
Evaluation tips

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The following sets of tables will help guide you through the process of undertaking an evaluation. They act as a series of questions which you should consider when developing an evaluation plan.

1.1 Developing an evaluation plan¹

An evaluation plan will help you

- identify the intended participants or audience for the evaluation (stakeholder analysis)
- define your evaluation questions
- focus on defining the complexity or scale of the proposed evaluation study
- take into account the associated time and resource (both financial and human) implications.

There are five principle questions to consider:

1. What are you evaluating?
2. What are your reasons for carrying out the evaluation?
3. What is the context within which your evaluation takes place?
4. Who is the evaluation for?
5. What evaluation questions are you going to ask?

1. What are you evaluating?

It is possible to evaluate both processes and products, depending on your focus of interest. You may want to evaluate the success of your e-learning development against the project plan, alternatively you might be interested in understanding the barriers and enablers to implementation. It is important to be clear about the focus of your evaluation as this will influence the data collection used and the findings. Provide a brief description of what your evaluation will focus on.

2. What are your reasons for carrying out the evaluation?

The table below lists a range of reasons why you might want to carry out an evaluation. Consider these in relation to your e-learning development and decide which are appropriate. For example you may be focusing on 'selecting' as part of your e-learning development might be about choosing and integrating a commercial VLE with other systems in the institutions. Alternatively you may want to understand the issues surrounding e-learning development in which case the nature of your evaluation will be more 'explorative'. A common focus for evaluation is trying to assess value for money and cost effectiveness.

¹ This is taken from an online Evaluation Toolkit (<http://www.ltss.bris.ac.uk/jcalt/>).

Reasons	Examples and/or perceived benefits
Selecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selecting a VLE or e-learning resource for example
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checking that a project is running on time and to budget
Validating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrating a project has met its objectives • Gathering evidence to demonstrate that the e-learning development has resulted in improvements of some kind – for example in administrative processes, or access to institutional information
Arguing/Justifying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documenting the reasons for choosing a particular system or approach • Presenting a case for replacing traditional processes
Improving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring how a new e-learning system leads to improvements or efficiency gains of some kind • Usability testing of an e-learning to improve the interface
Researching/Exploring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaining a better understanding of the way in which users use e-learning • Identifying ways in which e-learning is changing the way people do things eg students work collaboratively • Exploring the issues around the e-learning development and identifying barriers and enablers

3. Context of the evaluation

This allows you to consider the resources and expertise which you have available to carry out your evaluation and timescales and any constraints.

<p>Reasons and benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the reasons for carrying out your evaluation? • What are the benefits of doing your evaluation? • What will you know at the end that you don't know now? • What will this enable you to do?
<p>Timeframe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When are you planning to undertake this work and when does it need to be completed?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long will the evaluation work take approximately?
Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a group of users associated with this? • If there are users associated with the evaluation, give details of the number and their level/background experience. • Who will be doing the evaluation? • What resources have you got available? • Is there a budget to support the evaluation activities?
Scale <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the scale of your evaluation? • Is it self contained or integrated with other activities?
Wider issues and implications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there anyone that you want to persuade? • Who else wants you (or doesn't want you) to do this evaluation? • How will the information you discover change the way you work?

4. Who are you doing the evaluation for?

This section will help you to define key stakeholders in your evaluation. Although 'stakeholders' are sometimes defined as the groups who have the ability to influence the situation, here the term is used to refer to anyone who has a stake in the evaluation process or the activity/implementation.

The table below lists a set of potential stakeholders and some ideas for what their concerns might be. The list of stakeholders and of concerns is not intended to be authoritative or exhaustive; users should adapt the list to their own local circumstances, adding in-groups and/or concerns as appropriate.

- Select the stakeholders who are important for your evaluation (or add your own stakeholders).
- Select appropriate concerns or add to the list with your own examples.
- Remember you are invariably one of the stakeholders and you should include this in your choice. You will need to decide which of the categories you fit into.
- We recommend that you limit your choice to a maximum of two or three stakeholders only and would also suggest that you allocate one of these as the primary focus for the evaluation.
- Try and also identify a maximum of three concerns from your list which you can work with in the next stage of the process

Evaluation stakeholder analysis	
Stakeholder	Suggested concerns
Student	Students experience of using e-learning The relevance to their learning The ability to find information of relevance and use to them to support their learning and help them manage their modules
Developer	Ease/difficulty of access User interface, subject content Bugs

Lecturer	Time need to become familiar with new e-learning tools and resources Ways in which e-learning improves administrative processes Ways in which e-learning can be used to support their teaching Ways in which e-learning will result in timesaving
Manager	Efficiency Cost-benefits Student retention Pass rates Better communication mechanism across the institution
Support staff	Whether the e-learning will require additional support, maintenance, etc. How well the development is integrated with other services
Funder	Transferability Increasing knowledge Quality of the learning experience Value for money Input to policy Whether objectives have been met
Researcher	Does it advance a theory or support a particular hypothesis Might this lead to valid, publishable material Does this uncover a new body or knowledge Will this give a better understanding of the learning process and/or experience

5. Devising the right evaluation question

The questions prioritised as the focus for your evaluation can have a large impact on the design of the study. Additionally, the different stakeholder groups will see certain types of questions and the resultant data collected as more persuasive than others. For these reasons, it is important to be aware of the range of different types of questions that could be asked. The table below gives you some examples of the types of questions you might consider asking.

Exploratory questions

Think about a question with a stem using words and phrases such as, 'what', 'when', 'for whom', 'under which circumstances', and so on. Stems for this type of question include:

- What are the perceived benefits of..
- When is the best time to...
- Who likes...
- Under which circumstances do students...

Comparative questions

Consider questions looking at alternative resources or using another 'type' of student, or involving some other related situation. Stems for this type of question include:

- Compare your evaluation with
 - ...what happened last year
 - ... the support mechanisms students current have to support their courses
 - ...how lecturers find and use institutional information at the moment
 -a related e-learning development elsewhere
 - ...with some specific benchmark data

Measurement questions

Consider your question in terms of scores, tests or performance. Could look at cost, time, number of occurrences, number of errors, number of people satisfying certain conditions, and so on. Stems for this type of question include:

- How many...
- How much...
- How long...
- How often...
- What percentage...

Negative or opposite-type questions

Construct a question so that it forms some sort of 'opposite' to the concern. So, for example, if the concern is about maximising benefits, think about limiting disadvantages; if it is about widening opportunities, think about possible exclusion; if it is about changing things, think about understanding what the current situation is. Stems for this type of question include:

- ...worst than...
- ...problems..
- ...fails....
- ...disadvantages...
- ...limits...