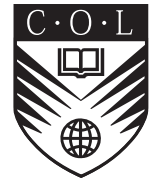


COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING



# PREST

Practitioner Research and  
Evaluation Skills Training in  
Open and Distance Learning

Programme evaluation and its  
role in quality assurance

HANDBOOK

**B4**

The PREST training resources aim to help open and distance learning practitioners develop and extend their research and evaluation skills. They can be used on a self-study basis or by training providers. The resources consist of two sets of materials: a six-module foundation course in research and evaluation skills and six handbooks in specific research areas of ODL. There is an accompanying user guide. A full list appears on the back cover.

The print-based materials are freely downloadable from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) website ([www.col.org/prest](http://www.col.org/prest)). Providers wishing to print and bind copies can apply for camera-ready copy which includes colour covers ([info@col.org](mailto:info@col.org)). They were developed by the International Research Foundation for Open Learning ([www.irfol.ac.uk](http://www.irfol.ac.uk)) on behalf of COL.

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### Handbook B4: Programme evaluation and its role in quality assurance

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# Programme evaluation and its role in quality assurance

## Handbook overview

Welcome to the handbook on *Programme Evaluation and its role in Quality Assurance*! My name is Merridy Wilson-Strydom, and I will be taking you through this handbook. I have been involved in various evaluation and applied research projects over the past five years and I hope this will make me a good guide for this topic. During the writing of this handbook I have worked together with Neil Butcher who you may have 'met' in the handbook on *Using Programme Monitoring in Research and Evaluation*. In case you have not yet worked through that handbook let me briefly introduce you. Neil has spent the last ten years of his life researching distance education programmes and institutions for the South African Institute for Distance Education. As such he has much experience to contribute to this handbook.

After working through this handbook I hope that you will be able to:

- ▶ develop a process and the necessary tools to evaluate a distance education programme and demonstrate how this will lead to an improved educational experience for learners in that programme.

Because of my background and experience of doing evaluation in the South African context I will be drawing heavily on South African examples in this handbook. Of course, I will also make use of the best of international literature that I have managed to find on programme evaluation. In this way, I am confident that together we will be able to go on a learning journey that you will find enriching and interesting.

## Learning outcomes

This handbook has been structured to help you to be able to do the following things by the time you are finished:

- 1 define the purpose of an evaluation process and prioritise the key questions that the evaluation will need to answer
- 2 select appropriate methods for gathering the necessary data for a good quality and practically useful evaluation of a distance education programme
- 3 identify the characteristics of effective evaluation processes and factors that are most likely to impede successful implementation of an evaluation

- 4 define the reporting requirements of an effective evaluation process
- 5 describe the relationships between programme evaluation and quality assurance
- 6 plan an evaluation study.

At the end of the handbook, I will encourage you to return to this page to see whether or not the handbook has lived up to its promises.

You will find that several of the research concepts and methods that are relevant in the context of evaluation have also been covered in other core modules. Where this is the case, we will briefly summarise the issues rather than covering them in detail again.

## Handbook organisation

The handbook is structured into this introduction and four units, as follows.

Unit 1: What is programme evaluation and why is it important? (4 hrs)

Unit 2: Defining the purpose of an evaluation (6 hrs)

Unit 3: Designing and implementing an effective evaluation (6 hrs)

Unit 4: Evaluation and quality assurance, ensuring the impact of evaluation (4 hrs)

(These times exclude any project work that you choose to do.)

Each unit is made up of the following components:

- ▶ an introductory paragraph or two that provide an overview of the unit, its focus and outcomes
- ▶ one or more activities for you to engage in, such as readings to complete and analyse, questions to answer, or problems to solve
- ▶ a commentary on these responses that takes you deeper into the topic by providing new information and suggesting further reading
- ▶ a unit summary
- ▶ feedback on your responses to the questions or problems posed in each activity.

You will need about 20 hours to work through the four units of this handbook. The time required for the project tasks is really up to you, since it depends on the scope of your project and the number of people involved in it. A time limit is suggested for each step of the project process, but this can only be a guide. All the times set out in the schedule that follows are suggestions, but Units 1 to 4 have been designed on the assumption that handbook users will be able to complete the core work (without the project) in about 20 hours.

## How to use the materials

I have tried not to assume that all readers will want to use these materials in the same way. There are three broad options open to you depending on your time availability, current and future involvement in distance education research and evaluation, and access to a distance education programmes to use as a practical example.

- 1 You could simply read through the handbook, and its accompanying reading *Resources File*. If you do this, you will get a good introduction to the topic of the handbook, and to the various issues contained in the list of outcomes above. Of course, without completing any of the activities, you will not achieve the same depth of experience and insight that will come from completing them. So, you are advised only to follow this route if you need a quick overview of key issues in using programme monitoring in research and evaluation.
- 2 You could read through the handbook and its accompanying reading *Resources File*, and only complete the **activities**. These are tasks that you can complete in the comfort of your own home or office, and will not require you to do any field research. For this handbook, some of the activities will be centred on two examples of evaluation studies. Depending on your time constraints you might like to select one of the studies that you best identify with, or that best suits your research needs, to complete the activities.

The benefit of these activities is primarily that they will give you good opportunities to think through the key issues in the handbook, and formulate your own opinions before reading the material of the handbook units. As we all know, many learners simply skip over these activities, and go straight on to reading the content of the material. This is no problem if you do not want to do this extra work. However, these activities are designed to get you to reflect on issues and formulate your own opinions, rather than just relying on the handbook to tell you the 'right' answer. If you do choose to complete these activities, I strongly recommend that you complete them at the exact point at which they appear in the text, as their placement is quite deliberate. If you read ahead, and then complete these activities, you will lose many of their intended educational benefits.

- 3 You could read through the handbook and its accompanying resources, complete the activities, and work through the **project tasks**. These tasks will require you to go into the field to do research work with ODL practitioners. Obviously, those who complete these project tasks are going to gain the most educationally out of this handbook, but these benefits come at the expense of your time. There is no point in attempting these tasks unless you are serious about pursuing them throughout the handbook. I advise you to complete these project tasks if you:

- ▶ are keen to pursue a career in distance education research and evaluation (or are already pursuing such a career path)
- ▶ are beginning to conduct your own research and evaluation, and feel that the project tasks provide a good framework for supporting you in this work
- ▶ can establish a good working relationship with a distance education programme manager somewhere in your area
- ▶ have the time to do the field research thoroughly
- ▶ are completing this handbook as part of a structured learning experience.

More information on the project tasks is presented below, so you might like to read the next section before making a final decision on whether or not to do them.

## The project tasks

You would be forgiven if you are now somewhat concerned about the project tasks, as I think I might have made them sound a little intimidating. However, it is in doing these tasks that you will really derive the greatest benefit from this handbook. I can introduce ideas and concepts, and suggest ways for you to think carefully about them, but it is really only when you go out into the field and see what is happening in practice that these ideas will come alive. So, if you have the time and you are serious about research and evaluation, I would strongly encourage you to find ways to do these project tasks.

The project tasks will require you to find an existing ODL programme with which you can work. Over the course of the handbook the project tasks will assist you to:

- ▶ develop an evaluation framework and implementation plan for an evaluation of a programme of your choice
- ▶ decide on and develop appropriate methods for gathering the data needed for your evaluation
- ▶ describe how this evaluation research can lead to an improvement in the quality of the programme with which you are working
- ▶ summarise and describe the quality assurance systems of the programme chosen
- ▶ use a checklist for reviewing the impact of your evaluation.

This is challenging, but I can assure you that it will be worth the effort. If you complete the project, you will have a full evaluation plan by the end of the handbook. You could then use this plan as a proposal to raise funds to be able to conduct the evaluation or, if possible, immediately begin conducting an evaluation of your programme.

To do the project tasks, therefore, you will need to consider one of the following options:

- ▶ Are you involved in an ODL programme yourself? If so, you could use that programme to complete the project tasks.
- ▶ Do you know anyone who is running or helping to run an ODL programme? Will he or she be willing to let you evaluate the programme? If so, then you could ask that person to let you work with her.
- ▶ If you don't personally know someone who is involved in ODL, do you know of an organisation or institution near where you are living that is involved in delivering distance education programmes? If so, then you might approach that institution to help you with your project tasks.
- ▶ If there is no ODL delivery near you, then do you have access to the Internet? If so, then you might try to find someone running a distance education programme in another part of the world. You might then approach someone online and ask him or her to supply you some information via e-mail. A good starting point would be the web site of the Commonwealth of Learning – [www.col.org](http://www.col.org) – that has connections to distance education providers all over the world.

I hope you will strongly consider doing the project tasks. It should be a fascinating exercise, and will add enormously to the experience of this handbook.

## The Handbook as a workbook

This book is designed for you to use as a workbook, particularly with respect to completing the activities. Space has been provided within this workbook for you to store your answers, and I encourage you to use this space. Many of you might find it very difficult to write in a book, but it is an ideal way to store your responses to the questions posed and to form a record of your own thoughts and learning process. The reading that accompanies this handbook has been divided into essential reading which must be done to achieve the learning outcomes set out above, optional reading that is linked to activities and allows you to extend your learning experience, and further reading, reading that you might like to follow up in your own time if a particular issue interests you.

## Food for thought

Another device that I have used is called 'food for thought'. Here, I have tried to insert some questions to get you to think more about what we are discussing. With 'food for thought' questions, you are encouraged at least to think briefly about your responses to the questions posed before proceeding. If you want to, though, you might also consider keep some paper handy to jot down your thoughts.

## Evaluation examples

Instead of using the pen portrait characters that you are probably familiar with from other handbooks and core modules, in this handbook we will draw on two evaluation studies as examples to illustrate the key points being made.

Each of these evaluations has been included in your *Resources File* and Unit 1 has an activity during which you will have the opportunity to review them and to choose one that is particularly relevant to you to use for later activities. I know that this might look like a lot of reading to be done – and it is – but I do recommend that you try to set aside the time to do this as it will enhance your learning experience throughout this handbook. The two evaluation studies are briefly summarised below.

### Evaluation 1

Fentiman, A. 2003 *SOMDEL: Somali Distance Education Literacy Programme (Macallinka Raddiya)*, report prepared for Africa Educational Trust (AET) by the International Research Foundation for Open Learning (IRFOL), Cambridge, UK: IRFOL

(This will be referred to as *Evaluation 1* in the rest of this handbook.)

In March 2002 the Africa Educational Trust together with the BBC World Trust launched a new and innovative distance education literacy programme in Somaliland and Somalia. This programme is called *SOMDEL – the Somali Distance Education Literacy Programme – Life Skills Approach*. The programme focuses on the provision of literacy, numeracy and life skills training to out-of-school children and adults. *SOMDEL* involves the use of radio, print and face-to-face teaching. In order to assess the effectiveness of this programme the International Research Foundation for Open Learning was commissioned to undertake an external evaluation.

The evaluation used the logical framework of the programme as the basis on which achievements were measured. Various research methods were employed to gather the evaluation data, including examination and scrutiny of statistical records and documents, focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, case studies, surveys and participant observation.

### Evaluation 2

Magagula, C. 2002 *Evaluation report of the Course for Distance Education Policy-makers in Southern Africa*, Vancouver: Commonwealth of Learning

(This will be referred to as *Evaluation 2* in the rest of this handbook.)

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) contracted the evaluator to evaluate an online course for policy-makers who work in ODL institutions in sub-Saharan Africa. This course set out to provide participants with:

- ▶ a conceptual platform and in-depth introduction to open learning and distance education concepts
- ▶ an understanding of the policy development process
- ▶ an understanding of the implications of different policy choices in open learning and distance education.

The evaluator was asked to determine whether the online course met the participants' needs and also whether the delivery strategies (online delivery supported by a one-week face-to-face workshop) were effective. To answer these questions the evaluator used questionnaires, interviews, and analysis of documents, e-mail messages and learning activities.

## Resources

The following resources are used in this *handbook*:

| Resource   | Name when referred to in our text | Location  |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|
| Fentiman, A. 2003 <i>SOMDEL: Somali Distance Education Literacy Programme (Macallinka Raddiya)</i> , report prepared for Africa Educational Trust (AET) by the International Research Foundation for Open Learning (IRFOL), Cambridge: IRFOL | <i>Evaluation 1</i>               | Resources File  |
| Magagula, C. 2002 <i>Evaluation report of the Course for Distance Education Policy-makers in Southern Africa</i> , Vancouver: Commonwealth of Learning   | <i>Evaluation 2</i>               | Resources File  |
| Kachroo, K. 1999 'Distance education programmes at college and university levels in Jammu region: an evaluative study' <i>Indian Journal of Open Learning</i> 8, 3: 293-305  | <i>Kachroo</i>                    | Resources File  |
| Mugridge, I. 1999 'Quality assurance in open and distance learning' <i>Indian Journal of Open Learning</i> 8, 3: 213-220   | <i>Mugridge</i>                   | Resources File  |
| Moore, M. 1999 'Editorial – Monitoring and evaluation' <i>The American Journal of Distance Education</i> 13, 2: 1-5  | <i>Moore</i>                      | Resources File  |
| Whyte, A. 2000 <i>Assessing community telecentres: guidelines for researchers</i> , Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, at <a href="http://www.eldis.org/static/DOC7867.htm">http://www.eldis.org/static/DOC7867.htm</a>      | <i>Whyte</i>                      | <a href="http://www.eldis.org/static/DOC7867.htm">http://www.eldis.org/static/DOC7867.htm</a> |

These resources are included as an appendix at the end of the publication.

## Status of the readings

In order to achieve the learning objectives outlined above you will need to make sure to read the essential reading. We will refer to these evaluation studies throughout this handbook. The optional readings will allow you to further develop your understanding of the concepts presented here. If possible, I would recommend that you try to read these. The further readings have been provided to assist you to explore issues that you find particularly interesting or useful for your work.

### Essential Reading

Fentiman, A. 2003 *SOMDEL: Somali Distance Education Literacy Programme (Macallinka Raddiya)*, report prepared for Africa Educational Trust (AET) by the International Research Foundation for Open Learning (IRFOL), Cambridge: IRFOL

Kachroo, K. 1999 'Distance education programmes at college and university levels in Jammu region: an evaluative study' *Indian Journal of Open Learning* 8, 3: 293-305

Magagula, C. 2002 *Evaluation report of the Course for Distance Education Policy-makers in Southern Africa*, Vancouver: Commonwealth of Learning

### Optional reading

Mugridge, I. 1999. Quality Assurance in Open and Distance Learning. *Indian Journal of Open Learning*, 8(3).

### Further reading

Moore, M. 1999 'Editorial – Monitoring and evaluation' *The American Journal of Distance Education* 13, 2: 1-5

Rathore, H. and Schuemer, R. (eds.) 1998 'Evaluation concepts and practice in selected distance education institutions', *ZIFF paper* 108, Hagen: Central Institute for Distance Education Research, FernUniversität, at <http://www.fernuni-hagen.de/ZIFF/pref108.htm>

Whyte, A. 2000 *Assessing community telecentres: guidelines for researchers*, Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, at [http://web.idrc.ca/en/ev-28301-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://web.idrc.ca/en/ev-28301-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html)

I hope you are looking forward to working through this handbook. The journey begins by considering what programme evaluation is and why this form of applied social research is useful in the context of distance education.

# What is programme evaluation and why is it important?

UNIT  
1

## Unit overview

This unit focuses on helping you to develop a clear understanding of what programme evaluation is and why it could be useful for you. We are going to begin by looking at what programme evaluation is. To do this, we will consider a series of definitions of evaluation and then look in more detail at what the concept of a programme includes. Since this handbook is part of a series focused on research skills we will briefly look at evaluation as a form of research. The unit ends with a consideration of the relationship between programme monitoring and evaluation as well as why evaluation is useful for distance education programmes.

Many of the concepts that you will learn here, although covered in the context of distance education, can in fact be used for designing evaluations of a wide range of social interventions or programmes. So, I hope this unit (and the whole handbook in fact) will be a useful research tool in many different research and evaluation contexts that you might find yourself in.

In this unit you will be encouraged to read the two evaluation studies briefly described in the introduction. Each of these studies has been chosen to highlight specific issues that we will cover as we progress.

### Reading – Resources file



You might like to read the executive summaries of *Evaluation 1* and *Evaluation 2* in the *Resources File* before beginning the handbook to gain a sense of what they cover. You should not spend more than about 30 minutes doing this. As a reminder, the two studies are:

- ▶ Fentiman, A. 2003 *SOMDEL: Somali Distance Education Literacy Programme (Macallinka Raddiya)*, report prepared for Africa Educational Trust (AET) by the International Research Foundation for Open Learning (IRFOL), Cambridge, UK: IRFOL. This is called *Evaluation 1* in this handbook.
- ▶ Magagula, C. 2002 *Evaluation report of the Course for Distance Education Policy-makers in Southern Africa*, Vancouver: Commonwealth of Learning. This is called *Evaluation 2* in this handbook.



'Evaluation is the collection, analysis and interpretation of information about any aspect of a programme of education or training, as part of a recognised process of judging its effectiveness, its efficiency and any other outcomes it may have' (Thorpe 1993).

'Evaluation is the systematic process of collecting, analysing and interpreting information that enables judgements to be made about the value of a programme (of learning) and its effectiveness and/or efficiency in achieving a set of outcomes' (Dolley 1994).

We could perhaps sum up the above three definitions quite simply using the words of Francis Rubin here. Since we seem to have been only talking about evaluation in the definitions above, you might be wondering if the definition of **programme** in the concept of programme evaluation is simply assumed?

Evaluation means 'to understand the value of something in order to do things better' (Rubin 1995).

Well, the answer could be yes or no! Very often the term programme is used loosely to refer to any social intervention that is to be evaluated. This could then be, for example, a community-sewing project, a national literacy campaign, or a set of courses within a distance education institution. It is however useful, and important, to look at the concept of a programme. You will see as we continue, that understanding what a programme is and consists of, means that you are one step closer to designing your evaluation plan without even being aware that you are doing so!

Babbie and Mouton (2001) present a useful conceptual model or map of a programme (Figure 1).

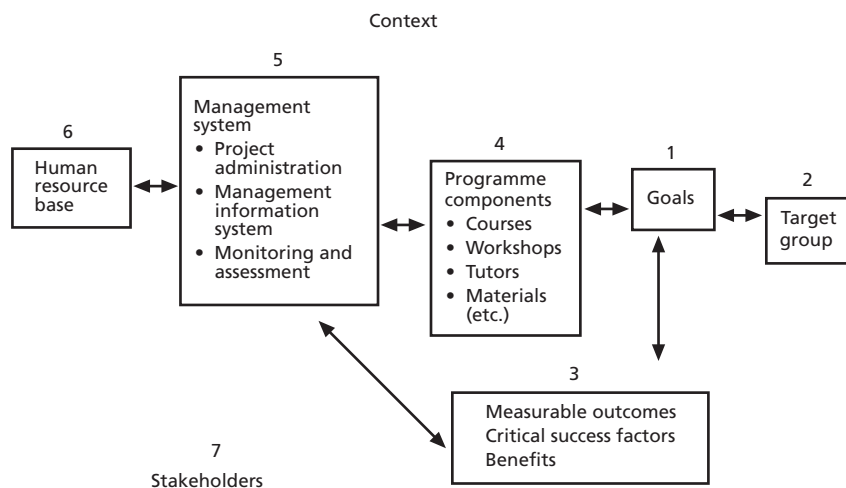


Figure 1 A conceptual map of a programme  
Source: Babbie, E. & Mouton, J. 2001, p.343.

This diagram shows us what a programme 'looks' like. The details of each of the boxes will differ depending on the specific programme. The example here is relevant to an educational programme. This diagram highlights the core



about which variety of fruit to buy when standing in the local fruit and vegetable shop. You would look at how fresh each of the varieties is, think about what you need the fruit for, who will be eating the fruit, which is the best value for money etc. Here you are conducting an informal, elementary evaluation, assessing which variety of fruit will best meet your needs.

But, is this research?

I am sure you would agree with me that this is not research, and again Patton's words can guide us. He tells us that evaluation research must involve systematic and careful data collection and analysis in order to answer a specific research question. This means that all the requirements for conducting good research that you have been considering throughout these handbooks should be applied in the context of conducting an evaluation. While we are not able to cover all these details in this handbook, we will highlight the research requirements as we go.

The question of whether evaluation is different from research is one that is debated in the literature and among evaluation theorists and practitioners. Some argue that there is little or no difference between research and evaluation, and so use the term evaluation research. Others argue that in fact evaluation is a different type of activity from research, even though both make use of similar methods.

Understanding this debate is important because your stance will affect the way that you approach the design and implementation of an evaluation. What do you think? Read through the extract below that outlines some possible similarities and differences between research and evaluation.

## Reading



### Similarities between research and evaluation

#### Same methods, same skills

Researchers and evaluators use the same methods of social science inquiry and require the same sorts of skills, qualities and principles in the practitioners conducting an inquiry.

#### Evaluation and research share the same domain

Evaluation is part of the domain of educational research and is not isolated from general developments and issues in educational research, its methodology and theoretical issues.

#### Rational re-construction versus reality: a shared challenge

Both evaluation and research face similar challenges in choosing between description and prescription (the real and the ideal) in reporting their findings. Reports are often rational re-constructions of the (sometimes different) realities of the research process, presented to fit norms of 'ideal' practice (as described in textbooks) rather than accounts of the realities themselves.

### **Increasing influence of governments and sponsors brings convergence**

Resources for educational research and large-scale evaluations are increasingly determined by the demands of governments or funders who seek solutions to centrally defined topics or questions which are problem-oriented and policy-related. One result of this may be to make research more like evaluation in having focus on practical outcomes and specific problems.

### **Differences between research and evaluation**

#### **Selecting questions or problems for investigation**

A researcher is probably more free to select his or her own research questions and to seek answers to them in whatever way he or she sees as appropriate professionally. An evaluator often is commissioned to investigate a pre-determined question or topic. Some practitioners view the difference between research and evaluation as lying in the purpose of the two activities and the kinds of question asked. While researchers may seek generalisation in their findings, and ask questions relating to general propositions, evaluators focus more on specific activities in particular contexts (e.g., 'Was this particular programme cost-effective for this institution using these media?').

#### **A different relationship between the research question and methodology used**

Research questions are likely to be shaped by the problem-solving or inquiry techniques or methods available and considered sound, so an initial research question may be amended in the light of what it is most possible to measure or answer. Learning to formulate answerable research questions is part of the training of researchers. By contrast, the evaluator may have the research questions provided to him or her and change in these may not be negotiable.

#### **A different balance between disciplinary rigour and the rapid or timely production of usable findings for decision-makers**

Evaluators may choose (if reluctantly sometimes) a different balance from 'pure' researchers in applying the critical canons of research practice because of the need to provide rapid findings and answers to practical problems. They may have to compromise in order to provide findings or answers that are 'good enough' for the purpose in hand while holding to good practice as far as possible in the conduct of the inquiry. Evaluations are often heavily constrained by time and the realities of field conditions. While researchers and evaluators, working on the same question, might carry out the inquiry in similar ways on some aspects, they might also carry it out differently in others.

#### **The need to provide reports for non-specialist audiences**

The forms of reporting in evaluation have to meet the needs of a range of non-specialist users or stakeholders, rather than a narrower group and the more specialist interests of a research community.

#### **A more political activity than research**

Evaluation is inescapably a political activity because of the vested interests of the various stakeholders and the different meanings they place on the evaluation activity and its findings. Since evaluations point towards practical action, different stakeholders are likely to be more immediately affected by the findings than by a 'purer' research study.

#### **A broader set of competences and skills required**

Evaluators often need to be competent in a wide range of methods and techniques, especially if working alone, whereas researchers may prefer, or are somewhat more likely to specialise in one or other approach (quantitative or qualitative). Where researchers combine methods of research, one approach tends to lead and the other supports (they are not generally used in equal measure).

Robinson 2001, pp. 5-7

So, to summarise the point here – evaluation is a specific form of research that should follow the same overall guidelines and protocols as any other research process. However, for various reasons listed above, an evaluation project is also different from a research project. As an evaluator you need to be clear on both these similarities and differences.

Evaluations are usually applied research, conducted for someone or some organisation and involve making some form of value judgements about the programme in question. In other words, evaluations should always have a clearly defined purpose and target audience. Very often, evaluations have implications for resource decisions, most commonly funding decisions, and so evaluation research can be more sensitive than other forms of research.

## The relationship between programme monitoring and evaluation

You may or may not have worked through the handbook on programme monitoring, so just in case, here are the definitions of monitoring presented in that handbook.

*'Monitoring is the continuous assessment of the intervention and its environment with regard to the planned objectives, results, activities, and means. It takes place at all levels of management and uses both formal reporting and informal communications. Monitoring enables a stakeholder to review progress and to propose action to be taken in order to achieve the objectives. Monitoring identifies actual or potential successes or failures as early as possible and facilitates timely adjustments to the operations'*

(Ministry for Foreign Affairs 1998).

*'Monitoring: recording and tracking the progress of a programme while it is running, with a view to judging whether a plan is on course and its objectives are on the way to being achieved. Information collected for monitoring purposes is also useful as information for evaluation'* (Dolley 1994).

### Food for thought

Given these definitions of monitoring, how do you think programme monitoring processes relate to programme evaluation?

## Programme monitoring in ODL

Programme monitoring refers to the process of continually tracking how a programme is being run. For an ODL programme, this includes, for example, tracking student enrolment, submission of assignments, results of assignments, tutors' participation etc. Monitoring should also be taking place at all levels of a programme. For example, a lecturer would monitor the progress of her class of students; the course coordinator would monitor progress of all students in a particular course as well as the lecturers and tutors etc.

Evaluation, however, is specifically about making a **judgement** about the quality of a programme. This may be a judgement to determine whether a

In the previous section we considered the following quotation:

*'When one examines and judges accomplishments and effectiveness, one is engaged in evaluation. When this examination of effectiveness is conducted systematically and empirically through careful data collection and thoughtful analysis, one is engaged in evaluation research'* (Patton 1990).

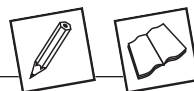
When talking about evaluation of distance education programmes, programme monitoring is one of the central means of systematic data collection. So, programme monitoring is one of the **tools** for use in programme evaluation. A good programme monitoring system should provide the researcher with much of the data needed when conducting an evaluation. The challenge is to identify what information to look for in order to answer your specific evaluation question(s). Deciding on which information to gather will be a topic that runs throughout this handbook. You might also like to have a look at the handbook *Using Programme Monitoring in Research and Evaluation*.

## Why should distance education practitioners conduct evaluations?

So far we have considered what programme evaluation is, how it relates to research more broadly and also the role that programme monitoring plays in evaluation.

But why should you be interested in conducting evaluations?

### Activity 3 1 hour



You should use either of the two evaluation reports, *Evaluation 1* or *2*, in the *Resources File* for this activity.

Note down your response to the following questions as you read through the full report. (Hint: The purpose of the evaluation is usually stated early on in the report).

- 1 What is the stated purpose of the evaluation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2 How is this evaluation useful for the distance education programme in question?

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►*

One of the conclusions to draw from these examples is that in most cases evaluations are a tool for decision-making, and for assessing and promoting the quality of a programme or institution. While evaluations provide findings that can help programme planners make decisions, it is also important to note that this does not necessarily make decision-making easier. Sometimes evaluation findings will recommend that very difficult decisions be made, for example that a programme is not working and should be discontinued.

Evaluations have an important role to play in quality assurance processes. Evaluations are about making judgements about quality and value of a programme. We will look in much more detail at quality assurance in Unit 4. For now, it is just important that we make this link between programme evaluation and quality assurance.

## Unit summary

This unit is titled *What is programme evaluation and why is it important?*. We began by looking at definitions of programme evaluation, and this section has highlighted for you some of the purposes of evaluation. In the context of ODL programmes, programme evaluation is important to support decision-making and to enhance the quality of the programme in question.

To summarise, in this unit we:

- ▶ defined the concept of programme evaluation
- ▶ considered evaluation as a specific and applied form of research
- ▶ noted that programme monitoring is an important data gathering tool for programme evaluation
- ▶ began to establish the links between programme evaluation and between and quality assurance.

### Project task



It is now time to begin to think about your project for this handbook.

- 1 First, establish a working relationship with a distance education programme that you would be interested in evaluating.
- 2 Then draw a conceptual map (see Figure 1 on page 11) of the programme that you have chosen to evaluate. You will probably find it easiest to begin with Box 1 and then work through each box numerically.

You may need to approach the leader of the programme you have chosen for documentation or perhaps a brief interview to find the information that you will need to help you to develop your specific model.

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### Feedback to selected activities



## Feedback to Activity 2

At a first glance, the double arrows tell us that each of the parts making up a programme are inter-related and have an effect on each other. Following the numbers above each block, we see a direct relationship between goals and the target group. This is an important point, since a programme is usually conceptualised and implemented to meet the needs of a specific target group. Who the target group is will differ from programme to programme as will the goals. A good and well-defined programme would operationalise these goals into measurable indicators of success. However, you will see as you work with programmes that many do not reach this point, goals remain vague and one is not sure whether they have been achieved or not. This is one point at which programme evaluation is of central importance. We will return to this issue in later units.

In order to achieve the goals of the programme several components will be needed. Box 4 refers to the mechanisms and means of implementation used to achieve the goals of the programme, which, in this example, are different ways of delivering an educational programme. In order to be able to implement the programme, a management and a human resource base will be

needed. In the context of a distance education institution this will include institutional management structures, educators, tutors, materials developers, administrators etc. These are not the only people involved in a programme; there are also various other stakeholders. Stakeholders are the people or organisations who have any interest, direct or indirect, in the success of the programme. In a distance education setting learners are an important group of stakeholders. Finally, all of the parts making up a programme exist in context. There are several levels of context that might influence a programme. For example, a distance education programme exists in the context of the department and institution providing it, as well as in a local, national or international context. When designing an evaluation it is important to keep all of these contexts in mind, as they could influence the findings of your evaluation.

A programme evaluation, depending on its purpose, will consider all or some of these components. You will see later that one approach to writing an evaluation plan is to work out appropriate research question(s) for each of the parts making up a programme.

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### Feedback to Activity 3

You will probably have identified several purposes and various ways in which the reports would be useful to the organisation. These might include:

#### Purpose

- ▶ to analyse the effectiveness of the programme including its reach of the target audience
- ▶ to examine the impact of the programme
- ▶ to decide whether a funder's money has been well spent
- ▶ to explore the strengths and weaknesses of the distance education approach used
- ▶ to make recommendations for changes to the programme.

#### Useful because

- ▶ it provides a thorough appraisal of the whole programme by an external agent
  - ▶ it informs the quality assurance process.
-



# Evaluation conceptualisation: defining the purpose of an evaluation



## Unit overview

The first unit of this handbook focused on setting out definitions and clarifying some important issues in the field of programme evaluation and how this relates to ensuring quality within distance education. In this and the next unit you will work through some concepts and approaches that underlie programme evaluation. In this unit we will be concentrating on understanding the different purposes of evaluations, how we ensure that the evaluation is useful for those it is being conducted for, and also, how we decide on what questions to ask when focusing our evaluation study. Each of these is important for planning an evaluation.

## Unit outcomes

When you have worked through this unit, you should be able to:

- 1 define the purposes and types of evaluation
- 2 state the difference and relationship between formative and summative evaluation
- 3 identify the target audience of an evaluation
- 4 formulate key evaluation questions
- 5 describe why consultation is important when conducting an evaluation.

## Purposes and types of evaluation

We ended Unit 1 noting the importance of evaluation in supporting efforts to ensure quality in ODL programmes. Here we will look in more detail at some of the reasons why people conduct evaluations, i.e. the purpose of the evaluation. Understanding this is central for designing and conducting good evaluations. We will then explore how the purpose of an evaluation shapes how the evaluation is designed and conducted.

**Activity 1** 15 mins



List at least three reasons why someone might want to conduct an evaluation.

1

2

3

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►*

## The main purposes of evaluations

People working in the field of programme evaluation have attempted to summarise this wide range of reasons into categories so that it is easier to write about and discuss evaluation purposes. While there is always some difference between the approaches adopted by different authors there is also a general acceptance of the main purposes for which evaluations are conducted. Although we look at only two here, many different taxonomies of evaluation have been proposed in the literature.

Babbie and Mouton (2001) use the work of Michael Patton to define three main purposes of evaluations as:

- 1 to make judgements (judgement-orientated)
- 2 to make improvements (improvement-orientated)
- 3 to generate knowledge (knowledge-orientated).

### Orientations of evaluations

- 1 judgement
- 2 improvement
- 3 knowledge

Similarly but with one addition, Francis Rubin (1995) defines four categories:

- 1 to improve performance
- 2 to make choices and decisions

3 to learn lessons

4 to increase accountability.

We will look in more detail at Babbie and Mouton's three categories. But before we do, we should note that the last of Rubin's points – to increase accountability is also an important purpose of evaluation, especially in the context of quality assurance. Evaluation is one means of assessing whether people and institutions do what they have been assigned to do, and so provides a means of checking staff performance, as people will have to provide answers for their actions during an evaluation process. As we noted in Unit 1, for these kinds of reasons evaluations can sometimes be challenging to conduct, and in such cases evaluators are rarely liked by everyone! Some approaches to evaluation have explicitly sought to address this issue. For example participatory evaluation seeks to involve programme participants in all parts of the evaluation and approaches evaluation more as learning opportunity than an opportunity for making judgements.

To return to our purposes of evaluation – we will look briefly at each of the three purposes defined above. This will also provide us with an opportunity to look at the distinction between formative and summative evaluation, which has become a widely accepted distinction within evaluation methodology.

## Judgement-oriented evaluations

Think of a situation in which you might need to conduct an evaluation of a programme that has provided teachers with computer training to assess whether they are now able to use computers and whether this has improved their teaching. In this instance you would be conducting a judgement-oriented evaluation. This category of evaluation research includes those studies that set out to determine the worth, value or success of a programme.

But, how do you know if the teachers' teaching has improved? Central to all evaluations that set out to make judgements is the formulation of criteria against which to judge the success of the programme.

Think back to Unit 1, where we looked at the structure of a programme. Do you remember that we noted that a good programme would have clearly defined goals and that those goals would have been translated into measurable outcomes or critical success factors? We also noted that, often, programmes do not have clear goals and measurable outcomes. Often, it is only when evaluations begin that goals are made explicit and measurable outcomes defined. A core step in conducting a judgement-oriented evaluation is to define these criteria and how they will be measured.

Since we are measuring whether a programme meets specified criteria, then we must be conducting the evaluation after the programme has been implemented or towards the end of implementation, for example, at the end of a newly introduced distance education course. This is where we meet up with the concept of summative evaluation.

## Summative evaluations

**Summative evaluation** is an evaluation that takes place to make judgements about the overall success or failure of a programme, and is often related to decisions about whether the programme should be continued or not. Summative evaluation usually takes place towards the end of a programme or after implementation.

Funders often use this kind of evaluation to test whether the programme they have funded has achieved the outcomes it was supposed to. The answer to this question may then determine whether further funding is granted or not. This kind of evaluation is also conducted to identify the lessons that can be learned from the experience and applied to future projects or programmes.

## Improvement-orientated evaluations

As the name suggests, improvement-oriented evaluations are concerned with improving the programme while it is being implemented rather than judging how successful it has been during implementation or after completion. This kind of evaluation is usually called a **formative evaluation**.

Here the evaluation helps to 'form' the programme by providing a means of assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the programme, looking at how implementation takes place, considers the response of programme participants etc. The aim here is to identify problems as they occur so that they can be quickly corrected. Sometimes more substantial changes of approach or adjustment of plans may be needed to improve the programme.

## Knowledge-orientated evaluations

Judgement and improvement-orientated evaluations are carried out in order to provide direct input into a specific programme or to assess whether or not the programme is successful. In other words, both forms of evaluation have an applied focus. In contrast, **knowledge-oriented evaluations** are conducted to improve our understanding, to help build theory and sometimes to inform policy-making processes.

For example, you might evaluate a range of distance education programmes to assess which approach led to the best learning outcomes, the results of which could inform the planning of future programmes.

This purpose for evaluation is much less common than the two described above and you are probably more likely to make use of formative and summative evaluations, or a combination of these, in your own evaluation work.

### Summative evaluation

*Summative evaluation* is an evaluation that takes place to make judgements about the overall success or failure of a programme.

### Formative evaluation

*Formative evaluation* is concerned with improving a programme while it is being implemented.

### Knowledge-orientated evaluations

- ▶ improve our understanding
- ▶ build theory
- ▶ inform policy-making

## Balancing formative and summative evaluation

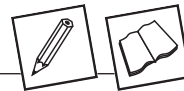
We have defined summative evaluation as evaluation that is usually conducted towards the end of a programme with the purpose of judging its success or effectiveness. Formative evaluation in contrast was defined as evaluation conducted during a programme for the purpose of improving it. From these definitions you might have concluded that these two forms of evaluation stand in opposition to each other; that the different kinds of evaluation are defined by purpose and point in programme development at which they are conducted.

Rather, in practice these categories overlap. Summative evaluation can be conducted during a programme to measure achievement of specific objectives at a point in time. Simultaneously, the evaluator may also be using formative evaluation to evaluate and improve programme processes. These different kinds of evaluations complement each other and using a combination of both is likely to ensure a more thorough evaluation study. Each type serves a specific purpose in the evaluation of a programme. Although complementary, planning for formative and summative evaluations usually get done at different times and may even be conducted by different evaluators depending on the specific programme and circumstances.

### Knowledge-generating evaluations

An example of *knowledge-generating* evaluation is included in the *Resources File* – see *Kachbroo*. In this study the authors evaluated a range of distance learning higher education programmes in order to make recommendations for successful implementation of distance education programmes at college and university levels in the Jammu region. The evaluations are used to generate knowledge about implementing distance higher education programmes in a general sense, rather than making judgements about or improving a specific programme.

### Activity 2 30 mins



This activity is based on whichever of the two evaluation examples, *Evaluations 1* or *2* in the *Resources File*, you have chosen to work on. It will help you think about the extent to which a given evaluation is formative, summative, or a combination of both.

- 1 Is this a formative or summative evaluation, or a combination? Explain briefly why you came to this conclusion.

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►*

## Identifying an evaluation's target audience

Evaluations are usually applied research – except in the case of knowledge-oriented evaluations briefly described above. It follows that this applied research should be useful to somebody or some organisation. When designing an evaluation you need to clarify who the target audience is. This will depend

to some extent on who asked you to conduct the evaluation and the type of evaluation being conducted – and what the evaluation report will be used for:

In both of our evaluation examples, we have an evaluation consultant conducting an evaluation of an ODL programme. In each case the funders of the programme commissioned the evaluation and, as such, are its main target audience. The programme implementers would also be target audiences since they would be interested in how effective their distance education programme was and would like to know which areas should be improved. Others who may wish to use similar approaches, or perhaps replicate a programme in another context, would also be interested in the evaluation findings. Because of the range of audiences the evaluation will need to consider the politics of the situation. For example, the needs and interests of funders and project implementers may not be the same, and may in fact be contradictory if the funders are considering a withdrawal of funding based on the evaluation results. Both of these examples highlight for us the fact that evaluation studies and the report thereof, most often have a range of target audiences.

When designing your evaluation and when writing your evaluation report you should ask yourself the following questions:

- ▶ Is the audience(s) for the evaluation clearly specified?
- ▶ Does the evaluation address the particular concerns of the main target audience? This is not an easy question to answer. One way of arriving at an answer is through a process of consultation, which we will address below.
- ▶ How should the evaluation report be written so that it is appropriate and accessible for the target audiences?

You might like to look at the *Reporting on research and evaluation to influence and support change* module, which deals in more detail with the construction of reports and dissemination strategies.

### Food for thought

Think back to the institution you have chosen for your project tasks.

Now think about how you might begin to answer these questions in that context.

You will return to this below when you go back to your project work.

## Formulating key questions

The core module, Planning research and evaluation, has covered how to develop research questions, and also the importance of this for the overall success of the research project being conducted. For a successful evaluation, the clear formulation of your key question(s) is fundamental. At this point it is useful to recall the point made by Kumar (1999 p. 7):

*'A research problem is like the foundation of a building. The type and design of the building is dependent upon the foundation. If the foundation is well designed and strong, you can expect the building to be also. The research problem serves as the foundation of a research study: if it is well formulated you can expect a good study to follow.'*

The same principles that you covered for research questions in general also apply to evaluation research questions. In addition, the purpose and type of evaluation being conducted will inform your decision about the key question(s).

**Evaluation types** are a slightly different, although related, distinction to that we made above between different kinds of **purposes** for evaluations. Within each of the purpose categories it is possible to conduct different types of evaluations. We will again draw on Babbie and Mouton (2001) in presenting this section. These authors draw on the four types of evaluation proposed by Posavac and Carery (1992) although it is important to note that different authors classify these types of evaluation in other ways too.

### Type 1: Evaluation of need

Here you would be interested in evaluating the **needs** of an identified target group. Often this is related to the provision of a specific service. For example, you may need to evaluate whether students taking part in your distance education programme need additional peer support or not, before implementing a new peer-support programme. This type of evaluation can also be called a needs assessment.

#### Question examples

- ▶ What training do primary teachers need on the new school curriculum?
- ▶ What income-generating activities do women in rural communities want to learn about?
- ▶ What kind of childcare information do young parents in rural areas need?

### Type 2: Evaluation of process

In this case the evaluation would focus on **the design and implementation of a programme**. For example, you may need to evaluate how well your institution's current administration system works with respect to student registration, assignment submission and return of marks and examinations. You would most likely be interested in understanding the processes followed in order to assess whether this is the most effective system or whether improvements are needed.

#### Question examples

- ▶ Is the programme being implemented as designed?
- ▶ Does the programme serve the target population?
- ▶ Are the necessary administrative and management procedures in place for the programme to run effectively?
- ▶ Do the materials reach the rural village to coincide with the supporting radio broadcasts?

### Type 3: Evaluation of outcome

Outcome evaluation is one of the most common forms of evaluation. It assesses **the effects of the programme**. This is usually done by comparing the effects with the goals and measurable outcomes defined at the outset. To assess outcome an evaluator should try to collect baseline data that reflects the situation before the programme was implemented. By collecting the data after and/or during the programme implementation, the evaluator can then assess whether there have been any changes due to the programme. When considering programme outcomes or effects the evaluator usually looks at both intended and unintended effects. Evaluators are usually interested in proving that some form of positive change has occurred as a result of the programme. To do this, it must be established that some change or effect has occurred, and also that this is a result of the programme - and not other external factor(s).

It is also important that we distinguish between outcomes and outputs. These are terms that you have probably seen used in a variety of ways. An outcome is the end result or effect of a programme, while an output is a product of a programme. For example, in the SOMDEL evaluation example, the programme aims to achieve the outcome of providing literacy, numeracy and life skills for out-of-school children and adults in Somalia and Somaliland. In striving to achieve this outcome, the programme includes several outputs, for example, print materials, radio broadcasts, and face-to-face teaching sessions.

#### Question examples

- ▶ To what extent have intended outcomes been achieved?
- ▶ To what extent have literacy levels been improved?
- ▶ What unintended outcomes have been achieved?
- ▶ Has the programme achieved the specified goals?

### Type 4: Evaluation of efficiency

In this kind of evaluation – **efficiency** – the emphasis is on whether the programme has achieved its outcomes in the most efficient and cost effective manner. In this case the costs of the programme (financial and others such as time), are measured against the benefits of the programme.

For example, a pilot project might test the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in supporting distance education in a developing country context. It might involve setting up a centre where 20 learners have access to their own computer, and a common television and video recorder to support a specific distance education course. The project might show that learning outcomes improved remarkably due to the introduction of ICTs. One might then be tempted to conclude that this programme was a success and should be replicated in other environments. However, an evaluation of efficiency may show that the costs of providing this

technology per learner would more than double standard learning costs. In this case it would be necessary to assess whether the improved learning outcomes justifies this additional cost and also whether funds are available to implement this on a larger scale.

### Question examples

- ▶ Were funds spent for the intended purpose?
- ▶ Did the programme achieve success at an acceptable cost?
- ▶ How do the outcomes of this programme compare to those of a similar programme of comparable cost?

The range of terminologies used in this area can be confusing. For this reason, some useful explanations are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1 Some terminology in the evaluation of efficiency**

| Term               | Explanation  |
|--------------------|--|
| Cost benefit       | The relationship between the costs of a programme and its benefits, in terms of the actual or estimated monetary value. This contrasts with cost-effectiveness measurement, which may measure benefits in terms of different (non-monetary) kinds of outcomes. Cost benefit results are shown as the ratio of costs to benefits, or as a figure representing the net benefit (or net loss). The technique allows comparisons to be made between programmes and policies that have quite different outcomes. Costs of input are typically easier to measure than benefits of outcomes. 'Cost benefit' is often used loosely in everyday language to refer to the relationship between the cost (not necessarily financial) of doing something and the benefits (of whatever kind) gained. |
| Cost-effectiveness | The relationship between the achievement of objectives of a programme, course or project and their costs. A cost-effective programme is one that can be shown to provide either the maximum gains for a given level of resources or a given level of benefits at the lowest cost. Cost-effectiveness analysis is most easily applied when there is one clearly identifiable outcome measure or gain (this is not always the case with education projects).   |
| Cost efficiency    | An education programme is cost efficient if its outputs cost less per unit of input, when compared with alternatives.  |
| Efficiency         | The measurement of the resources used (costs) to achieve stated goals; the measurement or ratio of output to input. To be efficient, a programme or institution needs to demonstrate that good use is being made of the resources available. Efficiency is not an absolute measure but a judgement about relative worth.   |
| Effectiveness      | The extent to which an education or training programme or intervention can demonstrate that its goals (explicit ones) have been met.   |

Source: Robinson (forthcoming)

### Summary

In this section we have looked at the evaluation of need, the evaluation of process, the evaluation of outcome and the evaluation of efficiency. As with the distinction between formative and summative evaluation, there is likely to be overlap between these types of evaluation within any one evaluation study.



There is an approach to evaluation called 'participatory evaluation' that is based on the principle of consultation at all levels. As noted above, this approach to evaluation focuses on evaluation as a learning process rather than a process of making judgements. Programme participants make the judgements, rather than the evaluator. The role of the evaluator in participatory evaluation is as a facilitator rather than as the 'expert researcher'. The evaluator facilitates an evaluation process, but the focus of the evaluation, how it takes place, when it takes place, the research questions and so on, are determined by the programme participants rather than the evaluator or funder.

It is particularly important for researchers or evaluators to be aware of organisational dynamics and structures, as often the person responsible for negotiating a contract or requesting that an evaluation be conducted is not directly involved in the micro management of the programme being evaluated. It may also be the case that the evaluation is not welcomed by the programme providers or by the institution. Throughout the evaluation, expectations of both the evaluator and programme participants need to be monitored and managed. This may include returning to the focus of the evaluation and reviewing whether this still meets expectations, and if not, what should be done about this. How this is done will depend on various factors, including the kind of programme being evaluated, the relationship of the evaluator to the programme (e.g. an employee or contracted in from outside), the scope of the evaluation, the timeframe etc. For large programmes and complex evaluations with a range of stakeholders, it might be useful to set up a steering group to ensure consultation. It will be important that this group is representative of the range of stakeholders in the programme. There will be different kinds of evaluation participants or stakeholders. Some will be the evaluation funders, the programme funders, those responsible for the planning and management of the programme, those who write distance education materials, the learners, the assessors etc.

Equally important to managing expectations from the outset of evaluation research, is to establish agreement between researchers and evaluation participants about how data will be collected and analysed.

In this regard, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest the following kinds of questions for both parties to consider:

- ▶ What are the time and human resource requirements involved?
- ▶ What data collection techniques will be used?
- ▶ Will participants volunteer to take part in the research?
- ▶ Will participants and their information/responses be anonymous?
- ▶ Who will plan and manage the study?
- ▶ Who will keep notes, collect and analyse data?

- ▶ Who will review the reports produced?
- ▶ In what ways will researchers and participants benefit from the evaluation research?

This section has highlighted the range of issues that the evaluator will need to face in the course of an evaluation. It is essential that you negotiate these issues and relationships with care and from the outset of the evaluation research process.

## Unit summary

To summarise, in this unit we covered a lot of ground! We:

- ▶ defined different purposes for and types of evaluations
- ▶ explored the difference between formative and summative evaluation as well as the relationship between them
- ▶ highlighted the importance of question formulation
- ▶ formulated evaluation questions
- ▶ discussed the importance of defining the target audiences of an evaluation
- ▶ discussed the importance of consultation for successful evaluations.

### Project task



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So far in your project you should have:

- ▶ identified a distance education programme to work with
- ▶ drawn a sketch of the programme so you have a clear idea of what you are working with.

You are now ready to begin the preparation of your evaluation plan. Use the following questions to help you do this:

- 1 What is the purpose of my evaluation?
  - 2 What are my research question(s)?
  - 3 What type of evaluation will I be conducting?
  - 4 Who is the target audience of my evaluation?
  - 5 Who will it be important to consult in designing this evaluation? (You might like to arrange a time to briefly meet with one or some of the people to ask what they think about the evaluation you are planning.)
-

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### Feedback to selected activities



### Feedback to Activity 1

You might have included some of the following reasons for evaluations in your list:

- ▶ for effective management and planning,
  - ▶ to measure progress and/or effectiveness
  - ▶ to learn lessons for future programmes
  - ▶ because funders made evaluation a condition for giving money
  - ▶ as part of a research project
  - ▶ because your institution has a policy about conducting evaluations regularly even though staff aren't always clear about why evaluations are done or how the results will be used!
-

## Feedback to Activity 2

We thought that these evaluations could be classified as follows:

### 1 Somali distance education literacy programme

This evaluation aimed to *'analyse the effectiveness of the SOMDEL programme in terms of reaching its target beneficiaries; to examine the impact of this three-way approach which incorporates printed materials, radio broadcasts and face-to-face instruction; to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this approach with a variety of stakeholders; and to make recommendations of suggestions for future programmes'* (p. 8).

A look at the research design of this study will show that the research was conducted towards the end of the first set of broadcasts for this programme. We see that some of the aims of the evaluation were to assess the impact and effectiveness of the programmes, i.e. summative evaluation approach. The evaluation also had the purpose of learning lessons from this first set of broadcasts for improving the future implementation of the programme. This aspect of the evaluation can be described as formative evaluation.

### 2 Course for distance education policy makers in Southern Africa

The aim here was to *'determine whether the online course met course participants' needs and whether the delivery strategies were efficient and effective'* (p. 5).

Thus, this study is about making judgements about the programme and as such is an example of a summative evaluation. However, a closer look at the methodology used will show that formative evaluation data was also used in carrying out the summative evaluation.

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## Feedback to Activity 3

### Evaluation Example One: SOMDEL

This example is an interesting one because instead of formulating research questions, the evaluation has formulated aims and then makes use of the project logframe as the framework of the evaluation. In the introduction to this evaluation report we read the following:

*The specific aims of the evaluation were to analyse the effectiveness of the SOMDEL programme in terms of reaching its target beneficiaries; to examine the impact of this three-way approach which incorporates printed materials, radio broadcasts and face-to-face instruction; to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this approach with a variety of stakeholders; and to make recommendations or suggestions for future programmes* (p. 8).

Based on these aims we can say that this evaluation is an outcome/impact evaluation and also an evaluation of process. Although no specific research

questions are noted, do you see that we could reformulate these aims as research questions? Consider the following possible research questions:

1. Did the SOMDEL programme reach those it was intended to reach?  
[Evaluation of process]
2. What was the impact of the three-way approach adopted? [Evaluation of outcome]
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the SOMDEL programme?  
[Evaluation of process]

### Evaluation Example Two: Course for Distance Education Policy Makers

On page 8 of the evaluation report we find the terms of reference for this study. We see that, with a focus on online delivery and the face-to-face workshop, the evaluator was requested

*to determine whether the online course met the participants' needs (i.e. of increasing their understanding and knowledge of policy development processes) and whether the delivery strategies were efficient and effective.*

On the basis of this we can conclude that this evaluation is both an evaluation of process and also an evaluation of efficiency. The research questions are indicated in the quotation. They are:

1. Did the online course meet the participants' needs?
  2. Were the delivery strategies efficient and effective?
-



# Designing and implementing an effective evaluation



## Unit overview

In this unit you will consider how to move from the research design phase that you reached in Unit 2 to the practical issues of choosing research methods, collecting data, analysing data and writing up the final evaluation report. Although we will refer to different kinds of research methods in the context of conducting an evaluation, we will not cover these in detail here since you can read about research methods in other handbooks and modules in the PREST series and other Research Methodology reference books.. In addition, the *Resources File* includes more detailed information.

We will also, very briefly, consider some important issues to keep in mind when budgeting for an evaluation. After completing this unit, you would have worked through all the steps required for planning a good evaluation study. By the end of this unit, if you decided to do the project tasks, you should also have your own evaluation plan or proposal.

## Unit outcomes

When you have worked through this unit, you should be able to:

- 1 list the planning questions you need to answer when designing an evaluation
- 2 define evaluation outputs and specify activities using the Logical Framework approach
- 3 choose evaluation research methods
- 4 describe the logistical issues that need to be taken into account when conducting an evaluation
- 5 outline the budgeting issues for evaluations.

## Evaluation planning, forming a conceptual framework

In Unit 2 we spent some time thinking through some of the theoretical and research design principles important for conducting an evaluation.

To summarise much of what has already been covered and some of what is yet to come in this unit, let us have a look at a set of key questions that Rubin (1995 p. 30) notes should inform the development of an evaluation design.

Overall evaluation planning questions to answer:

- ▶ What is the purpose of the evaluation and for whom is it being conducted?
- ▶ When in the project/programme lifecycle will the evaluation be conducted?
- ▶ What are the scope, objectives and key questions of the evaluation?
- ▶ Who holds responsibility for managing the evaluation, collecting data, writing reports etc?
- ▶ How will the evaluation be conducted, what procedures will be followed?
- ▶ What financial resources, human resources, time and other resources will be needed?
- ▶ How will the evaluation findings be presented to different audiences?
- ▶ How will follow-up take place?

In addition to these questions that help with planning evaluation research, establishing a conceptual framework for an evaluation also requires that the evaluator understands the programme to be evaluated, how it is designed and what its aims are. This information might be obtained from documentation and/or talking to those directly involved in the programme. In many cases there will also be a theoretical framework underlying the design programme and how it is implemented. For example, if the aim of the programme has been to introduce new teaching and learning approaches within an existing distance education programme, you will find a range of literature and other resources that address the issues of teaching and learning for distance education. Perhaps the programme you are evaluating focuses on the use of computers to enhance distance education. You may find a range of literature on the use of technology in distance education that could provide helpful background for your evaluation. These resources can be used to help you design your study.

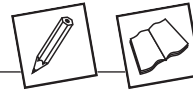
In some instances, establishing the conceptual basis would also include exploring the context within which the specific programme takes place. For example, if the programme were seeking to bring current teaching and learning methods in line with new national distance education policy, then it would be important for the evaluator to understand the policy.

Not only will articulating the conceptual framework of the evaluation provide useful input when developing your research questions, but you may also be able to raise some generic issues out of your findings, instead of programme specific findings only. For example, you might be able to make some more



Once you have defined your deliverables, you then need to think what specific research activities are required in order to produce each of these. There are many different ways of doing this, depending on the requirements of the specific evaluation, your research background, and your approach to research. This process has been explored in depth in the core modules. Here we will look at two methods of evaluation planning.

**Activity 2** 1 hr 30 m



Use *Evaluation 2* from your *Resources File* for this activity.

- 1 Turn to page 96 of *Evaluation 2*.
- 2 Read the terms of reference given to the evaluator.
- 3 Using only these terms of reference and, imagining that you are the evaluator of this project, complete the following table:

| List the deliverables for this evaluation | List some of the research activities needed |
|---|---|
|   |   |

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►

## Log-frame approach

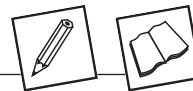
In the last activity you saw a detailed example of one way of planning your evaluation study. Since in this series you have been introduced to the logical framework (often simply called a log frame) for planning research, we will work through a log frame example here. A log frame can be used to plan a research project or the implementation of a programme. Since this format outlines the outputs and activities of the programme (note: not the outputs and activities of the evaluation) it can be used as the conceptual framework against which to evaluate how successful the programme is.

Although people often find log frames time consuming and sometimes even intimidating to complete, they are a useful planning tool. In general, log frames summarise in a standard format:

- ▶ what a programme aims to achieve
- ▶ how the goals will be achieved
- ▶ what is needed to ensure success (including assumptions as well as inputs)
- ▶ proposed ways of measuring progress
- ▶ potential problems that might be faced.

The following activity is designed for you to assess how well you understand the role of the different parts of a log frame.

### Activity 3 30 mins



Use *Evaluation 2* from your *Resources File* for this activity.

Turn to pages 11-14, where you will find an example of a logical framework being used for planning an evaluation.

After reading through the logical framework, focus on only the first column that describes the programme being evaluated to answer the following questions.

- 1 How does the formulation of the 'goal' and the 'purpose' of this programme differ?

### Log frames – where to find out more

<http://www.bond.org.uk/pubs/ipw.htm>

Download the resource guide, Logical Framework Analysis.

Bond is a UK-based network of voluntary organisations, working in the international development field. This means that these guidelines are written for people living in the UK who are involved in development work internationally. The guide does, however, include some useful tables that provide definitions of all the log frame terms as well as guidelines on how to make use of a log frame for planning.

2 What does the outputs section tell us about the programme?

3 In terms of programme implementation, how are the activities related to the outputs?

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►*

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## The other columns of the log frame

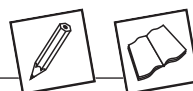
Now look at the second and third columns of this log frame where you will see how the evaluator has made use of this tool for the purposes of her evaluation study. Read through the second column. Do you see that the evaluator has documented the extent of achievement for each aspect of the programme as defined in the programme log frame? This is what is documented in column 2. Because the log frame outlines exactly what the programme should achieve, it is a useful tool against which the success of the programme can be assessed. Read through the third column. What is the purpose of this column? Well, this column provides additional details from the evaluation research to back up what has been noted in the second column, where the extent of achievement is assessed. Column 3 also provides information that is helpful for making recommendations about the future of the programme.

To sum up, we looked at two ways of planning an evaluation study. Remember, there are also many other ways of presenting your evaluation plan. Knowing how to use a log frame is a very useful skill since many funding agencies will request proposals in this format.

## Choosing evaluation research methods

Programme evaluation usually requires that several aspects of the programme itself are assessed, and that a range of programme participants, their roles, responsibilities and activities are also researched in order to answer the evaluation research question. (You saw the complexity of this in Figure 1.)

Because of this complexity you will usually find that a range of data gathering methods, both quantitative and qualitative are used in evaluation. The rationale for using a variety of methods and sources of information is to enrich the quality of the data and to ensure sensitivity to the full range of issues and concerns that are likely to emerge during an evaluation study.

**Activity 4** 30 mins

Use *Evaluation 1* and *Evaluation 2* from your *Resources File* for this activity.

- 1 In the tables below, list below the different kinds of research methods used.
- 2 Note whether these are qualitative or quantitative.
- 3 List one strength and weakness of each.

|              |         |                          |                      |
|--------------|---------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Evaluation 1 | Methods | Qualitative/quantitative | Strengths/weaknesses |
| Evaluation 2 | Methods | Qualitative/quantitative | Strengths/weaknesses |

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►

## Use of existing information

The specific research questions being asked are one influence on the choice of research methods. This will also be affected by the kind of information that already exists within the programme, and that which needs to be specifically collected for the purposes of the evaluation. Both of the evaluation examples that we have looked at have made use of programme documentation in their analyses. This will be information that already exists in the programme and includes, among others, proposals, programme reports, planning documents, memos, emails, budgets, etc. If you think back to Unit 1 you will remember that we noted there that programme monitoring systems are an important tool for evaluation. A good programme monitoring system will provide the evaluator with much of the information needed, especially information related to the processes and systems within the programme.

For example, you will be able to find information about the number of learners enrolled, numbers of learners in each course, lists of tutors, assignments sent out, assignments received, marks and assessments etc. In the context of distance education programmes, a monitoring system should also provide you with information that you can use as indicators. For example, researchers sometimes use dropout rate as an indicator of success of a

### Sources of information about qualitative and quantitative methods

The core modules of this series.

*Evaluation 1* – see *Resources File*.

*Evaluation 2* – see *Resources File*.

*Whyte, Chapter 5* – see <http://www.eldis.org/static/DOC7867.htm>

programme. Once you have established, for example, the dropout rate of students within a particular course, you might then conduct individual interviews with students to determine their reasons for withdrawing from the course. This would provide you with information that the monitoring system could not provide.

For example, a researcher, interested in studying the causes of student dropout, interviewed by telephone all the students (over 100 practising teachers), who had dropped out of one course in a distance learning diploma programme that comprised of four courses (Robinson 1984). Reasons for withdrawal were explored with each person during the interview. From this data, the researcher was able to quantify the reasons, to explain them in terms of personal-related and course-related reasons, and to compare them with another set of data on the student dropout on another of the courses in the same diploma programme.

## Multiple methods research

We noted above that the complex evaluations often require the use of a range of research methods. The use of a combination of research methods can be termed **multi-method** or **mixed-method** approaches. These approaches can be more rigorous than single method assessments, if each of the research methods is used correctly (Tshakkori and Teddlie 1998). However, one should not assume that using more than one method necessarily means a better study.

To be effective, multiple methods research must:

- ▶ be competently designed and conducted for all of the methods used
- ▶ be appropriate for the research question (collecting 'more' data is not always 'better') and multiple methods tend to be more expensive to use than single methods
- ▶ fit together as a set of methods in relation to the research question
- ▶ avoid spreading limited research resources too widely and thinly in finding answers to the research question
- ▶ be conducted by researchers who have a sufficient level of competency in the various research methods involved.

In addition, different research methods can be combined in different ways depending on the reason for using multiple methods. For example, Hammersley (1996) notes the following three ways in which research methods can be combined.

- ▶ **Triangulation** – the use of quantitative research to corroborate qualitative research findings or vice versa. For example, to determine the successful outcome of a distance learning programme the researcher may

use assessment results and attendance patterns, together with interviews with learners to explore reasons for success and/or failure.

- ▶ **Facilitation** – when one research strategy is used to aid research that is using another research strategy. Before conducting a survey, the researcher might conduct interviews to determine the best way of asking the questions.
- ▶ **Complementarity** – when two research strategies are used to dovetail different aspects of an investigation; for instance, our example of the evaluation of the online course for distance education policy makers. This included both the evaluation of the online component and the face-to-face workshop that supported it. Slightly different research approaches were used for each, but these complemented each other and both were used to produce the final evaluation report of the programme.

### Triangulation

Are you familiar with the term triangulation? This is a term that has become increasingly commonplace in education and social science research methods so it is important for us to explore it in a little more detail here. One of the reasons for using multiple methods, if used appropriately as outlined above, is that this can help to achieve triangulation and so potentially enhance the rigour of the study.

#### Triangulation

Triangulation is the use of a combination of different research methods to study the same thing in order to verify the findings of each method.

Triangulation is a term adopted from surveying, where surveyors take readings of a geographical point from several angles to ensure and check the accuracy of their conclusions. It has been used in social science and educational research as a way of increasing confidence in the researcher's findings.

Methodological triangulation refers to the use of a combination of different research methods to study the same thing in order to verify the findings of each method. In this way, the same programme, process, person etc is studied from more than one perspective as is highlighted in the following quotation:

*'Firstly the researcher needs to be confident that the data generated are not simply artefacts of one specific method of collection. This confidence can only be achieved when different methods of data collection yield substantially the same results. Furthermore, the more the methods contrast with each other, the greater the researcher's confidence. If, for example, the outcomes of a questionnaire survey correspond to those of an observational study of the same phenomena, the more the researcher will be confident about the findings' (Cohen & Manion 1994).*

According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) it is useful to adopt a **pragmatist** research stance where the research question is central and the most appropriate research methods are chosen to answer the specific research question rather than for reasons of methodological preferences or theoretical worldviews. Mixed method approaches work from the assumption that all methods have particular strengths and all methods are flawed in some

respects, thus using different methods allows the researcher to make maximum use of the strengths of each whilst striving to overcome the weaknesses of each method.

Along the same lines, and in the context of evaluation specifically, Jennifer Greene (2000) notes that,

*'Because programme evaluation is inextricably intertwined with politics and values, and because evaluators must navigate carefully amid competing political and value agendas, it is essential that evaluators have a diverse set of approaches to help guide practice.'*

## Budgeting for evaluations: keeping expectations realistic

Research takes time and is costly. It is essential that we remain realistic about what we can and cannot do when planning an evaluation. For this reason, careful budgeting is an important part of planning for an evaluation study. The evaluation plan, objectives, deliverables, and methods chosen must be realistically achievable within both the timeframe of the study and the available budget. It is important at the outset to try to note any constraints or research limitations that might arise due to either time or financial limits.

There are different ways in which an evaluation might be funded and this will affect the budgeting required and the kind of evaluation undertaken. For example, an in-house evaluation of an ODL programme might be conducted by someone working within the programme as an aspect of his or her work. The budgeting for such an evaluation would be quite different from one in which an external evaluator is contracted to do the evaluation and has to travel to another country for this, as in the SOMDEL example. The kinds of research methods to be used also affect the budgeting. For example, conducting a focus group rather than many individual interviews can reduce costs (but will provide a different kind of data). Large-scale surveys, whilst often useful for evaluations, are costly, unless linked to other distribution channels of an ODL programme, for example including a survey when registration materials are set out.

When budgeting for an evaluation (or any other research project) you need to think carefully about all the expenses that are likely to be incurred. This includes financial costs such as salaries, daily expenses, travel costs (vehicle hire, petrol etc), costs of meetings and venues, costs of materials, production of research instruments, reports, the costs of gathering feedback from participants on the final results of the evaluation, and the time allocation of staff usually employed for other tasks. Very often research budgets are based on the number of days it is estimated that the research will take.

There are many different ways of working out a budget. You may find that your institution has a standard way in which all budgets are calculated. A helpful tip for creating a budget is to map out your deliverables and activities

in tables as we did above (see the feedback to Activity 2). For each of the activities you can then work out how much time and other resources will be needed, to which a monetary value can then be attached.

Whatever method you use, when putting together a budget you should always be aware that costs add up quickly. Also, unanticipated costs (such as difficulties with gaining access to the people who need to be interviewed, which means that research time becomes longer) often arise. This is particularly relevant to evaluation research since you will always be working closely with an organisation or organisation(s), programme(s), etc that have their own way of functioning and processes of doing things which might cause delays in your research process. Your budget needs to make provision for this.

## Evaluation logistics

So far we have looked at the theoretical, design and methodological issues that are important when planning an evaluation study. The previous section presented some practical information about budgeting. In this section we very briefly note some of the logistical issues and decisions that you might be required to make when planning and conducting an evaluation.

Obviously, each evaluation study will have specific logistical requirements. The list below outlines some of these.

- ▶ contact stakeholders – make contact with, and possibly negotiate terms of access to, the stakeholders in the evaluation
- ▶ project documentation – gain access to all the relevant documentation
- ▶ plan data collection – plan the most appropriate way of collecting data from participants who, in a distance education setting, are dispersed. For example, would it be better to use a postal survey, send emails, or do telephone interviews?
- ▶ plan timing for data collection – plan the most appropriate timing for data collection, e.g. perhaps during a block contact teaching session
- ▶ clarify who will be responsible for collecting data and when. For example, you may request that a tutor send out a survey with a set of assignment feedback, to be returned with submission of the following assignment
- ▶ ensure research tools are available – e.g. questionnaires copied, and assign responsibility for doing this
- ▶ appoint workers – e.g., researchers or fieldworkers to assist with data gathering. You may need to prepare terms of reference for their work and draw up a contract
- ▶ arrange transportation and accommodation for researchers if required
- ▶ communication – ensure good communication processes between all evaluation team members and also with evaluation participants/stakeholders

- ▶ monitoring data collection – put in place systems for monitoring and documenting data collection processes (especially if you have employed a team of researchers for the evaluation)
- ▶ other – add any other logistical issues you can think of to this list.

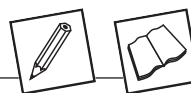
## From data gathering to analysis and reporting

Once you have collected your evaluation data you are half way there, but still have two important research steps to complete. The first of these is to analyse the data you have collected. Depending on your research design, you may or may not have begun analysing the data during the data collection processes. How the data is analysed will also be dependent on the research methods you have used. For more information on how to analyse different kinds of data you should have a look at core modules on qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis.

Once you have analysed your data, you begin to seriously focus on writing your research report. Very often, parts of the final report will have been written as you have progressed with the evaluation and simply need to be drawn together into a coherent whole at this point. We have noted before the importance of ensuring that the evaluation is designed and reported in a manner that meets the needs of the target audience. Remember, your results must reflect the purpose of the evaluation and should clearly answer the research question(s) you defined when designing the study.

For more information on report writing you can refer to the module on reporting on research and evaluation.

### Activity 5 15 mins



Use *Evaluation 1* and *Evaluation 2* from your Resources File for this activity.

Using the contents pages of these two evaluation examples as a guide, note down what you think is essential to include in an evaluation report.

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit* ▶

## Unit summary

In this unit we:

- ▶ defined deliverables and activities of an evaluation
- ▶ considered issues relevant when selection research methods for evaluation
- ▶ outlined some budgetary considerations for evaluation planning
- ▶ specified possible logistical issues that will need to be addressed
- ▶ outlined what must be considered when writing an evaluation report.

### Project task



So far in your project you have answered the following questions:

- ▶ What is the purpose of this evaluation?
- ▶ What is my research question(s)?
- ▶ What type of evaluation will I be conducting?
- ▶ Who is the target audience of my evaluation?
- ▶ Who you think it is important to consult in designing your evaluation.

You will now complete your evaluation plan in the project task below.

Drawing on all the project tasks you have worked through so far you now need to complete the following steps in order to have a full evaluation plan that you can use to begin implementing your evaluation or as a basis for raising research funding.

If you liked the log frame approach presented in this unit, you might at this point like to begin working in this format. If you did not find the log frame helpful, then I suggest that you use the alternative approach we worked through.

- 1 Write up the theoretical basis for your proposed evaluation.
- 2 Define your deliverables and activities.
- 3 Outline the research methods that you will be using.
- 4 Look through the research tools included in your reader to see if any of these examples will be useful for your research.
- 5 Work out a project budget.
- 6 List the logistical issues that you expect to face, and note how you would deal with them.

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### Feedback to selected activities



## Feedback to Activity 2

There is a range of ways of doing this activity. We will look at one possible set of deliverables and activities below. You may have approached this slightly differently which does not mean your answers are incorrect. If you have been working with Example 2 throughout this handbook will see that this approach also differs slightly from that of person who conducted the evaluation.

We have approached this task by defining three overall deliverables with specific deliverables making up each one and then identifying activities for each specific deliverable where appropriate. A table format is helpful when presenting activities. Using a table, one can also specify the deadline for each of the activities. We have not included deadlines in this example, but have indicated where you could do so. This then becomes a useful tool for you to keep track of where you are in your evaluation and where you are going. Depending on the complexity of the evaluation and your requirements, you can specify varying levels of detail for your research activities.

---

| <i>Deliverable</i>                            | <i>Actions</i>   | <i>Deadlines</i> |
|---|--|------------------|
| 1 Evaluation of the online course components: |  |                  |
| a) Review of course planning and management   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• collect planning and management documentation</li> <li>• interview course planners/managers</li> <li>• analyse data</li> <li>• write up</li> </ul>  |                  |
| b) Review of online materials                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gain access to online materials</li> <li>• develop materials review criteria</li> <li>• review materials</li> <li>• write up</li> </ul>   |                  |
| c) Assessment of website and online system    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop assessment criteria for website and online system</li> <li>• review website and online system</li> <li>• join discussion lists</li> <li>• continual monitoring of online discussion</li> <li>• develop questionnaire for participants</li> <li>• administer questionnaire</li> <li>• analyse findings</li> <li>• plan focus group discussion</li> <li>• run focus group discussion</li> <li>• analyse focus group data</li> <li>• write up</li> </ul> |                  |
| d) Review of support provided to participants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• document support provided</li> <li>• develop questionnaire for participants</li> <li>• administer questionnaire</li> <li>• analyse findings</li> <li>• plan focus group</li> <li>• run focus group</li> <li>• analyse focus group data</li> <li>• write up</li> </ul>   |                  |
| 2 Evaluation of the face-to-face component    |  |                  |
| a) Assess workshop quality and usefulness     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• collect workshop planning documentation</li> <li>• attend workshop</li> <li>• develop brief workshop participant evaluation form</li> <li>• distribute and collect evaluation forms during workshop</li> <li>• analyse data</li> <li>• write up</li> </ul>  |                  |
| 3 Write up final evaluation report            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• review write ups compiled during the evaluation</li> <li>• produce draft report</li> <li>• circulate report for comments</li> <li>• produce final evaluation report and submit to COL</li> </ul>  |                  |

### Feedback to Activity 3

As you have seen earlier in this handbook, the **goal** is more general than the **purpose** when used in the context of a programme's log frame. We could say that the goal is the ultimate result of the project while the purpose is the

more specific aim or objective. The **outputs** describe what can be expected, or what will be presented at the end of the project in order to meet the stated goals and purpose. The **activities** describe what will be done in order to be able to achieve each of the outputs that have been specified.

## Feedback to Activity 4

You should have come up with tables that look something like the ones below. Please note that this is not a complete coverage of the strengths and weaknesses of each research method, but rather an illustration of the usefulness of different methods for different purposes. One strength and weakness for each method is presented in the context of evaluation. You may have listed others. You might like to refer to the core modules on qualitative and quantitative methods for more detail.

### Evaluation 1

| Methods                                     | Qualitative/Quantitative  | Strengths  | Weaknesses  |
|---|---|--|---|
| Review of documents and statistical records | Qualitative and/or quantitative depending on content  | Provides an overview of programme  | Documents may present the ideal, not what actually happens  |
| Focus group discussions                     | Qualitative   | Facilitates participation and provides information that may not have been foreseen during planning | Sometimes difficult to find a time to bring participants together – especially for distance education programmes where participants are dispersed |
| Interviews                                  | Qualitative and/or quantitative depending on the kinds of questions asked. Usually more qualitative | Allows in-depth exploration of specific issues with individual participants                        | Time consuming and costly if sample is large  |
| Case studies                                | Qualitative   | Provides detail and depth of analysis  | Time consuming  |
| Surveys                                     | Quantitative  | Provide statistical and aggregate data for standardised questions                                  | Can miss important information and details because questions are standardised and may not cover all issues of importance                          |
| Participant observation                     | Qualitative   | Provides a first hand view of the phenomenon under study (e. g. radio broadcast session)           | Researcher's presence can influence the situation   |

## Evaluation 2

| Methods   | Qualitative/Quantitative  | Strengths  | Weaknesses  |
|---|---|--|---|
| Questionnaires                                      | Quantitative  | Collect standard information from all participants   | No opportunity to follow-up responses for more detail               |
| Interviews (formal and informal)                    | Qualitative and/or quantitative depending on the kinds of questions asked. Informal will be qualitative | Allow the in-depth exploration of specific issues with individual participants                           | Time consuming and costly if sample is large                        |
| Analysis of documents                               | Qualitative and/or quantitative depending on content  | Provides an overview of programme  | Documents may present the ideal, not what actually happens          |
| Participant observation (through email discussions) | Qualitative   | Provides a first hand view of the phenomenon under study (e.g. member of online discussion and workshop) | Researcher's presence can influence the situation under observation |

## Feedback to Activity 5

Evaluation reports, like other research reports, will have different structures and will include different sections depending on the nature of the research conducted and also the author's preferences and writing style. However, there are a few sections that should usually be included in an evaluation report. These include:

- ▶ Executive summary
  - ▶ Introduction to the evaluation and background of the programme being evaluated
  - ▶ Research design, objectives, questions, methodology and limitations
  - ▶ Results/findings (usually ordered into different sections)
  - ▶ Discussion of results/findings
  - ▶ Conclusion
  - ▶ References
-



# Quality assurance, quality control and other views



## Unit overview

Thus far we have covered what programme evaluation is and why it is important in the context of distance education, as well as worked through the development of an evaluation plan. We have on several occasions noted that programme evaluation is used for decision-making and for ensuring quality. This unit expands on what you learnt in units one to three by clarifying what we mean by quality assurance and how programme evaluation is related to processes of ensuring quality distance education. This unit thus focuses on how evaluations can be used in an applied way, so ensuring the impact of the findings.

## Unit outcomes

When you have worked through this unit, you should be able to:

- 1 define quality assurance
- 2 describe the difference between evaluation and quality assurance
- 3 explain how to prioritise evaluation findings for action
- 4 explain the role of evaluation in supporting quality assurance.

## What is quality assurance?

Is quality assurance a term you are familiar with? Perhaps you have been part of quality assurance processes at your institution?

In this section, together, we will establish a common working definition of what we mean by quality assurance. This is important because quality assurance is a term that is sometimes used to refer to a very specific and clearly defined process and at other times is used quite loosely to include any efforts towards improvement of a course, programme or institution.



Secondly, **quality assurance** and **total quality management (TQM)** – another term you may have come across in your dealings with quality issues – are not the same thing. While quality assurance involves a focus on processes and procedures to ensure that things go as planned towards the desired outcome, total quality management is a broader approach to management, underpinned by a particular set of values. TQM includes quality assurance, quality control and also monitoring, so, quality assurance is one part of total quality management.

### Total quality management (TQM)

TQM encompasses quality assurances plus a set of values about people's responsibilities for quality.

Mugridge (1999) sums up these distinctions in his lecture on quality assurance that was presented as a paper in the *Indian Journal of Open and Distance Education*. This article is included as an optional reading in your reader. He states the following:

*'Quality assurance can simply be defined as measures taken to avoid faults, as the set of activities undertaken to ensure that standards are, first, specified clearly and second, reached consistently for all activities in which an institution engages. The second expression, quality control, is defined as measures taken to correct faults, as a retrospective activity, eliminating or improving faulty products or services. Both of these overlapping functions, along with the monitoring of the procedures themselves, together make up quality management.'*

#### Activity 2 15 mins



In this activity you will consider one more definition of quality assurance:

*'Quality assurance is 'a set of activities that an organisation undertakes to ensure that standards are specified and reached consistently for a product or service.'* (Robinson 1994).

How does this definition compare to what you and your colleague said above? Write down below a definition that you would like to use as your working definition of quality assurance in this handbook and also in your work environment.

*No feedback is provided for this activity*

## Differentiating between evaluation and quality assurance

We will now see if we can define the difference between evaluation and quality assurance.

In Unit 1 we said that programme monitoring is a **tool** to be used when conducting a programme evaluation. This was the conclusion we came to, since programme monitoring is one way of gathering the data that will be needed when conducting an evaluation.

We could apply the same logic when we think about the relationship between programme evaluation and quality assurance.

Lets quickly remind ourselves of how we defined programme evaluation. We summarised the various definitions of evaluation using a simple quotation from a book on evaluation by Rubin. According to Rubin (1995), evaluation means:

*‘to understand the value of something in order to do things better.’*

Are you starting to see the links to quality assurance here?

We noted above that Bernadette Robinson (1994) defined quality assurance as:

*‘a set of activities that an organisation undertakes to ensure that standards are specified and reached consistently for a product or service.’*

Do you agree with me that programme evaluation would be one of these activities? If you do, then you have understood the relationship between programme evaluation and quality assurance.

In order to confirm how evaluation and quality assurance are related we will look at a commonly used diagram (Figure 2) that illustrates the strategic and operational processes that are common components of institutional management systems. Each of these processes underlies efforts to ensure quality within an organisation.

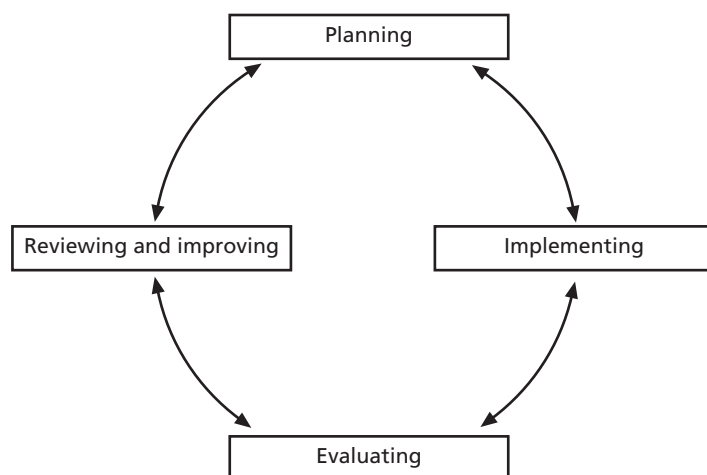


Figure 2 Core components of institutional management systems that support quality

Figure 2 shows four key management processes essential for effective programmes, including distance education programmes. As we saw in Figure 1, planning informs implementation. The implementation of the programme needs to be evaluated against clearly defined outcomes, to see whether it is successful. This evaluation then provides feedback to be used for review, which informs decisions about how the programme or institution can be improved. The diagram above therefore emphasises the importance of effective evaluation research and the crucial role it plays in a quality assurance process.

Did you also notice that the arrows linking each of the processes go in both forwards and backwards directions? This shows us that quality assurance processes are unlikely to take place in a linear fashion but that it might be necessary to move back to planning as lessons are learnt in the course of an evaluation process for example. Based on what you have learnt about the different kinds and purposes of evaluation in the previous units, you will know that the manner in which evaluation relates to these management and quality assurance processes also depends on the kind of evaluation being conducted.

To summarise we borrow the words of Rathore & Schuemer (1998):

*'Evaluation [is not] an end in itself...evaluation should rather provide information which can be used to maintain or improve the quality of products and processes.'*

This quote defines for us the ideal, that evaluation provides practical information that can be used for improvements in a programme or institution. However, one of the key messages that emerge from Rathore & Schuemer's book is the difficulty of getting institutions to use evaluation findings. We will pick up on this issue in the following section.

## Connecting evaluation to programme planning and quality assurance processes

So far most of what we have discussed has been largely abstract and theoretical. We have looked at how evaluation fits with other programme or institutional management systems and have also shown that programme evaluation is one important activity for ensuring quality. Just to highlight once more the important role of evaluation in ensuring quality of distance education provision, we consider the words of Michael Moore (1999):

*'One of the few generalizations that can be made about any distance education programme – whatever the communications media used and the content level – is that a good monitoring and evaluation system is likely to lead to a successful program, and a poor system is likely to lead to failure.'*

### Evaluation and quality assurance – sources

See Rekkedal, T. 1998 'Quality assessment and evaluation: basic philosophies, concepts and practices at NKI, Norway', in H. Rathore and R. Schuemer (eds.) *Evaluation concepts and practice in selected distance education institutions*, Hagen: FernUniversitat, at <http://www.fernuni-hagen.de/ZIFF/rekked.htm>

(The full Rathore and Schuemer book is also available at <http://www.fernuni-hagen.de/ZIFF/108cont.htm>)

Rekkedal explores in more detail (and provides some additional perspectives from Norway) on the issues of evaluation and quality in a distance education environment

The aim of this section is to help you to bring these concepts to life. Let's begin with an example that highlights how evaluation can be used in the establishment of a quality assurance system and also as an important planning tool for a distance education institution.

## Case study



### Using evaluation to inform quality assurance planning: an example

Technikon Southern Africa (TSA) is a large higher education distance education provider based in South Africa. In response to external policy demands and internal institutional transformation needs, in 2000 the senior management of TSA began work on a quality assurance review, planning and re-design cycle at the institution. The core of this process was a large-scale evaluation of a representative range of course materials and some specific courses too. The evaluation project was called the *Evaluation Capacity Building Project (TSA/SAIDE 2002)*. TSA worked together with the South Africa Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) on this evaluation. The aims of this evaluation project were to:

- ▶ Develop cost effective quality course review and design processes.
- ▶ Facilitate an organic intervention that injects transformative energies and processes into TSA.
- ▶ Ensure that residual capacity remains at the end of the project.

In meeting these aims, the evaluation included the following four key activities:

- 1 Mapping – the collation of information about instructional offerings (IOs), i.e. it mapped the current state of affairs.
- 2 First-level evaluation of materials and courses – getting a brief but informed sense of the general trends and overall quality of an IO by examining the courseware, and teaching and learning strategies
- 3 In-depth evaluation of materials and courses – adding depth and questioning insights gained through the first-level evaluation
- 4 Redevelopment – trying to put recommendations into practice by reworking identified units of the courses evaluated.

This project was run over a two-year period. While difficulties were experienced – some resisted the programme and others tried to participate but found the time required challenging – the following achievements and deliverables resulted.

- ▶ *Development of customised TSA evaluation instruments and course design support materials.* This included a range of mapping and evaluation instruments to use for evaluating course materials, a TSA curriculum redesign model to support staff in redesigning their programmes to meet the quality criteria, and a course design support package.
- ▶ *Reports of evaluations, project activities and processes.* Evaluation reports of 80 different IOs were prepared. These were used to conduct a trend analysis. An in-depth evaluation report was produced based on ten courses. Finally, four consolidated reports documenting the process were also produced.
- ▶ *Building capacity.* At the end of the 2-year period, ten staff across divisions had been trained as evaluators with specific skills in using the evaluation instruments developed. Five of this ten were additionally trained as facilitators to facilitate this evaluation capacity building process more widely across the institution.
- ▶ *Additional unintended outcomes.* One of the main incidental outcomes of the project was that it helped to bring various initiatives, such as access management and academic development across the institution together, and helped to develop acceptance of

working across disciplinary boundaries.

## The role of evaluation in programme planning and quality assurance systems

This example highlights the role that evaluation can play in both programme planning and the development of quality assurance systems. However, it is unusual in that the evaluation was specifically designed to support the quality assurance processes. What about evaluations that are done independently of such a process? This is probably the kind of situation you will find yourself in as you begin your evaluation project. How can you try to ensure that your results will be useful? There are a range of ways in which evaluation results can be used. These include, but are not limited to:

- ▶ improve management and organisation of the programme
- ▶ help in decision-making by providing an indication of actions needed to improve the programme, where training might be needed, where additional research would be helpful
- ▶ improve planning by providing information about past performance and the results achieved
- ▶ provide information that might be useful for bringing more resources into the programme. For example an evaluation might show that a distance education programme is understaffed and so not meeting its objectives. This information might support the efforts of the programme to lobby for an additional staff member
- ▶ improve accountability by showing that resources have been effectively used.

### Activity 3 15 mins



What factors do you think could influence the successful impact of an evaluation study on the programme being evaluated?

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ▶*

## Implementing recommendations

Let us look at a few of the recommendations made in *Evaluation 1*. You might like to quickly read through these before continuing.

### Reading – Resources file



The recommendations can be found on pages 27 and 28 of *Evaluation 1*.

Recommendation 2 states ‘a strategy needs to be devised to expand SOMDEL further to target two distinct groups’. These groups are children of school age who live in remote rural areas, and male youth who have missed out on education. Try to think in practical terms what it means to expand this programme that makes use of print, radio and face-to-face teaching to remote rural areas. Do you see that this is quite something to achieve? If you look carefully at how this recommendation is presented however, you will see that the major obstacles are also identified. These include inaccessible communities, lack of transport and the lack of qualified teachers. This shows the reader that the researcher is aware of the obstacles and challenges of the programme.

Have a look at Section 3 of these recommendations, *Programme pointers*. Do you see any recommendations in this list that you think are unrealistic? I think that most of these recommendations look achievable. One point worth noting though, this is a long list of ‘to-dos’ for those running the programme. It is also useful to prioritise the recommendations that you make as this will make it easier for your findings to be implemented.

Here is a possible checklist that you can apply to an evaluation to provide an indication of the impact it is likely to have on the programme evaluated. The more questions to which you can answer yes, the more likely that your evaluation findings will have an impact on the programme being evaluated.

### Checklist for reviewing the likely impact of an evaluation

- ▶ Is the evaluation written for a target audience at the programme level who could use the findings?
- ▶ Are the evaluation questions relevant to the programme?
- ▶ Are the findings clearly presented?
- ▶ Are clear and practical recommendations made?
- ▶ Are these recommendations prioritised?
- ▶ Were there processes of consultation with programme staff during the evaluation to assess relevance?
- ▶ Is the report presented in a readable way? (For example, a reasonable length, simple language, etc.)
- ▶ Does the report contain an executive summary?
- ▶ Are there strategies to make the results of the evaluation available to a range of stakeholders?

- ▶ Are there possibilities for follow-up to discuss and clarify the findings and recommendations? (A workshop or a meeting for example.)

## Unit summary

To summarise, in this unit we:

- ▶ defined quality assurance in the context of distance education
- ▶ have seen that evaluation is an important component of quality assurance processes
- ▶ considered an example of how programme evaluation plays a role in institutional planning
- ▶ have developed a checklist for assessing the likely impact our evaluation will have on the programme being evaluated.

### Project task



You are now ready to return to your project task. In the first three units you prepared an evaluation plan. This final project task is designed to help you to link this evaluation plan to the enhancement of quality of the programme you are evaluating and to assess the impact that your evaluation might have on the programme.

- 1 Prepare a brief overview of the current quality assurance systems in place at the institution/programme you have chosen.
- 2 In what ways do you think your evaluation study could benefit this system?
- 3 You might find that the institution you have chosen does not have a quality assurance system. If so, then consider how conducting an evaluation could be used to begin setting in place a quality assurance system.
- 4 When you have conducted your evaluation, use the checklist provided above to review your evaluation. (This is likely to be an activity that you come back to after some time).

## Conclusion

You have now worked through the handbook on *Programme Evaluation and its Role in Quality Assurance*. We hope that you have found this a fruitful exercise.

In the introduction we outlined the six learning objectives for this handbook, and I copy them below. Have a look through each and if you feel unclear on any of them, then you might like to return to the relevant section of the handbook to refresh your memory.

- 1 Define the purpose of an evaluation process and prioritise the key questions that the evaluation will need to answer.

- 2 Select appropriate methods for gathering the necessary data for a good quality and practically useful evaluation of a distance education programme.
- 3 Identify the characteristics of effective evaluation processes and factors that are most likely to impede successful implementation of an evaluation.
- 4 Define the reporting requirements of an effective evaluation process.
- 5 Describe the relationships between programme evaluation and quality assurance.
- 6 Plan an evaluation study.

If you feel happy that you have achieved each of the above outcomes, then you are ready to go out and conduct your evaluation. Good luck!

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### Feedback to selected activities



## Feedback to Activity 3

Being realistic about how to make use of your evaluation findings is an important skill to learn. As researchers, it is sometimes easy to assume that the recommendations made on the basis of a research processes are easier to implement than they in fact are. Trying to keep the recommendations we

make reasonable and practical is one important way of enhancing the chance that decision-makers and programme implementers will use the findings. A collection of suggestions or recommendations that seem impossible to achieve are likely to send those who are struggling with the daily realities of a programme running!

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