

7 Planning and Evaluating Academic Resources

Audience and function for this Guide

This guide is intended to help people working in higher education to plan and evaluate publications and other resources that are produced or selected to support improved academic practice.

This guide addresses the specifying and planning of resources; undertaking the evaluation; and (briefly) using the data obtained from the evaluation.

It is assumed here that such resources are being produced by an author in an educational setting and published by an academic or academic-related unit or agency. (The terms 'author', 'unit' and 'agency' can be replaced with other appropriate terms – the planning and evaluation procedures remain broadly the same.)

Resources

'Resources' here means any publication (paper or electronic), website, journal, magazine, guidance notes, various digital resources... – anything other than an event or a project.

Background

A goal for creating many academic resources is to support the improvement of programmes and courses, of teaching and learning and assessment, or indeed to support the improvement of any element of academic practice that affects student learning.

The approach suggested here to planning and evaluating development resources has much in common with the approach suggested in other guides in this evaluation framework for the evaluation of events and projects. It uses the same core evaluation framework, with necessary modifications.

Evaluating resources may be more difficult than evaluating events and development programmes and projects, given that resources may be obtained from websites anonymously and so it is harder to reach users.

Why evaluate academic resources?

To see, among other things:

- Whether each resource achieved what it was intended to achieve
- Whether each resource contributed to the attainment of the broader goals of the author(s) or the unit that produced the resource
- How the resources achieved whatever they achieved
- How future such resources could be even more effective
- What future resources should be produced
- How the cost effectiveness of resources compares with that of other development methods, such as events and funded projects

And any other reasons particular to the author or unit producing the resource,

As well as using standard evaluation tools such as those offered here, the author or unit producing a resource should always be willing to ask evaluation questions that are locally and particularly interesting and important.

Applying the evaluation framework (See Guide 1, Key ideas about evaluating educational activities and resources)

| <u>Level</u> | <u>Label</u> | <u>Possible goal(s) in relation to the resource</u> | <u>Possible implications of the goal for planning and publishing the resource</u> | <u>Possible approaches to evaluating the resource</u> |
|--------------|---|---|--|--|
| 1 | Awareness and knowledge of the resource | <p>As many as possible potential users of the resource:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know enough about the resource to make an informed decision on whether or not to obtain and use it, and • Obtain it easily if they think it may be useful. | <p>An author or unit may take several approaches to achieving this goal, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disseminating as widely as possible to their community / intended audience a very short summary of the resource. This summary will succeed if it enables any member of the community / intended audience to decide whether the resource may of use to them. • Make obtaining the resource as easy as possible – as close as possible to one click. (People are very busy. Every actual or perceived barrier to obtaining and using a resource reduces the number of people who will obtain and use it.) • Ensure that the unit’s database of contacts makes it possible to send the resource directly to anyone who is already known to be interested in the particular pedagogy or topic; without recipients feeling spammed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the methods the unit used to publicise the resource. • Identify the number of downloads or other requests for the resource. • In routine unit surveys, ask respondents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Had they heard about the resource? ○ If so, how? ○ Did they find it easy to decide whether or not the resource was for them? ○ Had they found it easy to obtain the resource? <p>(Units may feel that, if the resource is available for download directly from the website, this final question need not be asked.)</p> |
| 2 | Reactions to the resource | <p>People at whom it was aimed liked it, and found it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant to their needs and interests; • Easy to use; • Clear; • Helpful; and • Having any other virtues that are particularly appropriate to the particular resource, | <p>It is important, when specifying a new resource to be produced or an existing resource to be revised, to be explicit about, at a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The intended audience(s) and • What it is intended to help users to do and to achieve. <p>Resources should be planned with these two factors in mind.</p> <p>When drafted, resources should be refereed and then piloted to see if they have qualities listed on the left.</p> | <p>The goals listed on the left suggest questions about reactions to the resources. How to ask these questions? Possibilities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within normal surveys • Where a resource is sent by post, with a response form or email address |

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|--------------|--|---|---|---|
| | | its intended audience and function(s) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By providing an online space for responses, as with Amazon • It will also be good to have views on how future resources could be better • Response rates may be low. Effective and appropriate incentives may include a draw for a copy of a relevant book. |
| 3 | Engagement with the unit (if applicable) | The resource encourages those who obtain, read and use it to engage in other ways with the work of the author or unit producing it | A resource should be mostly self-contained. That is, it should answer most of the questions and meet most of the needs that it was intended to answer and meet. However, the resource should also make selective reference to other resources that the reader and user may find useful. | Ask; perhaps using the methods suggested above for 'reactions' to the resource'; "What other activities, products and services may you / have you use(d) or be(en) involved in following use of this resource?" |
| 4 | Learning from the resource | The author or unit wants users to take from the resource ideas and practices that readers and users will (a) want to, (b) be able to apply to their own practice... | The resource should make it as easy as possible for readers and users to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the key ideas and practices being suggested, and • Work out how they might adapt and apply these to their own practice. | Ask "What are the main things that you learned from the resource? Ask "What use may you make of what you learned from the resource?" |
| 5 | Using the learning from the resource | .. and (c) actually adapt and then use In their own teaching. | These goals suggest that resources should both describe underlying principles and give examples of practical application. | Ask "What use have you made of what you learned from the resource?" |
| 6 | Effects on student learning of applying the learning from the resource | Resources, like any other products or activities from the author or unit, should contribute to the improvement of student learning. | The resource itself; or some more generic guidance from the author unit; should make it as easy as possible for academics who are inspired and supported to try new academic practices, to identify the effects of their new academic practices on student learning. | Ask "What effects has your changed practice had on the learning of your students?" Responses to this and the question above can provide reports and indeed papers. |

Meta data

The following table describes information about this resource (meta data) which is also used to locate the resource using search tools. Please note the terms and conditions of use under the Creative Commons licence associated with the use of this resource.

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| Author (s) | David Baume |
| Owner (s) | David Baume |
| Title | Planning and evaluating academic resources |
| Keywords | Academic practice, development, evaluation, resources, Higher Education Academy |
| Description | <p>One of a series of guides on the evaluation of academic practice, academic development units, resources, events, activities and services.</p> <p>This guide, like the others in this series, is modified from an evaluation framework produced for the six Higher Education Academy Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) Subject Centres in 2009. These Subject Centres consist of Biosciences, Engineering, Information and Computer Science, Materials Science, Maths Stats and OR and Physical Sciences.</p> <p>The author, Dr David Baume, adbaume@aol.com, is happy to be contacted for advice and support on using this evaluation tool and others in the series.</p> |
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