Online evaluation has come into focus as a result of national social distancing measures. However, online versions of methods can be viable in their own right. In the long-term, there is a chance to use online approaches to build and maintain a more sustainable evaluative culture.

Opportunities

- Online methods can provide flexibility and the opportunity to build contingency options into plans to leave evaluators better positioned to adapt to changing circumstances.

- Online tools can be more accessible to evaluators and practitioners so long as they have the technology to engage with them (although there can also be technological and other barriers to be considered).

- Data is often more easily collated, and 'clean' when done online (because participants enter data directly rather than relying on third parties such as teachers for example to administer paper forms). Collecting data directly from participants online usually saves data entry time afterwards. By storing data electronically and permanently, the risk of data 'loss' or damage can be reduced.

- Opportunity to collect data 'in real time'. Collecting data immediately from participants can lead to a more accurate evaluation whilst it is still fresh in the mind of the respondent.

- Opportunity to embed evaluation as part of interactivity aspect of provision. Having interactive elements in online provision is important, because it boosts engagement and knowledge retention (which can in turn lead to a more effective experience). There can be opportunities to utilize interactive online aspects for evaluation – for example, games, texts, quizzes, polls, discussion forums, reflective activities (see below).

- Online methods promote asynchronous engagement to avoid excluding those who cannot access an environment at a specific time or place, which could enable the evaluation to have greater 'reach' (although technology can also act as a hindrance for other groups, for example, individuals with visual or cognitive impairment or people who do not have access to the internet).

- Opportunity to develop data collection procedures in common across activities, which allows for comparative research. Potentially online formats allow for more consistent evaluations, taking into account the extent to which generic questions may be employed. At the same time, qualitative methods

- There can be cost savings (for example, an online survey is less costly than paper based formats).

Challenges

- Evaluators need to consider whether online evaluation is appropriate considering any barriers target groups may face with online outreach, e.g. technologies, internet access, appropriate space. Are any issues of equity in relation to participant access and representation, for example, whether the perspectives of any groups will be excluded by not being able to participate?

- Time for online evaluation can be limited. Even if time is not limited, it is questionable whether learners will make the effort to engage with 'long' evaluations

- Dialogue and context-setting are essential in any evaluation, but these can be overlooked when online approaches are used. It is important to consider how evaluations are introduced and by whom.

- Further challenges in being able to obtain enough personal/background data on participants to allow for nuanced analysis by different subgroup characteristics or to be able to track the long term outcomes of students. This can vary from school to school and there could be concerns from stakeholders about giving personal information in an electronic format.

- Working in a situation of uncertainty in which participants are facing other pressure that could affect achievement of the outcomes of the provision in the short, medium and long term.

- Although online evaluation tools might be more 'accessible' to evaluators and practitioners, there is greater risk that institutions/providers do not know how many or when evaluations are taking place.

- Some methods of conducting online research, such as using social media data, brings new ethical challenges, for example, whether it is public or privately owned, informed consent and anonymity.

Useful Link(s):

The British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines (BERA, 2011) has a particular focus on avoiding harms when considering online research. https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2011

How can research methods be adapted for online evaluation?

Method	Benefits	Issues	Type of questions appropriate for?	When to use?	Tips
Brief feedback questionnaires	When used at the end of online sessions, feedback questionnaires allow you to monitor participants experience as you go along.	The main issues are likely to be lack of response and difficulties in ensuring the representativeness of the respondents.	Useful for feedback for example on course design, relevance, timing, accessibility etc.	Helpful in the development phase to know what needs to be changed, so you can have better results next time.	Could be a 'pop-up' survey at the end of the session. Experience suggests that the closer the questionnaire is to the event the better the response. If the session is interactive the end of session questionnaire response rate tends to be higher.
Online Surveys	All of the responses are recorded in the system. Give you measurable data that is easy to chart and analyze. Enables quick results to identify trends.	Response rates tend to be low (unless made a compulsory element of the provision) Need to keep the inquiries brief and succinct because respondents will have a short attention span (5 mins max). You need to make sure the software you use is fit for purpose in terms of functionaility, number of responses expected etc. A challenge with using some online survey platforms concerns compliance with data protection laws and GDPR (e.g. Google Forms is not GDPR compliant in the EU as data is stored outside the EU).	Could focus on your learning objectives and desired outcomes to uncover outcomes and pinpoint gaps that hinder outcomes. Surveys can also be used as follow-up to ask if their skills/ knowledge/ performance has been improved by using what they were taught online.	Could be included at the end of the session or used to get feedback after the event.	Possible to use survey software to collate responses across activities. Depending on the resource implications, the responses could be incentivized to boost the response rate (for example, entry into a prize draw, bonus materials for those who complete). However, the ethical issues need to be considered and incentives can bias the response rates.
Straw polls/voting	Can be useful to test participants perspectives and get 'single issue' data.	A snapshot rather than indepth perspective. No opportunity to probe for further insights. Data for groups rather than individuals.	Could test satisfaction levels. Could canvas on background characteristics (e.g. first in family). Or test levels of agreement with statements (e.g. intention to progress to HE).	Could be of some use in the delivery phase to inform understanding of group experiences, characteristics and perspectives.	Voting software is built into some video conferencing tools (e.g. Zoom).
Reflective activities	Diaries can also be part of a reflective pedagogic approach encouraging learners to reflect on and consolidate their experience. The act of reflection can be beneficial to the individual to consolidate their thinking on a topic and reinforce learning. Use of online tools makes it easier to access write reflections via the system (overcomes problems such as difficulties in sharing written accounts or needing to read	The main challenge is getting people to complete reflective logs/diaries. The usefulness of the information provided in reflective accounts can be very variable (having a structure can help with this). Interpretation of the information can be challenging.	Are useful to hear the voice of participants by giving them a chance to express their thoughts and changes they experience as a part of their experience of a project or activity.	Could be included at the end of the session or used to get feedback after the event.	Reflective activities could be incentivized (for example make it a formal part of requirements for a certificate of completion). To be useful the reflections need to be as thorough as possible and ideally including evidence to back up thoughts and feelings.

Method	Benefits	Issues	Type of questions appropriate for?	When to use?	Tips
	handwriting).				
Online Focus Groups	Focus groups give you the power to step into the shoes of the participants and see from a firsthand perspective.	Focus groups are harder to manage online than in person, both from the point of view of managing the discussion but also in terms of creating the right environment, building trust and rapport, and ensuring confidentiality. May work better for groups that already know each other or as part of a 'panel' approach where effort is put into building the group over time and ground rules can be agreed. Possible safeguarding issues with various audiences	This approach helps to collect qualitative feedback and could explore issues such as: is the online content easy to understand; are the activities and scenarios relevant to the audience and motivational; is the language appropriate; is the format appealing; are any instructions clear; was there anything missing?	Feedback from learners through a focus groups or from a sample audience can be particularly useful in the development stage for activities, in order to evaluate the experience offered, and could help generate improvements.	Could choose a select group of participants and invite them to be part of an ongoing audience panel approach. Invite them to access the online training materials and take notes on their experience. Could involve remuneration for time.
Online tests and quizzes	Depending on the aims of the activity, the learning or performance of participants could be tested online through tests and quizzes. This gives you the opportunity to identify knowledge and skill gaps. Tests and quizzes, such as multiple choice and true-false questions, provide measurable and comparable data. Tests could link to activities (e.g. asking participants to find or synthesize information from Web-based resources to answer questions) or be designed to ask participants to apply the skills learnt to tasks (e.g. writing a personal action plan, developing a research proposal or asking them to present ideas).	Need to carefully consider how to build tests in as part of the offer. Could be off-putting for some people risking disengagement.	Could help to gauge how much your participants know and what they still need to master.	Useful at the end of the online session to capture outcomes. Could also be used as part of the development phase to refine provision (if a high percentage have similar gaps at the end of the online session then you may need to rethink the activities).	For interventions with sufficient input, you could conduct pre-assessments before the online activity and then an exam on completion in order to track improvements.
Online Forums	Helpful to provide a "fly on the wall" effect (you can see what participants think by monitoring their discussions). The online discussion happens organically, which offers rare insight into your peoples' opinions, thoughts, and concerns.	Can be hard to manage because conversations may veer off-topic and you might not get the input on the areas you want. Possible safeguarding issues with various audiences.	Useful for 'from the horses mouth' feedback.	Probably most useful as a source of feedback during the activity delivery phase.	You could host focused online discussion for more focused feedback. Could put out a list of topics in advance and ask people for honest opinions and suggestions for improvements.
One-On-One Interviews (e.g. via video conferencing	Helpful to get indepth perspectives and may be useful for people who are reticent about sharing their	To be useful you need to gather enough data from a good mix of interviewees.	Can be used to evaluate the participants' experience of the provision as well as how they have	Useful at the end of the programme as part of formative and summative evaluation.	Can be helpful to provide participants with a list of questions or discussion topics in advance.

Method	Benefits	Issues	Type of questions appropriate for?	When to use?	Tips
tools)	views in a public forum. Possible to use recordings to capture accurate data (with consent).	Potential technical problems could arise (e.g. internet connectivity, webcam issues, a time-lag in audio, technological failure etc). Need to consider ethical aspects, protection and confidentiality issues. It's harder to establish a 'safe' and private environment for the interview as there's no control over the location.	benefited and the short term outcomes.		Could be sent as part of getting informed consent. Can be useful to encourage participants to use earphones for privacy. Interview could keep a note of whether the environment may have influenced the responses.
Asynchronous Interviews (interaction between the interviewee and the interviewer does not occur at the same time, e.g. interviewee videoing or emailing their responses)	The benefits of doing interviews asynchronously are they offer convenience to the respondent who has control over where and when the interview takes place. The approach can help to standardise the interviews whilst offering cost and time savings for the evaluator. Because the evaluator is not present potentially a large sample of data can be collected in the same time. Reviewing written information or recorded videos is less time consuming than face to face interview.	Because the interview is asynchronous the researcher is not able to follow-up points to check the meaning, or use additional prompts and explanations if required. Analysing the interviews is time consuming (although as the data is usually captured in written or recorded form the workload can be shared more easily than for traditional interviews). Online video interviews might not be appealing to everyone especially those less technical or without access to necessary technology.	Probably most useful for getting Vox Pox type feedback rather than for in depth questioning. Might provide insights into participants' experience of the provision as well as how they have benefited and the short term outcomes.	Useful at the end of the programme as part of formative and summative evaluation.	Only include a small number of the most relevant topics. Setting out clearly your questions/prompts in a standard pattern means that you should be able to compare the respondents answers. One way of analysing the data is to draw out common themes and analyse the patterns which emerge amongst the responses.
Data analytics	Monitoring the take-up/activity of online provision is relatively easy to collect as there are technical solutions built into online platforms for tracking participation (either hosted or cloud based).	Does not tell you much about the characteristics of users. The issue will be finding a way to analyse and present useage data to gain a better understanding of the effectiveness of online delivery.	Used to show participation (for monitoring purposes). Can help to assess participation and levels of engagement with the materials.	Provides evidence for ongoing evaluation of delivery. Agreeing a standard format for key statistics can help you to look at patterns over time.	Data analytics can help you to analyse data on your evaluation methods in real time – for example telling you how long it takes to complete a test or activity etc.
Peer Observation	Various different aspects could be observed (e.g. effectiveness of interactive aspects, student dynamics – see below). Can help to highlight areas for changes/improvements as part of a formative evaluation. Structured observation could involve a criteria/point system for the aspects to be reviewed during the observation. Subjective observation can also be useful in capturing aspects that may not be able to be meaningfully measured	Both the observer and the delivery team being observed will need to agree the goals of the observation in advance.	Peer observations can help to focus on the quality of the delivery, engagement factors, and how it is meeting educational and access needs. Categories could include for example: structure of online provision; materials; ease of use of technology and tools; accessibility and inclusion issues; student Interaction and engagement; support for participation; leader-participant interaction; group/classroom dynamics; relevance of content; clarity of	Observation of online activities may be better near the end of online programmes, as the evaluator will be able to take account of the participation and teacher responses across a period of time.	You could consider having live sessions recorded and observed at a later time (needs informed consent and would need to be stored and accessed securely).

Method	Benefits	Issues	Type of questions appropriate for?	When to use?	Tips
	by an objective observation through a narrative-based question, response and/or summary.		instruction; pace and delivery; sequence and cohesiveness; relationship between the objectives, content and the material; extent of active and personalized learning; relevance of any assessment tasks.		
Creative approaches	The online environment potentially offers many options for creative evaluation, for example: – using multimedia tools such as video, podcasts, digital storytelling, timelines, photo diaries to facilitate participants telling their story and showcasing their experiences; - mind mapping or concept mapping tools to explore perceptions or barriers etc; - interactive tools and games to canvas views on relevant issues. Evaluators and participants can interact online through a live synchronous session. Opportunity to bring participants together online to share experiences.	As with all creative evaluation methods it is essential that the approach forms part of a structured and robust research process. Clear planning, constancy and recording are needed to make sure that the activity results in systematic evidence that can inform an evaluation.	Useful to collect evidence about participants' experiences, perceptions or barriers, and views.	Can be used during the delivery phase. Potential to integrate into the online provision or to organize as a separate evaluation exercise in parallel to the online programme.	Having participants present their work to the evaluator or to a panel of reviewers can help with interpretation of the key themes.
Asking your team	Could build feedback from the team into regular meetings, canvas opinions through a staff survey, or ask them to complete a reflective account after the sessions. Can be useful to suggest changes/improvements to help increase effectiveness next time.	The challenge will be capturing the feedback in a systematic way and turning it into evidence for the evaluation.	Useful to check views on how the content is being received, and the effectiveness of the online delivery (e.g. technical support provided, timing, instructions, interactive activities etc.)	Useful for formative evaluation when developing online provision and for ongoing process evaluation.	It is often helpful to define the areas you are looking for feedback on rather than asking for unstructured feedback.