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Effective Use of VLEs: Evaluating your Practice

- Feedback Sources
- Personal Development

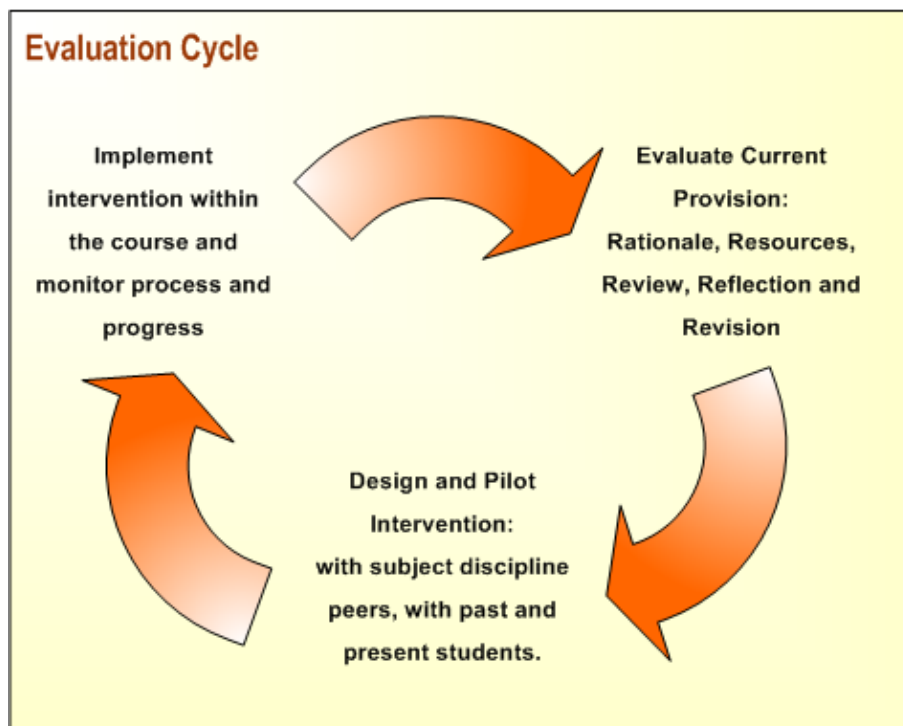
Evaluating Your Practice

This section is about gathering feedback on your own practice, with an emphasis on formative evaluation, looking to improve ongoing teaching provision and learning support, rather than summative evaluation, providing an overall judgement of value or quality at the conclusion of a module.

Some of the reasons why you evaluate your practice are:

- For personal development.
- To ensure that your teaching is effective from the students' viewpoint.
- Quality audit (department / institution).

The evaluation cycle below illustrates a continuous process, each turn invoking five 'Rs' – Rationale, Resources, Review, Reflection and Revision.



Rationale – purpose(s) of the item (e.g. material / conference / assessment), models of why this might be the way to achieve it(them),

Resources – (people, materials, technologies) available to support it

Review – tools and instruments for monitoring/investigating the processes/outcomes. These should adapt over time to fit need, and themselves stay under review so that they do not become mechanical, missing possibly valuable information.

Reflection – making sure that this part of the process involves sharing and exchange of thoughts and ideas with all participants

Revision – large or small-scale changes required to the item(s), addressing points of concern, and keeping the overall picture (rationale) in mind – and updating it.

You should build evaluation into your practice as a continuous or periodic event rather than as an add-on or something to conduct at the end of a module delivery.

It is important to develop an evaluation plan, and this will help you consider:

- what are you evaluating?
- why are you evaluating?
- when will the evaluation take place?
- who is it for?
- what type of questions will you ask?

Answering these questions will guide your methods and question design which will lead to meaningful and useful answers that can be easily analysed.

A guide to help you produce an evaluation plan is available from [Interact issue 30](#)

Feedback sources

Sources of information for your evaluation could include self-reflection, peer review, external consultation and, most importantly, student activity or performance and what they can tell you from their own experience of your provision.

Student feedback can come from many sources, including

- exams, assignments and projects,
- formal staff-student meetings,
- focus groups,
- informal class discussions,
- interviews,
- questionnaires and checklists,
- attendance records,
- notes, diaries, log books, portfolios,
- observation records of class activity,
- diagnostic tests.

'The evaluation cookbook' and other evaluation resources on the JISC infoNet website give 'recipes' and guidance on positive and negative aspects of these methods.

The section 'design of sustainable and scalable courses' gives more detail about using questionnaires to elicit feedback from your students .

Examples of the type of questions that you may wish to ask your students are shown below.

Do you (as a tutor):

- Encourage student-tutor contact and interaction?
- Encourage student cooperation?
- Encourage active learning?
- Give prompt feedback?
- Emphasise time on task?
- Communicate high expectations?
- Respect diverse talents and ways of learning?
- Let students know what to expect?
- Make effective use of technology?

You will also need to ask questions concerning the use of the VLE and the adequacy of the training that your students received.

Personal development

Phil Race has written an excellent article on evaluation for professional development 'Evidencing Reflection: putting the 'w' into reflection'. The article is available on line from <http://www.escalate.ac.uk/resources/reflection/index.html>

Peer observation

The purpose of peer observation is to share excellence in teaching and teaching practice. A peer observation scheme can be used to promote individual reflective practice and a culture of collaborative reflective practice. The observation is confidential between the 'buddies' with confirmation that the observation has taken place being lodged in a central place (department or institution). Such a scheme should be supportive in nature, not a fault flagging process. The School of Informatics at Northumbria University introduced [a peer observation scheme](#) in 1999; this was superseded by a [university-wide scheme](#) introduced a few years later.

Another example of a peer observation system is that from Queen Margaret University College. Details are available from <http://www.qmuc.ac.uk/cap/Guidelines/Page.asp?ID=PeerObs1>

Although these schemes were originally developed for face-to-face teaching, they can easily be tailored to apply to use of a VLE in teaching and learning. A 'buddy system' is also an excellent way of starting to share teaching material.

Reflective practice should not be a 'once a semester' activity; it should be ongoing. Keeping a reflective journal or portfolio can assist in the continuous nature of reflection. A peer observation scheme together with individual and collective reflective practice can lead to scholarship of teaching. Visit [the Higher Education Academy website](#) for more information on this topic.

Resources

Guidelines on peer observation are available from the Escalate website at <http://www.escalate.ac.uk/resources/peerobservation/>

'The evaluation cookbook'
<http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/Resources/evalkit/toolkit-database/ev019/view>

Evaluation resources on the JISC infoNet website
<http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/Resources/evalkit/resource-eval-methods/view>

HE Academy resources page
<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/979.htm>

Collecting and using student feedback – a guide to good practice. John Brennan, Ruth Williams.
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources.asp?process=full_recordid=352

HE Academy: Peer observation of teaching
<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/988.htm>

e-learning centre has a page of links relevant to evaluating online practice
<http://www.e-learningcentre.co.uk/eclipse/Resources/effective.htm>

'Interact' is published twice a year by the Learning Technology Support Service at The University of Bristol. 'Interact' Issue 30 is devoted to evaluating e-learning and includes an article on evaluating the the costs and benefits of e-learning.

Approaches to evaluating the effect of ICT on student learning. Rob Phillips and Tony Gilding. An LTSN leaflet ELN015 (Rich Text Format (RTF)) available from the HE Academy Website This guide is aimed at teaching staff and project managers involved in developing ICT applications. 'We will focus on the hardest part – planning an evaluation study. Once a plan is in place, people with social science research skills can be employed to do much of the leg-work of the study.'

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