Evaluation Strategy

Building better evidence
Director General’s message

The Department of Education and Training is focused on preparing Queensland children and young people with the knowledge, skills and confidence to participate successfully in the community and the economy.

Our work affects the lives of nearly one million children and young people.

Quality evidence matters. It informs our decisions, practice and service delivery.

We use and generate evidence to develop a richer understanding of our impact and our cost-effectiveness. Evaluation is a key part of the continuous performance improvement cycle outlined in the Performance Improvement and Accountability Framework. It is not a one-off exercise we undertake for the sake of compliance. Evaluation done well enables us to learn and to improve.

We know that well-designed, rigorous evaluations give us timely, accurate evidence about the appropriateness, effectiveness, equity and efficiency of our work. Evidence from evaluations deliver insights into what is working, whether things are working as intended and the ways we can improve. Evaluations enable us to fine-tune our practice or service delivery to be more responsive to the needs of our stakeholders and clients. They also serve as an accountability measure to our clients, demonstrating that we are continuously examining our performance and how we can best improve outcomes and invest public funds.

The department’s Evaluation Strategy: Building better evidence outlines our commitment to evaluation and evidence. It contributes to and supports the departmental Evidence Framework and aligns with the Performance Improvement and Accountability Framework. This strategy guides how we develop and conduct well-designed, quality evaluations. It has three key elements:

- Standards
- Building capability
- Leading evaluation.

Evidence from well-designed, quality evaluations helps build a stronger evidence base about our work. Evaluation plays an important role in building better evidence and ultimately in delivering quality services to the people of Queensland.

Dr Jim Watterston

Director-General, Department of Education and Training
Introduction

Governments are increasingly required to demonstrate that the initiatives they invest in make a difference and represent the best value for money.\textsuperscript{1} We know good intentions are not enough. We must continually evaluate our initiatives and performance to understand our effectiveness.

The Performance Improvement and Accountability Framework sets out a continuous performance improvement cycle. Evaluation is a key part of the cycle. The Department of Education and Training (DET) Value Chain demonstrates how evaluation contributes to this cycle.

Figure 1: DET Value Chain

The Evidence Framework delivers a clear structure for guiding how our organisation uses and generates evidence. Evidence from evaluations is one way in which we build better evidence.

Evaluations play an integral role in the design and ongoing implementation of initiatives, enabling us to determine whether we are on the right track and delivering the outcomes we are seeking to achieve. They provide information about the appropriateness, effectiveness, equity and efficiency of initiatives. Quality evaluations shine a light on what is working, what isn’t and why.

The Queensland Government expects evaluations of public sector policies or programs will:
\begin{itemize}
  \item specify criteria for determining the success of the program
  \item focus on key issues that will inform decision making
  \item use a systematic and evidence-based approach to assess performance
  \item be reliable, useful and relevant to decision makers and stakeholders
  \item be timely.\textsuperscript{2}
\end{itemize}

This strategy aims to strengthen our evaluation capability and embed a culture of evaluative thinking across the organisation through three elements:
\begin{itemize}
  \item Standards
  \item Building capability
  \item Leading evaluation.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{1} Initiatives includes: programs, practices, products, interventions, trials or services designed to improve outcomes.

The importance of evaluation

Evaluation is a systematic, objective process assessing the appropriateness, effectiveness, equity and efficiency of initiatives. Well planned and designed evaluations can provide evidence about:

- whether an initiative is achieving its objectives
- the extent to which intended outcomes are being delivered
- any unintended outcomes
- value for money
- whether there are more appropriate, effective, equitable and/or efficient ways to achieve the intended outcomes.

Embedding planning for evaluation within the design stage of initiatives facilitates good evaluation. The design of an evaluation must consider the objectives, scale, investment, strategic importance, risk profile and likely impact of the initiative. It will also need to consider how to involve interested stakeholders and how the evaluation findings will be used. The scale of effort and resources allocated to an evaluation of an initiative should be proportional to these factors.

Evaluations are part of the cycle of continuous improvement outlined in the Performance Improvement and Accountability Framework. Rigorous evaluation delivers continual feedback throughout the implementation of an initiative. It provides insights about whether an initiative was implemented as intended and whether an initiative is working as intended, for whom it is working and under what circumstances. In the absence of rigorous evaluation, we run the risk of persisting with initiatives which may have negligible or even negative impacts. Over time, the evaluation of multiple initiatives and their outcomes builds a strong evidence base to support front line staff, program developers and policy makers.

Figure 2: Evaluation as part of the policy and program development cycle

Principles of evaluation

The following principles inform our evaluations and ensure we undertake evaluations that produce insights to inform our decisions.

Principles

- **Impact**: Evaluations assess the appropriateness, effectiveness, equity and efficiency of initiatives.
- **Rigour**: Evaluations employ high-quality design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to inform findings.
- **Influential**: Evaluations are used to improve the design and delivery of initiatives, by engaging stakeholders and informing decisions and practice.
- **Timely and transparent**: Evaluations are conducted in a timely manner, with the appropriate mix of internal/external expertise and independence and findings are published.
- **Integrated and resourced**: Evaluations are planned early in the design of initiatives, and appropriately resourced in proportion to the value, anticipated impact and strategic importance of the initiative.

Evaluation Strategy: *Building better evidence*
1. Standards

Building better evidence depends on having the necessary tools to embed evaluative thinking into our everyday work. The Standards for evaluation and the Standards of Evidence help embed evaluative thinking in the design, planning, conduct and evaluation of initiatives within the department. By embedding evaluative thinking into our everyday work, we are best positioned to build better evidence about what works, what does not and why.

The Standards for evaluation support better monitoring, evaluation and review of our initiatives by making certain that all initiatives are designed from the start to generate evidence about their impact, scalability and investment as well as being able to attribute the results to the initiative. They do this by identifying the essential requirements that need to be in place for all initiatives, whether they are operating at the local level or statewide. Additional requirements apply when initiatives meet one or more of the following criteria:

- the initiative will operate for longer than three years
- there is investment of $5 million or more per annum
- the initiative is of public interest or carries high or extreme risk
- it is a departmental priority or a pilot initiative with potential for wider roll out
- an evaluation is required by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

The Standards of Evidence provide a consistent way to assess the evidence we use and generate. They provide a shared language to use, assess and generate evidence drawn from classroom practice, school or organisational improvement or reviews, program and project management, evaluations or the delivery and implementation of major reforms.
To strengthen the use and generation of evidence, we will implement the Standards of Evidence, enabling us to make judgements in relation to:

- **Design**
  - Quality of attribution

- **Impact**
  - Measurable change

- **Scalability**
  - Potential to implement

- **Investment**
  - Creating value

For evaluations, the Standards of Evidence will inform the design of evaluations as well as assessing the results and insights gained from evaluations. The Standards of Evidence will foster confidence in using evidence to inform decisions and practice. They provide a clear and transparent developmental pathway to building evidence on initiatives, including through evaluation.

**Action**

**Standards for evaluation**
Implement Standards for evaluation to deliver a consistent approach to the design, planning and conduct of monitoring, evaluation and review of initiatives

**Standards of Evidence**
Implement Standards of Evidence to embed a common language and shared understanding about how to use, generate and build our evidence base
2. Building capability

A culture of evaluative thinking is fostered when regular feedback and analysis of performance evidence occurs and the organisation is responsive and supportive of genuine dialogue about evaluation findings. Evaluative thinking supports our Performance Improvement and Accountability Framework and the Evidence Framework by encouraging critical reflection and identification of opportunities to improve.

Over the past decade, we have made great strides in developing our evaluation capability. We have invested in professional development activities and implemented processes to support the planning and conduct of strategic evaluations (for example, evaluation plans detailing data collection and measurement details).

To mature our culture of evaluative thinking, we will focus on building staff capability in the planning, design and conduct of strategic evaluations through improved tools, guidelines and evaluation networks. An improved monitoring system for strategic evaluations will also help support improved data collection and reporting on strategic evaluations.

![Action]

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<th><strong>Support tools and guidelines</strong></th>
<th>Refresh tools and guidance materials to support staff in planning and conducting strategic evaluations</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative partnerships</strong></td>
<td>Encourage collaborative partnerships between internal staff and external evaluators to build staff expertise</td>
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<td><strong>Evaluation in program and project management</strong></td>
<td>Ensure evaluation requirements are embedded within the DET program and project management framework</td>
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<td><strong>Evaluation network</strong></td>
<td>Create a network for staff undertaking evaluations to encourage sharing of knowledge and expertise</td>
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<td><strong>Evaluation insights</strong></td>
<td>Publish reports from strategic evaluations</td>
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<td><strong>Translate findings</strong></td>
<td>Disseminate evaluation findings to staff so that insights gained inform decisions and practice</td>
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<td><strong>Evidence studies</strong></td>
<td>Support staff to inquire into the impact of their practices on outcomes through networked improvement and innovation communities such as the Queensland Evidence Hub</td>
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3. Leading evaluation

Our business model supports increased empowerment, accompanied by clear accountabilities to ensure investments and actions are targeted at improving outcomes for all learners and delivering benefits for Queensland.

Good governance arrangements support quality evaluations, providing leadership, guidance and feedback on the design and conduct of evaluations. Evaluation governance is provided by the evaluation governance group established for each strategic evaluation and through the Research and Evaluation Working Group.

A four-year rolling schedule of strategic evaluations ensures strategic initiatives that meet one or more of the following criteria are evaluated when:

- the initiative will operate for longer than three years
- there is investment of more than $5 million per annum
- the initiative is of public interest or carries high or extreme risk
- the initiative is a departmental priority or a pilot program with potential for wider roll out
- an evaluation is required by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

External advisors with expertise in evaluation contribute to good governance by delivering independent assistance and assurance in the design of strategic evaluations.

Action

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<th>Governance</th>
<th>Provide oversight of strategic evaluations and research activities through the Research and Evaluation Working Group, including monitoring the progress and quality of strategic evaluations</th>
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<td>Evaluation leadership</td>
<td>Establish an evaluation governance group for each strategic evaluation to support the planning and conduct of strategic evaluations</td>
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<td>Schedule for strategic evaluations</td>
<td>Publish a four-year rolling schedule of strategic evaluations</td>
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<td>External assurance</td>
<td>Engage external advisors to provide expertise and assurance on the design and conduct of strategic evaluations</td>
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<td>Strategic research directions</td>
<td>Prepare strategic research priorities to ensure research efforts are aligned and contribute to the strategic agenda of the department</td>
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Monitoring our performance

We will annually review progress in implementing the actions of the strategy and report to the Research and Evaluation Working Group.

More information

For further information refer to:

Queensland Government Program Evaluation Guidelines:

DET Evaluation Page:

DET Evaluation Schedule:

DET Research Plan:

DET Research Guidelines:

DET terms and conditions of approval to conduct research:
DET Approach to Strategic Evaluation

Evaluation Strategy: Building better evidence

Appendix 1

Plan and oversight

Design and act

Develop evidence logic

Develop evidence blueprint

Collect and analyse data

Develop evaluation plan

Communicate and publish evaluation results

Monitor and report

Endorse evaluation report

Endorse evaluation plan

Endorse evidence blueprint

Endorse evidence blueprint

Standards for evaluation

Evaluation Governance Groups (EGG):
Direct, monitor and assure quality and conduct of the evaluation at each phase.

Research and Evaluation Working Group
Glossary

Evaluation  A systematic, objective process assessing the appropriateness, effectiveness, equity and efficiency of initiatives.

Effectiveness  The extent to which a program is responsible for a particular outcome or outcomes. This requires consideration of other potential influences on the outcomes of interest and what might have happened in the absence of the program.

Efficiency  The extent to which a program is delivered at the lowest possible cost, to the areas of greatest need, and continues to improve over time by finding better or lower cost ways to deliver outcomes.

Equity  Equity of outcomes is the gap between outputs or outcomes for identified groups and the general population.

Initiative  Includes programs, practices, products, interventions, trials or services designed to improve outcomes.

Outcomes  The short-, medium- and/or long-term results generated as direct result of the delivery of a program – that is, the difference a program made.

Output  The services or facilities provided as a result of a program’s processes or activities.

Program  A structure (for example, intervention, service or strategy) created to coordinate, direct and oversee the implementation of a set of related projects and activities in order to deliver value for the organisation and its stakeholders/clients.

Program maps  Methods to diagrammatically represent the logic or chain of reasoning underpinning a program by mapping out the objectives, inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes. This can be represented in a variety of forms including a program logic map, results chain, outcome hierarchy or investment logic map. Program maps assist in understanding how the program is intended to work, what is trying to be achieved and why.

4. Some definitions have been drawn from Queensland Treasury, Program Evaluation Guidelines.