

Evaluation master class – glossary

There are a number of technical terms associated with evaluation and policy research in general. This glossary defines some of the most commonly used terms. Some of the definitions are taken from the *Glossary of Regeneration and Local Economic Development* published by CLES¹. Other definitions are provided by New Economy or have been sourced central government guidance such as HM Treasury's *Green Book*².

Additionality	An output or outcome arising from an intervention is additional if it would not have occurred in the absence of the intervention. It is the extent to which activity is undertaken on a larger scale, takes place at all, or earlier, or within a specific designated area, as a result of public sector intervention.
Appraisal	Term used for an evaluation which is undertaken before a project or programme commences and which is based upon assumptions and forecasts relating to the likely impact of that project/programme.
Baseline	A description or statistical analysis of local conditions and recent trends at a particular point in time, against which subsequent change can be monitored and reported.
Benchmark	A comparative value used in setting targets for appraisal and evaluation. Useful in comparing the impact or success of a project or programme against a similar intervention.
Beneficiaries	An individual person who benefits directly from a project, programme or other intervention – that is, a person who is benefiting (or will benefit) from activities carried out, through the outputs, outcomes or impacts generated.
Comparison area	An area highly similar to the area in which a programme is operating, which is monitored by the evaluator in order to estimate what might have happened anyway within the programme area (c.f. additionality).
Control group	A group of individuals/companies etc who are identical/highly similar in profile to those individuals/companies etc being supported by the project but who are not receiving any support. The outcomes of the control group are monitored in order to estimate what might have happened anyway within the programme area (c.f. additionality).

¹ *A Glossary of Regeneration and Local Economic Development: 7th edition* (Centre for Local Economic Strategies, 2009)

² *The Green Book: Appraisal and Evaluation in Central Government* (HM Treasury, 2003)

Cost benefit analysis (CBA)	A method of analysis which quantifies in monetary terms as many of the costs and benefits of a proposal as feasible, including items for which the market does not provide a satisfactory measure of economic value, and compares the total value of benefits to the total value of costs, presenting the comparison as a benefit cost ratio. Having a single ratio figure allows for the comparison of different projects and programmes.
Deadweight	Activity and outputs associated with a particular project that would have occurred without the project's efforts (and therefore without the public expenditure made).
Discounting	A method used to convert future costs or benefits into present values using a discount rate, which is the annual percentage rate at which the present value of a future pound, or other unit of account, is assumed to fall away through time (3.5% is most commonly used discount rate).
Displacement	The degree to which publicly-funded activity is offset by reductions in activity elsewhere – this may occur when a successful regeneration programme results in problems shifting into a neighbouring area instead. In terms of outputs, displacement represents the proportion of project outputs accounted for by reduced outputs elsewhere in the target area.
Drop-off	The process by which outcomes are 'lost' over time as individuals/business/society etc reverts back to their original state.
Economic benefits	The benefits of a project or programme which accrue to an individual (e.g. increased earnings) or a business/agency (e.g. increased turnover or productivity).
Economy	One of the measures of value for money, economy relates to the cost of the inputs being consumed – that is, the extent to which activities have been delivered at reasonable cost (in terms of funding and staffing).
Effectiveness	A further measure of value for money, effectiveness refers to the extent to which achieved outputs result in the desired outcomes being achieved.
Efficiency	Also a measure of value for money, efficiency represents the relationship between outputs and inputs – the ratio of output to input, expressed in terms of cost per output.
Evaluation	Evaluation refers to the process of measuring or assessing the performance, effectiveness and value of an intervention. The methods used to evaluate an intervention, when they will be applied, to whom/what etc are described in an evaluation framework document.
Ex-ante	When an evaluation is carried out before a project or programme begins – commonly termed an appraisal.
Ex-post	When an evaluation is carried out after a project or programme completes its activities, with the evaluation drawing upon observed/primary data and information.

Fiscal benefits	The benefits of a project or programme which accrue to a government agency (e.g. local authority, health service, central government department) and which reduce the demand upon the public purse (e.g. a reduction in worklessness benefits payments).
Formative evaluation	An evaluation whose primary purpose is to inform the further/future design and delivery of a project or programme.
Impacts	Impacts represent the final consequence of a project or programme in terms of the effect that activities have on the wider conditions that the intervention originally set out to change. Impacts are usually identified through change in secondary data.
Indicator	An indicator is a measure that is used to assess the condition of something of interest, thereby helping to articulate performance (usually over time).
Inputs	The resources that contribute to delivering activities and producing outputs, in terms of financial, physical and human (time and skills) resources.
Lag	The time between an intervention taking place and the desired positive outcomes being observed within the target cohort.
Leakage	The proportion of outputs or outcomes that benefit those outside of the project or programme's target area or group – for example, jobs taken by residents from outside an area.
Logic Chain	A way of conceptualising the links between what a project aims to achieve, the resources it devotes to these aims, the activities these resources are used to deliver, and the outputs, outcomes and impacts that subsequently flow from these activities. Having a logic chain in place helps an evaluator to design an evaluation framework that tests key links in the chain.
Longitudinal research	A research process that is repeated on several occasions over a period of time, as far as possible replicating the chosen methodology each time. The key aim of such research is to measure long-term effects and changes over time. Longitudinal studies may be <i>cross-sectional</i> (different respondents) or <i>cohort</i> (same respondents).
Margin of error/confidence interval	The <i>margin or error</i> is the number of units (most often percentage points) in either direction that an given figure could vary by – margins of error are most commonly written as +/- X%. The <i>confidence interval</i> express how likely it is that the true answer for the whole population falls within the margin of error identified for the sample – e.g. a 95% confidence interval means that 19 times out of 20 the whole population results will fall within the margin or error given for the sample.
Market failure	Anything that prevents markets from operating freely or adjusting quickly, or that restricts the information available to producers, consumers or suppliers of resources.

Monitoring	The ongoing review of data relating to project outputs and income/expenditure patterns.
Multiplier effects	Further economic activity (jobs, expenditure or income associated with additional local income, local supplier purchases and longer-term development effects) as a result of increased investment. In terms of outputs, multiplier effects represent the supplementary impact of an intervention over and above the 'hard' outputs achieved. The size of the multiplier depends on the period over which it is measured, and the geographical area considered.
Objectives	An objective is a succinct statement of the key goal(s) being pursued by an intervention over the medium to long run.
Observational techniques	Social research which involves direct observation of an activity – observational techniques can be covert (CCTV, credit card records, website visit records etc) or overt (secret shoppers, participation in training etc).
Opportunity cost	The value of the most valuable of alternative uses of the resources needed to deliver a project or programme.
Optimism bias	The demonstrated systematic tendency for appraisers to be over-optimistic about key project parameters, including capital costs, operating costs, works duration and benefits delivery.
Outcomes	Outcomes represent the wider consequences of activities and outputs. They reflect the intended results of an intervention, and should be closely linked to its objectives and underlying rationale. A distinction is sometimes made between intermediate outcomes and final outcomes – intermediate outcomes are the more short term, easily measurable outcomes that result from an activity, whereas final outcomes are the longer term outcomes that may be harder to capture.
Outputs	The measurable or quantifiable results of an intervention, expressed in terms of the goods and services produced in the short-term as a consequence of activities.
Primary and secondary sources/ data	A primary source provides the initial basic data set under discussion, while a secondary source is one that offers further analysis or commentary on pre-existing data. Primary sources will include information or evidence produced directly through the research process, such as new documentation, speech, interview notes, and so on. Secondary data have already been collected by other people, including (for example) pre-existing reports and analyses, and readily available data such as information from the Census and surveys such as the Annual Population Survey.
Process evaluation	See formative evaluation.

Qualitative research	Qualitative research methods produce information on the views and perceptions of individuals or communities. They are concerned with the quality rather than quantity of information, and in gaining an understanding and insight into the underlying reasons and motivations for actions, and establishing how people interpret their experiences and the world around them. Qualitative data are normally presented discursively, although quantitative measures can also be applied.
Quantitative research	Quantitative research methods look to quantify information. They tend to be based upon statistical data, and produce numerical results. Quantitative data can be stored in reasonably well-defined categories, and in sufficient volume (in terms of the number of responses) to permit a range of different statistical analyses.
Randomised Control Trial (RCT)	A research technique whereby all those who are eligible for a project or programme are randomly assigned to an intervention group (who receive the specific support/activity etc) or a control group (who do not receive the specific support/activity but do still receive all other services). Identical outcomes are tracked for both groups, with any difference in outcomes observed being regarded as the added value of the project or programme.
Rationale	The justification of a policy intervention in terms of the market failures it aims to correct, and how it is designed to correct them. The rationale should be demonstrated in a robust evidence base.
Sampling	Sampling is the process by which the total number of possible respondents for a research project (the research population) is reduced to a number that is practically feasible and theoretically acceptable (the sample).
Sensitivity testing	Analysis of the effects on an appraisal of varying the projected values of important variables – e.g. would a project still delivery value for money if user numbers fell by 50%?
Social benefits/social return	The benefits of a project or programme which accrue to society (e.g. more cohesive communities, increased happiness) and which can often be hard to place a financial value upon.
Strategic added value	Strategic added value represents the more intangible, strategic outputs and outcomes of an intervention, such as the provision of strategic leadership and influence, the leverage of additional resources, the dissemination of information and intelligence, the encouragement of more co-ordinated responses, and the effective engagement of a wider range of stakeholders in the design and delivery of activities.
Substitution	When an individual, organisation or business substitutes one activity for a similar activity (for example, choosing not to invest private funds due to the forthcoming availability of public assistance, or recruiting a particular job applicant over another as doing so will meet the criteria for grant support).
Summative evaluation	An evaluation whose primary purpose is to understand whether a project or programme has achieved the objectives it was set at the outset.

Weighting and scoring

A technique that involves assigning weights to criteria, and then scoring options in terms of how well they perform against those weighted criteria. Weighted scores are then summed, and can then be used to rank options.