


Policy Evaluation

Building Capacity and Infrastructure


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Summary

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- ESRC Strategic Framework
 - National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM)
 - Developing Evaluation Methods
 - Core Competency Framework
 - Joint ESRC-government funding
 - Conclusion

Vision and role under the ESRC Strategic Framework

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- To create a world class UK social science infrastructure that will underpin the delivery of the highest quality social and economic research

Defining research infrastructure

Broad definition which includes:

- Quantitative, qualitative and spatial research data;
- Broader information sources including bibliographic and library holdings;
- Methodological tools and techniques;
- Broader research skills;
- Tools, such as software and computing resources.




National Centre for Research Methods




- Co-ordinating Hub at Southampton.
- A network of research groups (nodes).
- The nodes focus on developing innovative methodological tools and techniques.
- Seven new nodes just been re-commissioned.
- Each conducting **research** and **training** in an area of social science research methods.



Methodological Development to support Policy Evaluation


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- Though a good cross-section of significant research capacity is represented in the Centre, the selection of Nodes through open competition inevitably left gaps in the Centre's programme.
 - ESRC recognises the need for developing methodology for the *empirical evaluation* of policy, especially in the context of *policy trials*.
 - Needs relate both to decision making in government & to advancing the social sciences.
 - It is therefore natural to commit to joint ESRC-government funding support for research in this area.

Methodological Development to support Policy Evaluation


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- RCTs may be viewed as one element within a broad class of empirical methods for policy evaluation.
 - Research into the potential integration of RCTs with alternative methods would be useful to help embed the methodology of RCTs within the methodology of research in the social sciences.
 - Methods of research synthesis.
 - Policy modelling
 - Macro/Micro Level modelling

NATCEN report identified the need for infrastructure to support the use of quantitative evaluation of policy outcomes (QEPO).

Suggested key functions:

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- Champion and promote quantitative evaluation of policy outcomes and raise their profile amongst policy makers and researchers and stimulate demand;
 - Facilitate training and capacity building for a range of stakeholders at all levels, including commissioners, providers and policy makers through both short term measures and long-term focussed intervention;
 - Facilitate the build up of departmental expertise and resources (which are clearly variable) using knowledge transfer;
 - Act as a clearing house for information: about methods or applications by collating and disseminating existing knowledge; and about sources of support available resources both in the UK and beyond;
 - Deliver an advice function which should be a multiple role focussing on when QEPO is appropriate, what methods and techniques can be used and how to implement and manage QEPO projects;

NATCEN Report identified the need for infrastructure to support the use of quantitative evaluation of policy outcomes (QEPO) CONT

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- Provide practical guidance and help with the implementation of QEPO projects, statistical or analytical problems, and reporting and presenting findings in the political arena and the real world;
 - Facilitate greater use of secondary and meta analysis in order to utilise and extend available knowledge about methodology;
 - Enhance standards and provide quality assurance through the collection and dissemination of good practice and the provision of independent reviews (it should not act as a regulator); and
 - Clarify and codify QEPO approaches and help to develop QEPO technology and facilitate leading edge methodological development.


An ESRC/ GSR Policy Evaluation Service?

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Aims:

- Provide a quality assurance function for policy evaluations to ensure that they were fit for purpose.
- Provide technical advice on policy trials to government departments.
- Offer a technical training and development programme for government researchers on policy evaluation to compliment that of academics.
- Act as a champion for the use of robust methods in policy evaluation within the academic and policy communities, and among other key stakeholder groups (e.g policy makers and commissioners of research).
- Offer an interchange scheme to develop a core group of experts within government and academic communities.
- Provide a virtual network between the academic and government research analysis communities.

Core Competencies Framework

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- GSRU are developing a coherent, forward looking programme of professional skills training for government social scientists
 - This will exploit economies of scale, shared learning and increases the quality of, and opportunities for, development.
 - Goal is to develop social scientists within government.
 - ESRC also want to scope out the possibility of an agreed approach being developed and used across the social science community in the UK.

Conclusion

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- Joint recognition that there is a need to:
 - Build capacity in policy evaluation, across both the UK academic and government analytical communities.
 - Further raise the quality of policy evaluations to ensure that policies are based on best evidence.
 - Promote the use of robust methods of policy evaluation across government and the wider academic community.
 - Keen to explore the possibility of a joint Policy Trials Service by working in partnership with Government Departments and others.
 - Service needs to include a methodological research programme in order to support the development of new methods.
 - Build on existing infrastructure of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods.
 - Activity should be broader than just Randomised Control Trials, and include both quantitative and qualitative approaches.