

EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC SERVICES

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Evaluation of service delivery is an increasingly important issue for public sector organisations.

The event will explore the important issue of how public service delivery at both national and local level is evaluated, offering the opportunity to learn from a range of expert speakers who will consider various aspects of evaluation, and demonstrate how organisations can make better use of quantitative data to measure policy outcomes and formulate effective performance management frameworks.



This event is being run as part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science 2011

09:30 – 09:50	Registration & Coffee
09:50 – 10:00	Introduction
10:00 – 10:30	Dr Louise Scott, Scottish Government Evaluation in Government under SNP Administrations: Past Orientations & Future Directions
10:30 – 11:00	Dr Erica Wimbush, NHS Health Scotland Public Health Policy Evaluation - Dealing with the Effectiveness Question
11:00 – 11:30	Coffee Break
11:30 – 12:00	Dr Rhys Andrews, Cardiff Business School Evaluating Regional Variations in Public Service Effectiveness Using Quantitative Data
12:00 – 12:30	Professor Peter Elias, University of Warwick Evaluating National Service Delivery: Data Needs for Quantitative Methods
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch
13:30 – 14:00	Professor Anna Vignoles, Centre for Economics of Education (CEE), Institute of Education Evaluating School Effectiveness Using Large Scale Administrative Data Sets
14:00 – 14:30	Dr Susan Purdon, Bryson Purdon Social Research National Evaluations of Locally Varying Programmes
14:30 – 15:00	Coffee Break
15:00 – 15:30	Steven Marwick, Evaluation Support Scotland Evaluating the Contribution of the Voluntary Sector
15:30 – 16:00	Rikke Iversholt, Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services Visualising Data for Effective Evaluation
16:00 – 16:15	Closing comments

The Royal Society of Edinburgh
22-24 George Street, Edinburgh
Wellcome West Room

Thursday 3rd November 2011
09:30-16:15

Programme

Chair: Professor Susan McVie, Director of AQMeN (am) and Professor Lindsay Paterson, University of Edinburgh (pm)

09:30-09:50 *Registration & Coffee*

09:50-10:00 Introduction

10:00-10:30 Dr Louise Scott, Scottish Government
Evaluation in Government Under SNP Administrations: Past Orientations and Future Directions

Evaluation has been central to Scottish Government’s understanding of the effectiveness of public services for many years. Analysts from within Scottish Government and from across the public service delivery spectrum have been concerned with understanding what works and why to improve policy effectiveness. Since the start of the SNP administration in 2007, however, we have seen a change in policy-making and governance arrangements, which has necessitated a change in the way we understand effectiveness. This presentation considers the impact of the Concordat, the transition to outcomes and the tight economic climate on approaches to assessing effectiveness of policy and, taking the recent announcements in Spending Review 2011, considers how things might develop in the future.

Dr Louise Scott is head of Local Governance and Reform Analytical Unit in the Scottish Government, where she leads analysts in the development and use of evidence on local government, third sector, public bodies and public service reform. Working in government for 8 years, she has held post in the Office of Chief Researcher and Education Department. Prior to this she worked as a research fellow at Loughborough University working on a cross-national comparative study concerned with family policy.

10:30-11:00 Dr Erica Wimbush, NHS Health Scotland
Public Health Policy Evaluation - Dealing with the Effectiveness Question

Effectiveness is not the only question addressed in public health policy evaluation, but it is certainly the Big Question most commonly asked and of greatest interest to policy-makers, Ministers and the public. In practice, it is the most difficult question to answer in a robust way for three main reasons: demonstrating attribution when designs using randomization and counterfactuals are not possible; the complexity of the policies or programmes and the range of implementation contexts; the poor quality of programme planning, design and outcome specification. For these reasons, from a public health science perspective, many health improvement programmes are considered unevaluable. Health Scotland’s approach to evaluation at a national level is necessarily pragmatic but has shifted significantly over the last seven years in an attempt to address some of these challenges. Dr Wimbush’s presentation will outline some of the ways in which they have been gradually adapting their approach to impact evaluation.

Dr Erica Wimbush is Head of Evaluation at NHS Health Scotland. She has worked with the national agency for health improvement since 1994 and brings considerable experience in the uses of social research and evaluation for policy and programme development. Recent work includes the application of theory-based evaluation (including Contribution Analysis) to strengthen partnership planning and performance reporting. She was awarded an ESRC Fellowship with Edinburgh Business School in 2009/10 to pursue work on outcomes based accountability. She has numerous publications in the field of health promotion research, evaluation and using evidence to inform policy and practice.

11:00-11:30 *Coffee Break*

11:30-12:00 Dr Rhys Andrews, Cardiff Business School
Evaluating Regional Variations in Public Service Effectiveness Using Quantitative Data

The presence of regional variations in public service effectiveness is an increasingly important issue in the theory and practice of public policy and administration. In the wake of the devolution of service provision responsibilities to regional administrations across the globe, many analysts point to the emergence of troubling regional disparities between the effectiveness of public organizations. But on what evidence are these claims made? And how might one best design quantitative evaluations of the impact of regional effects on public service outcomes? Drawing on recent studies investigating health, education, social care and welfare, waste management and community safety in England, Scotland and Wales, this presentation will explore the research designs and data requirements for evaluating regional variations in public service effectiveness. Recommendations will be made for improving the quality of evidence on this important issue.

Dr Rhys Andrews is Reader in Public Management at Cardiff Business School. He is a member of the Centre for Local and Regional Government Research at Cardiff University, and an advisor to the Welsh Assembly Government Efficiency and Innovation Programme and the Local Government Data Unit Wales. His research interests focus on the impact of civic culture and organizational environments on public service performance. His publications include articles in Public Administration, Regional Studies and Urban Studies.

12:00-12:30 Professor Peter Elias, University of Warwick
Evaluating National Service Delivery: Data Needs for Quantitative Methods

Evaluation of public services is an essential part of service delivery. Private goods and services rely heavily on market signals as indicators of their effectiveness in meeting the demands of a modern society. Public services, including those which are ‘privatised’, must make use of other methods to determine their effectiveness. A variety of methods are available for evaluation of public services. This presentation discusses the data that are required to support various methods and considers the ways in which such data are generated. Professor Elias is a Professor at the Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick.

Professor Peter Elias graduated in the physical sciences before undertaking his doctoral studies in applied labour economics at the University of California at Berkeley. He is a Professor at the Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick, where he has worked across a wide variety of research areas for more than 30 years. These have ranged from the evaluation of large-scale government programmes, statistical monitoring of the status of particular groups in the labour market, the study of occupational change and the relationship between further and higher education, vocational training and labour market outcomes. From October 2004 he has acted as the Strategic Advisor for Data Resources to the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), assisting the ESRC and other research funding councils and agencies with plans to develop data resources for research across the social sciences and at the boundaries between the social sciences and other disciplines. Major new developments in this area that he has helped facilitate include the 2012 Birth Cohort, the related Cohort Resources Facility, Understanding Society (the new UK Household Longitudinal Study), the Secure Data Service and the Administrative Data Liaison Service.

12:30-13:30 *Lunch*

13:30-14:00 Professor Anna Vignoles, Centre for Economics of Education, Institute of Education
Evaluating School Effectiveness Using Large Scale Administrative Data Sets

The use of quantitative data to evaluate the academic performance of schools is long standing in the UK. In particular, in England large scale administrative data sets are used systematically to judge the relative performance of primary and secondary schools. Such data are then used to produce ‘league table’ information on school effectiveness. Large scale administrative data is not without its problems and there are a number of problems with school league tables. The Institute of Education has been conducting a long term study of how administrative data might be best used to judge school performance and the problems this poses.

Professor Anna Vignoles is a Professor in the Economics of Education at the Institute Of Education and a Deputy Director of the Centre for the Economics of Education. She has published widely on the importance of mathematics in the labour market and the value of numeracy and STEM subjects. Anna is a Co-Director of an ESRC National Centre for Research Methods Node, ADMIN (Administrative Data - Methods, Inference and Network) which is investigating the use of large scale administrative data in policy research. ADMIN is also developing methodologies to best exploit linkages between survey data and administrative data sets. Her research interests include issues pertaining to equity in education, school choice, school efficiency and finance and the economic value of schooling.

14:00-14:30 Dr Susan Purdon, Bryson Purdon Social Research
National Evaluations of Locally Varying Programmes

Within the last few years there has been a shift away from government piloting of centrally-designed initiatives, and a move towards piloting of local designed programmes that have common aims but sometimes very different approaches. This move has generated a considerable new challenge for impact assessment. Although, in an ideal world, separate impact evaluations would be carried out per area or model to allow for comparisons to be made, in practice theoretical and practical constraints apply – the commonest theoretical constraint being ‘treated population’ size, and the commonest practical constraint being money. This presentation will cover some of the methods that can be used to work around these problems to allow for some statistical assessment of what works best and for whom.

Dr Susan Purdon worked for many years at the National Centre for Social Research in London, but has now set up an independent research partnership (Bryson Purdon Social Research). Her research interests are in the design, implementation and analysis of sample surveys, social experiments, and quasi-experiments and, over the years, she has been a lead player in the design, analysis and reporting of many policy evaluations in the UK. These include DWP’s Job Retention and Rehabilitation RCT; the New Deal for Lone Parents; the DfE’s Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative; the National Healthy Schools Programme; the DfE’s Activity and Learning Agreements Pilots; the DfE’s early years education pilots, and the Office for Disability Issues’ Right to Control Trailblazers.

14:30-15:00 *Coffee Break*

15:00-15:30 Steven Marwick, Evaluation Support Scotland
Evaluating the Contribution of the Voluntary Sector

Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) supports voluntary organisations to measure and report on the difference they make. Quantitative data does not always exist to show the contribution voluntary organisations make to effective services. Quantitative methods may not always explain ‘how and why’ services delivered by voluntary organisations do - or do not- lead to positive outcomes. Steven will talk about non-quantitative approaches to evaluating the effectiveness of voluntary sector contributions. He will cover logic modelling and the role of self-evaluation. He will describe how evidence from voluntary organisations can be used in policy and service design. Steven’s presentation will give examples from ESS’s work with voluntary organisations and funders.

Steven Marwick is Director of Evaluation Support Scotland which works with other voluntary organisations and their funders to help measure their impact, report on the difference they make and deliver better services. His previous jobs include policy and research posts for the Community Fund lottery fund and the Government and work as a freelance consultant. He has a track record of supporting evaluation best practice in Scotland and working with voluntary groups to help them design outcomes and evaluation systems. Steven is member of the Evaluation Committee of the Economic and Social Research Council and was until recently the chair of the Edinburgh Volunteer Centre.

15:30-16:00 Rikke Iversholt, Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services
Visualising Data for Effective Evaluation

Focusing on the use of data visualisation for the effective evaluation and communication of public data, this presentation will explore a selection of freely available data visualisation tools and provide advice on how to choose the appropriate visualisation methods for different types of data. Examples will demonstrate in-depth, the techniques which can be used to improve the communication of data, making it more suitable for distribution throughout an organisation and for inclusion into formal organisational performance and policy evaluations.

Rikke Iversholt manages IRISS’s data visualization project, designed to deliver new ways for organisations within Scotland’s social services to understand and communicate data, and enable them to make better decisions about the services they provide. The project is part of a wider innovation and improvement programme to develop tools, training and interventions that support and enable the sustainable transformation of social services in Scotland. Prior to joining IRISS, Rikke worked in the private sector, specialising in implementing and managing research projects for continuous process- and performance improvement within organisations that operate across languages and cultures. She has implemented improvement programmes for a variety of global corporations. IRISS’s online data visualization tool is free and easy to use. For more information or to obtain access, please visit: <http://look.iriss.org.uk/>

16:00-16:15 Closing comments