

HEIF evaluation expert advisory group

Minutes of group meeting; 28 September 2021

Attendees

Group:

- Alice Frost (Chair)
- George Bramley
- Tomas Coates Ulrichsen
- Professor Luke Georghiou
- Dr Phil Clare
- Dr Gemma Derrick

In attendance:

- Rosie Lavis (Project officer)
- Michael Clark (Project officer)
- Dr Martin Wain (Technopolis)
- Cristina Rosemberg (Technopolis)

Apologies:

- Dr Efthymia Amanatidou

Item 1: Welcome by the chair and introductions

1. The chair welcomed all attendees and noted that the group would be invited to make important contributions toward the development of the tender specification document.

Item 2: Minutes from previous meeting

2. The minutes from the previous meeting (held on 16 June 2021) were agreed. A point was raised relating to the link between data quality and how funding is allocated.

Item 3: *“Knowledge exchange and place: A review of literature”* – Technopolis report discussion

3. Martin Wain and Cristina Rosemberg from Technopolis presented the findings from their KE and Place literature review to the group
4. It was noted that as the Levelling Up White Paper due to be published soon, the report may want to consider intra-regional spillovers.
5. Technopolis were asked whether they had explored literature that concerned activities positioned to achieve intentional spatial impacts versus the activities where spatial impacts were incidental as a result of the university being in the area. Technopolis noted that the

literature on this was sparse, where it focussed mainly on institutional development.

6. Group members asked if the literature discussed density of HEPs in locations, to which Technopolis replied that this was something which may be worth exploring in a different iteration.

7. The group agreed that the scale and complexity of institutions made it difficult for universities to self-classify and asked if the literature covered transaction costs of engagement. Technopolis responded that it was difficult to find literature on transaction costs.

Item 4: Presentation of tender document

8. The group discussed the introductory section of the tender document, where it was agreed that the tender should downplay reference to logic models from the outset and instead should emphasise the importance of developing a programme theory between RE and evaluators which would then form the basis, and be tested, in the evaluation. This was important to reflect the complexity of the programme and the need to explore theories rather than jump to finite models.

9. The group also suggested that the evaluation should be separated into two clear phases of work:

1. Phase 1 - The design/methodology phase – this will include co-production between the appointed contractors and project staff at Research England (also involving other key contacts e.g., BEIS/DfE)
2. Phase 2 - The delivery phase – delivering the evaluation based on the methodology agreed during the design stage

10. It was noted that the evaluation should consider evolving rationales and examine whether policy changes or changing government priorities over the period that was being evaluated had an impact on HEP behaviour.

11. The group discussed the issue of attribution versus contribution when it comes to the impacts of HEIF funding – and what are least burden approaches particularly for external beneficiaries, agreeing that the suppliers should consider this in the design of the evaluation methodology.

12. The group agreed that the references to the precursor work (SQW report on logic models - along with the Technopolis report on KE and place) should be moved to the 'background to requirement' section, as this currently read as though the evaluation was a continuation of the work, as opposed to helpful background research.

13. The impact of the abolition of HEFCE as part of wider university/research agency landscape change on HEPs was discussed by the group, and whether this should be covered as part of the early design phase when interviewing BEIS, or as part of the

delivery stage when interviewing HEPs.

14. The group agreed that the evaluation should consider the drivers from government policy directives of the last decade and successes and failures of the programme against those including HEP implications, and that programme theory should be used to examine this.
15. Selection criteria (of tenderers) was discussed by the group, with an emphasis placed on giving due regard to responsible research and evaluation.
16. The group discussed what may fall under the scope of the evaluation. One suggestion was to consider that additional knowledge exchange UKRI/RE funding streams can contribute to KE outcomes. The group discussed that it would be helpful to examine the interactions between other knowledge exchange funding streams and HEIF, including RE contributions (and coherence of RE strategy on different funding streams), other public funding and beneficiary contributions.
17. It was noted that it would be valuable for the suppliers to consider a counterfactual as part of the evaluation programme (as example, past TCU analysis has looked at subsets of HEPs as controls).
18. Additionally, group members discussed the possibility of examining what happens to HEPs when they stop receiving HEIF, and what did the loss of HEIF monies mean to HEPs and their KE offering. It was noted that there was evidence on this in the period when a cutoff to HEIF was introduced which has been examined in TCU studies.
19. Finally, the group discussed that there should be a few clear strategic questions which run through the tender from its outset to its end (the questions which the evaluation should attempt to answer in its conclusion), for example:
 - Is the scale of the programme appropriate? How would you measure value for money?