



Advanced evaluation: Options and choices in impact evaluation

**Exercises for the on-line
Social Research Association course**

Course Tutor:

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Practical Exercises

The course will involve three short, scenario-based exercises:

- Exercise 1: Managing for Realistic Expectations of Evaluation
- Exercise 2: Exercise on Experimental Approaches to Impact Evaluation.

A brief for each exercise is set out below and provides for:

- A brief statement of the scenario for the exercise and its context; and the tasks for the group/take away exercise.
- Each exercise to take approx. 30 mins.
- Both exercises will be group exercise through an online 'breakout' activity. The group responses to the exercise tasks will be feedback by one group member (rapporteur) in the plenary session and discussion which will follow the exercise.

Each exercise will be introduced by the tutor. You may find it helpful if you print out a copy of this pack to refer to during the exercise sessions.

Exercise 1: Managing for Realistic Expectations of Evaluation

Scenario: *New guidance is to be issued by the responsible government agency on Keeping Children Safe to update earlier 'duty of care' provisions. This will include specific requirements for safeguarding students undertaking work placements as part of a new curriculum requirement obliging schools to organise 'high quality' educational work placements of at least two weeks for all Year 12 students. A pilot has been running in 200 schools across six local authorities and government is to fund an impact evaluation to assess the pilot for:*

- a) Effectiveness of schools adjusting to the (draft) new Guidelines within the requirements of the new curriculum,*
- b) Impacts on enhanced safeguarding, quality of the educational offer of work placements and firms propensity to offer work placements*
- c) Costs and other burdens on schools and workplace providers*
- d) Implications for roll-out of guidance and new procedures.*

The responsible government agency has developed an outline specification for:

- An intensive external evaluation which will inform roll-out decision making.*
- Use of a mixture of secondary (before and after management information from participants and schools with: F2F interviews with schools, colleges, business owners and UK stakeholders; sample survey of participating schools; a small number of school case studies to show best practice and positive impacts.*
- An interim report (after 6 weeks), draft final report (after 8 weeks) and final report and recommendations (after 9 weeks) to DfE.*

The budget is £10,000 +VAT; the evaluation will start in late June.

The exercise: The exercise will look at how to best balance the stated needs and expectations of the impact evaluation so to provide practical evidence for a 'fit for purpose' and proportionate approach to inform national roll out.

Issues for exercise:

- What are the stress points for balancing expectations, needs and resourcing?
- Budget and timescale are fixed; so what is the best focus for the evaluation?
- What are the risks of the approach proposed against the expectations set out in the specification? Are there contingencies to address these?

Format: Breakout group discussions and plenary feedback.

Exercise 2: A Framework for an Experimental Approach to an Impact Evaluation of a Pilot Initiative

Scenario: *The public-agency collaboration will be spending a one-off budget for a single year to tackle a persistent problem of (from an earlier research study) mainly school-aged young people deliberately setting grassland (and field crop) fires in the summer-vacation period on the edge of a large town, causing environmental damage and death to livestock and significant expenditure to emergency services. The evaluation will need to demonstrate value to funders (local government and emergency services) if the initiative is to be rolled out to other areas similarly affected (in subsequent years). The impact evaluation is to be led by one of the partners with a budget of £10,000 which will fund an external design, delivery and analytical input (to be agreed) by the local university.*

The initiative will run over six weeks and will involve a cross-agency collaboration of:

- *A multi-activity programme including a social-media campaign*
- *A programme of community-based alternative activity events for young people*
- *A branded on-line information and events platform*
- *Local cross-agency anti-fire setting 'action-days'.*

All will be focussed on 12-16 year olds resident in households in the pilot locality.

The exercise: Producing a 'framework plan' to measure and evaluate the impact of a trialled cross-agency initiative (local authority - youth services, fire and rescue service, Police and Crime Commissioners office, parish councils) in a single pilot area using a social marketing campaign to reduce deliberate summer fire-setting by young people in urban fringe grasslands. The evaluation will need to provide counter-factual evidence and report within four weeks of the conclusion of the pilot.

Issues for the exercise: The evaluation is expected to use past research evidence and also mainly available secondary data (real time, web-based and activity monitoring information) to minimise costs and speed up analysis. It will also have access to past management information on numbers, locations and attendance costs at deliberate fire setting incidents. It is expected to need either an experimental or quasi-experimental design to show what 'net' difference the initiative has made.

Format: Breakout group working with plenary feedback to outline the framework plan for either a fully or quasi-experimental approach to meet these needs.