

# **Introducing a Voluntary Evaluator Peer Review (VEPR) initiative for EES and UKES**

## **A. Why have a peer review system for evaluation practitioners?**

In the past decade evaluation associations and societies internationally have been focusing on ways to enhance professionalism in evaluation through the development of competencies frameworks and practice standards. The evaluation community has also debated the pros and cons of a ‘designation’<sup>1</sup> system that can support professional accountability, enhance quality evaluation practice and support individual practitioners’ acquisition of knowledge and skills. Canada was the first evaluation society to implement such a system. However there are a range of difficulties in developing designation systems, given the varied pathways to evaluation work, the diverse roles that evaluation practitioners undertake, and the diversity of cultural and other contexts in which evaluation is practised.

The proposed VEPR adopts a new approach, focusing primarily on professional development through peer review, rather than designation as such. This takes into account the difficulties noted above concerning roles, pathways to the evaluation field and diversity of cultural contexts. The proposed VEPR model is based significantly on professional peer review systems that have been found to be effective within other professions, including the teaching, medical and midwifery professions that also require a strong focus on ethical practice. Each evaluation society can tailor the basic VEPR model to suit the cultural contexts of that society’s members.

## **B. How will the proposed VEPR system work, and how will it benefit members of a sponsoring evaluation society?**

VEPR envisages a review process where members of an evaluation society or association apply to their evaluation society to undergo a structured professional practice review with the assistance of two approved peer reviewers. The reviewer panel will be comprised of senior evaluation practitioners representing a range of evaluation roles - evaluation providers, educators, commissioners, advisors, and so on - so that the VEPR will be relevant to any of those roles, and the review can be undertaken by peers experienced in those evaluation roles. The proposed review process will focus on the applicant identifying selected practice areas for review where they would like to enhance their professional capability. These areas will address the capabilities framework of the relevant society. The proposed process of selecting reviewers for a particular applicant allows for the applicant to have some choice, to ensure that the reviewers are appropriate as well as independent.

VEPR is **not** a test, or something that the applicant might ‘pass’ or ‘fail’. The review process is specifically focused on self-reflection and designed to support applicants to explore their current practice, focusing on skills areas that they want to develop,

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘designation’ is used in this paper to refer to a formally recognised status for a member of a particular profession that indicates a level of skill and accountability.

through a structured discussion with peers they respect. ‘Success’, in this system, occurs when both the applicant and the reviewers consider that significant learning has occurred through the review process. To become an approved VEPR reviewer, the person must have undergone a VEPR review themselves.

A satisfactory review will have two main outcomes. Firstly, the reviewers and applicant work together to compile a report that summarises what the applicant has learned and achieved through the peer review, together with some reflections from all parties on the applicant’s areas for development. This document is the property of the applicant and may be used by them for their own purposes, including sharing with others. Secondly, where the review is concluded to the satisfaction of the applicant and reviewers, the applicant’s name is included in an index on the society’s website, indicating that they have undergone a formal peer review process. Should the peer reviewers conclude that the applicant has not demonstrated an acceptable level of learning from the review process, a development plan will be suggested to the applicant together with an invitation to a further review within 12 months.

Key advantages of the proposed VEPR model are that it:

- Facilitates regular and personalised professional development
- Is entirely voluntary, promoting participation through peer encouragement rather than as a professional imperative or prerequisite of practice
- Combines the objectives of professional learning and accountability to the profession
- Sets up accountability to the profession itself, as well as to the professional body
- Promotes discussion of evaluation practice and standards amongst practitioners.

A further benefit of the VEPR is that it provides a system for evaluation societies and associations to identify capacity and capability gaps and needs across the profession at large. It also provides assurance to commissioners, evaluation stakeholders and participants, and the broader public that evaluation practitioners are engaged in continuing professional development.

### **C. Piloting the VEPR with the EES and UKES**

Over the next few months the EES and UKES will be currently piloting the VEPR concept. If you would like to see how the VEPR concept is developing through the pilot, go to <http://www.europeanevaluation.org/events/ees-conferences-and-events/conferences/evalyear-2015x/vepr-pilot-progress>

If you are interested in volunteering to be part of the pilot, please contact either Pam Oliver for EES [pamo@clear.net.nz](mailto:pamo@clear.net.nz) or Derek Poate for UKES [cdpoate@gmail.com](mailto:cdpoate@gmail.com)