

## Evaluation protocol

### What is evaluation and why is it important?

1. Evaluation is an objective process of understanding how a policy, or other intervention, was implemented, what effects it had, for whom and why.
2. Good evaluations allow us to understand what works and what does not work, and to build on this understanding for the future. Evaluation provides the evidence that support claims about an intervention's effectiveness and builds confidence in what we are doing.

### Why do we need an evaluation protocol?

3. The gambling industry (the industry) is being encouraged to trial and to evaluate new approaches to harm minimisation. This protocol aims to assist industry in undertaking effective evaluation, so that the integrity of the results are trusted and learning can be made available to others.

### Who should use this protocol?

4. This protocol has been developed to support the industry in evaluating their new interventions, as demonstrating that harm minimisation strategies are working is vital. We also anticipate that the principles will be useful to anyone working in the in responsible gambling and implementing interventions around harm minimisation.
5. It is hoped that all stakeholders will voluntarily follow the guidance set out in this protocol unless a convincing case is made as to why it does not apply.

## Overarching principles of evaluation

6. There are some fundamental overarching principles of evaluation. These are:

### **Robustness and credibility**

Appropriate evaluation approaches are used to generate robust evidence, perceived as credible by stakeholders.

### **Proportionality**

Evaluation should be proportionate to the risk and scale of the intervention. Interventions of high risk, high uncertainty will require a comprehensive evaluation plan. Smaller scale, lower-risk initiatives may require less comprehensive evaluation plans. This should be considered and documented at the outset.

### **Independence**

There are significant advantages in independent evaluations – these are perceived as more objective and robust, resulting in more credible results and increased stakeholder confidence. However, independent evaluations for *all* interventions may not always be possible or proportionate. If the industry is self-evaluating, adherence to this protocol is especially important.

## **Transparency**

Transparency is not restricted to data and results. Evaluations should be as open as possible about the rationale behind an intervention, the details of the intervention itself, the evaluation process, the results generated and any conclusions formed. Transparency increases confidence and credibility. It also allows stakeholders to independently assess assumptions and conclusions, and think about how lessons learned can be transferred.

## **Specific principles for evaluation**

7. The following principles provide more specific details on what constitutes a good evaluation.

### **Policy intervention being evaluated**

8. Good evaluation...
- is included from the very beginning when an intervention is being planned, and should not only be considered at the end.
  - should include a clear articulation of what an intervention is intended to do, the outcomes it is intended to achieve, and how it is envisaged these outcomes will come about.
  - is considered early in the process, allowing the intervention to be implemented in a way that allows for effective evaluation. This might include trials or piloting of interventions, for example.

### **Approach, method and design**

9. Good evaluation...
- has clearly defined evaluation objectives and research questions.
  - is tailored to the type of intervention being considered and to the types of question it is looking to answer.
  - makes best use of available information and collects additional information to fill in gaps and aid interpretation of findings.
  - answers specific questions to support decision makers.
  - Is proportionate, matching design and choice of methods to the scale of the intervention, decision-making needs and available resources.
  - is conducted according to recognised ethical standards.

### **Robustness of results and confidence in the evidence**

10. Good evaluation...
- recognises that most outcomes are affected by a range of factors and attempts to understand what would have happened in the absence of the intervention, or to understand why results are as they are.
  - considers context and different applications – understanding that outcomes may differ depending on individual and environmental circumstances (what may be effective in one scenario for some people may not work for other people in other environments).
  - has good governance procedures and quality control assurance to ensure results are robust and fit for purpose.
  - where appropriate, seeks external input; whether in the form of a steering group, external assessors or peer review.

### **Data collection and analysis**

#### 11. Good evaluation...

- has data collection which is planned before the intervention is implemented – so that, if necessary, baseline data can be collected before the policy starts.
- gathers data which gives reliable and consistent measures of an intervention's intended objectives.
- tailors appropriate data collection methods to the evaluation questions posed, and recognises that both qualitative and quantitative insights may be equally important.
- considers availability of existing monitoring data and what additional data may need to be collected to support the evaluation.
- has processes in place so that any data is verified to ensure it is accurate and consistent.
- adheres to accepted analytical standards to ensure robust results and accurate interpretation of the data.

### **Engagement, sharing and dissemination**

#### 12. Good evaluation...

- gives consideration to how findings will be shared and disseminated and thinks about engaging with a range of stakeholders throughout the project.
- demonstrates a commitment to openness and transparency towards research results, including noting any limitations or caveats around the results.

### **Next steps and sources of further information**

13. This protocol represents the first step in a package of work to support the industry in undertaking robust evaluations. The Responsible Gambling Trust will be responsible for delivering this work, and has already begun to deliver bespoke evaluation training. The Trust has also started to plan the development of evaluation FAQs, access to workshop materials and expert advice, details of appropriate evaluation contractors, and guidance on how to commission an evaluation.
14. This protocol only contains the high-level principles for conducting robust evaluations, more detailed information on evaluations is available in: *Magenta Book: Guidance for evaluation* (HM Treasury, 2011), *The Green Book: Appraisal and Evaluation in Central Government* (HM Treasury, 2011), and the UKES *Guidelines for good practice in evaluation*.

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