

SRA Advanced Course in Impact Evaluation

A ready reckoner guide on experimentation choices

NB. This brief is provided to support participant in the SRA course. It is provided as a personal perspective from the course tutors on background, and practical use and should be used in conjunction with the briefing and guidance provided by tutors at the course.

Introduction

This ready-reckoner guide has been developed from practical tools set out in Magenta guidance (Section 9; 2011), a review of wider guidance and has been refined through practical experience of conducting many impact evaluations for public and grant awarding bodies. Its use is to provide for a preliminary assessment of likely viability for use of suitably focussed RCTs/QE in contrasting circumstances and situations for:

- The nature of the programme or intervention to be evaluated.
- The expected scale of net impact arising from the intervention.
- The data potential (access and availability of suitable secondary or primary data).
- The potential for comparator data/evidence.

	RCT/QE more viable when:	RCT/QE less viable when:
Budgetary availability for evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internal evaluation: Allocated staff resources/staff release of suitably skilled and experienced project management evaluation team - External evaluation: Substantial allocated budget or fixed resources to procurement of appropriate contractors for design, delivery, analysis and/or reporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited (or no) allocated staff resource or budget - Procurement constraints affecting financing (or contracting) with sub-contracted expertise
Nature of programme or target intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New policy/initiative - Distinct change in practice affecting participants - Non-complex and stable intervention environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Established/modified policy - Consolidating current activity - Multiple effect policy goals - Intervention environment not controllable for stability
Expected (likely) scale of programme impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Large expected effect - Distinctive effect relative to other changes taking place - Sustainable effect measurable in short time frame 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small expected effect - Complex environment (multiple confounding factors) - Long effect lead times or incremental impacts

Anticipated access and availability of appropriate data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appropriate data available on all individual participants - No data access constraints (DPA?) - 'Isolatable' intervention - Data well fitted to intervention period/classification needs - Comparative and control data – before-during-after intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Data coverage not comprehensive - Data not adequately differentiated - Access constraints affecting some/all - Data not well fitted to intervention period; data lags - Summative data collection only High levels of likely unintended consequences (eg leakage)
Likely potential for comparator data/evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pilot or trial interventions preceding roll-out - Phased roll-out - Appropriate data for non-intervention groups - Objective selections within intervention/control - Minimised/measurable selection bias 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Full-scale roll-out - Required data limited to pilot area; or inadequate comparisons - Ethical constraints to comparisons - Lack of control within intervention - Unstructured participant selections