know-how. The UK provides a good example of a 'hybrid' model where the role of HM Treasury in providing overall coordination is combined with network of evaluation units across Government departments with a considerable degree of autonomy. The UN and World Bank are also very good examples of how a strong central approach to coordinating evaluation activities through procedural rules, guidelines and technical support can be effectively combined with a decentralised network of evaluation units based in different countries and agencies. Whilst a centralised model facilitates a more strategic and coordinated approach to evaluation, a network of evaluation units helps to ensure that methods and procedures are customised to suit specific circumstances, and that learning and the use of evaluation results are tailored to the needs of particular groups of policy stakeholders.

Capacity-building and networking are needed to help Government officials develop the necessary skills to commission and implement evaluations. In fact, capacity-building on both the 'demand' and 'supply' sides is needed to develop an effective overall evaluation system. Evaluation societies and universities have important roles to play alongside Governments in developing evaluation guidelines and standards (e.g. Canada, UK, USA). Likewise, training is an important requirement to improve evaluation quality and use. But precisely what form evaluation training should take, i.e. through training courses or on-the-job learning, or a combination of these approaches, is very much open to debate. The research also highlights the important role of sector-specific 'centres of excellence' (e.g. Denmark and Sweden) in developing the specialised expertise and evaluation methods needed in different policy domains. The 'What Works Centres' in the UK are good examples of how evaluation results can be adapted to the practical needs of end users in Government and the professionals who put policies into practice.

Capacity building also has a purely methodological aspect, namely the need for an investment in developing evaluation techniques and quality standards so that the studies provide the information required by policymakers. Meta-evaluation and other techniques are needed to pull together the available evidence on policies from a multitude of sources in a timely way, to help distinguish the effects of policy from other factors in explaining the performance of an intervention, and to ensure stakeholder buy-in to evaluations and the results that are produced.

Overall, it can be concluded that there are many experiences highlighted by the research that can guide the development of the building blocks of an evaluation system that is geared up to the needs of policymakers. It is debatable, however, whether it is appropriate to speak of 'best' practices as evaluation system in different countries should be context-specific and supported by a consensus amongst stakeholders on what suits their particular situations and traditions best.

Appendix: List of Interviews and Secondary Sources

List of interviews

Name	Organisation	Position	Study Area
Netherlands			
Oskar Huurdeman Fons van Gessel Michel Bravo	Ministry of Justice and Security		Police effectiveness
Menno Ottens	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy		Climate change
Andre Rodenburg	Ministry for Infrastructure and Water Management		Circular economy
Joost van der Vleuten	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy		Digitalisation
Saskia de Smidt Richard Kemper Klaas Bouman	Ministry of Foreign Affairs		SME internationalisation
Misha Omlo	Ministry of Defence	Senior advisor	Cyber security
Don O'Floinn	Ministry of Justice and Security	Coordinating advisor	Cyber security
Jelmer Puylaert	National Coordinator for Security and Counter-terrorism (NCTV)		Cyber security
Denmark			
Jakob Stourmann Rikke Lyng Storgaard	Oxford Research A/S	Director Internat. Rel. Deputy Director	Evaluation practices in Denmark
Martin Bæksgaard Jakobsen	Danish Evaluation Society (+OR)	Senior Analyst	Evaluation practices in Denmark
Thomas Jørgensen	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Danish Trade Council	Chief consultant	SME internationalisation
Tonny Danielsen	Danish Business Authority	Chief consultant	SME internationalisation
Prof. Thomas Bredgaard	Aalborg University, Research Centre for Evaluation	Head Evaluation Research Centre	Research on evaluation/ public policy
Søren Beltofte Nanna Dalgaard	Agency for Digitisation, Ministry of Finance	Director of Analysis & Policy	Digitalisation Strategy
Finland			
Paul Silfverberg	Finnish Evaluation Society	Independent evaluation consultant	Evaluation practices in Finland
Riitta Oksanen	Ministry for Foreign Affairs	Deputy Director, Development Policy	Evaluation practices in Finland (development)
Sirpa Kekkonen	Prime Minister's Office	Councillor on strategy	Evaluation practices (PMO)
Petri Haltia Tommi Karjalainen,	Ministry of Education and Culture	Ministerial Advisers	Evaluation practices (education)
Juho Korpi	Environment Ministry	Development Director	Evaluation practices (environment)

Name	Organisation	Position	Study Area
Jari Hyvärinen Annu Kotiranta Teppo Tuomikoski Heli Karjalainen	Business Finland	Head Impact assessm's Adviser Senior adviser Senior Director Strategic Support	SME internationalisation
Sweden			
Kaisa Lähteenmäki-Smith	MDI Consultancy (before FI Prime minister's office)	Board member FI Evaluation Society	Evaluation practices in Sweden
Charlotta Eriksson	Ministry of Finance	Project leader Office for Efficiency analysis	Evaluation practices in Sweden
Jukka Teräs	Nordregio research centre	Senior research fellow	Evaluation practices in SE
Gunilla Thorstensson	Tillväxtverket	Project responsible Kickstart project	Digitalisation
Mats Aluntun	Tillväxtverket	Responsible evaluation	Digitalisation
Martin Flack	Swedish Climate Council	Senior Analyst	Climate change
United Kingdom			
Jonathan Breckon	Alliance for Useful Evidence	Director	Evaluation practices in UK
Owen Bellamy	Committee on Climate Change	Senior Analyst	Climate change Emissions Research
Nerys Thomas	College of Policing	Lead, Knowledge, Research and Practice	Police effectiveness
Andy Higgins	Police Foundation	Research Director	Police effectiveness
Dr Nicolás González- Pampillón Gonzalo Nunez Chaim	What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth	Research Officer Research Economist	SME internationalisation
Canada			
Krista Brower	Canadian Evaluation Society National Board	Chairperson	Evaluation practise in Canada
Peter Robertson Christine Minas	Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat	Directors, Results Division	Evaluation practices in Canada
Andrew Lejeune	Edmonton Police Service	Impact & Evaluation Section	Police effectiveness
Cédric Ménard	Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat	Senior Results Policy Analyst	Evaluation practices in Canada
United States			
Diana Epstein	Office of Management and Budget	Evaluation Lead	Evaluation practices in the US
Kathryn Newcomer	George Washington University	Professor of Public Policy & Administration (former AEA president)	Evaluation practices in the US
Tom Archibald	Eastern Evaluation Research Society		Evaluation practices in the US
Jennifer Bellville	Indiana Evaluation Assoc.		Evaluation practices
Dr. Rita Fierro	Fierro Consulting LLC	CEO	Evaluation practices
World Bank			
Estelle Raimondo	IEG (Indep.Evaluation Group), WBG	Evaluation Officer	Evaluation practices in the WB
Jos Vaessen	IEG (Indep.Evaluation Group), WBG	Methods Advisor	Evaluation practices in the WB

Name	Organisation	Position	Study Area
Marelize Gorgens	World Bank	Senior Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist	Evaluation practices in the WB
Edouard Al-Dahdah	World Bank	Senior public sector specialist	Evaluation practices
Ali Halawi	World Bank	Senior P ublic Sector Governance Professional	Evaluation practices
Johannes Zutt	World Bank	Director for Strategy, Results & Risk in OPCS	Evaluation practices
Robert P. Beschel Jr.	Center of Government Governance Global Practice	Global Solutions Lead, Governance	Evaluation practices in the WB
United Nations			
Guy Thijs	International Labour Org.	Director, organisation of evaluation function	Evaluation practices in the UN
Miguel Jimenez Pont	UN International Trade Centre (UNEG)	Head Monitoring & Evaluation Unit	SME Internationalisation

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