

## Evaluation Activities in the United Kingdom

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### General Summary of Activities

The UK Evaluation Society (UKES; [www.evaluation.org.uk](http://www.evaluation.org.uk)) was founded in 1994 and is composed of over 150 individual and corporate members. Most of these are individual members. UKES hosts an annual conference each year in December and jointly conducts seminars and conferences with other professional organizations. The society also sponsors an e-mail discussion list, Eval Chat, publishes a thrice yearly newsletter, *The Evaluator*, and produces *Evaluation: The International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*.

UKES has five regional networks. Three of these networks, the Scottish Evaluation Network, the London Evaluation Network, and the North West Evaluation Network are established. The other two, the Cymru Evaluation Network (Wales) and the Midlands Evaluation Network are just forming.

The UKES website offers a host of information and links on evaluation topics, including:

- evaluation guidelines for good practice from different national evaluation associations,
- a list of postgraduate courses on evaluation taught throughout the U.K.,
- links to 21 national/regional evaluation society websites,
- an evaluation glossary (including an entry on “chatty bias”)

- a short but wide-ranging bibliography of evaluation books

***Evaluation: The International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice***

The journal *Evaluation* is published quarterly by Sage. Through the end of October it is available free online at [evi.sagepub.com](http://evi.sagepub.com). I reviewed the last two years of *Evaluation* (the January 2003 issue through the July 2004 issue) and categorized each article according to Lori Wingate's adaptation of Michael Scriven's analogy for understanding disciplines. Wingate identified four categories of focus for journal articles—practice, methods, theory, metatheory—that I used below and one category—history—that I eliminated because no articles fit the description.

Practice issues dominated the 37 articles from the last two years (48.6 percent). The practice articles mainly dealt with the related issues of evaluation use and stakeholder participation. An article by Taut & Brauns (2003) examines social and psychological explanations for resistance to evaluation and offers strategies for overcoming evaluation resistance.

Many articles I categorized in the practice area concerned evaluation in different fields—healthcare, bidding for public services, welfare policy. These articles did not discuss different evaluation approaches or models, so I did not categorize them under theory.

Over one-fifth of the articles (21.6 percent) concerned theory. Three of these eight articles concerned theory-based evaluations—with two generally favorable and one generally unfavorable toward the approach—while other evaluation approaches addressed included qualitative, desk screening and implementation evaluation. Hearn, Lawler and Dowswell (2003) addressed the dominance of the positivist approach to most healthcare evaluation and argued that an inclusion of

“nonpositivist, qualitative, and process-oriented evaluation” would improve our understanding of health programs and policies.

I categorized six articles (16.2 percent) as methods articles. Interestingly, all of these articles focused on quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. Sverdrup (2003) discussed the use of time-series databases of complaints data to evaluate laws and regulations.

The metatheory category included five articles (13.5 percent) across 2003-2004. Virtanen and Uusikylä (2004) address the “paradigm crisis” in evaluation that stems from evaluators’ different assumptions about causality. These authors describe four alternative models (which they term ideal models) for evaluation considering: 1) how explicitly causality has been taken into account, and 2) how well the model enhances public-sector accountability.

The model reflecting both a strong link between causality and the evaluation design and an emphasis on public accountability is termed “transparent democracy”. “Scientific inquiry” signifies a strong link between the evaluation design and causality without an emphasis on accountability. The “explorative inquiry” model is characterized by a high degree of emphasis on accountability and a difficulty in distinguishing causal effects. Finally, an evaluation using the “symbolic evaluation” model serves a symbolic purpose rather than a “true pursuit of learning.” (89)

## References

Hearn, J., Lawler, J., & Dowswell, G. (2003) Qualitative evaluations, combined methods and key challenges: General lessons from the qualitative evaluation of community intervention in stroke rehabilitation. *Evaluation*. 9: 30-54.

Sverdrup, S. (2003). Towards an evaluation of the effects of laws: Utilizing time-series data of complaints. *Evaluation*. 9: 325-339.

Taut, S., & Brauns, D. (2003). Resistance to evaluation: A psychological perspective. *Evaluation*. 9: 247-264.

Virtanen, P., & Uusikylä, P. (2004) Exploring the missing links between cause and effect: A conceptual framework for understanding micro–macro conversions in programme evaluation. *Evaluation*. 10: 77-91.