

Quick check for counterfactual impact evaluation

This checklist is designed to rapidly assess whether it's worth further exploring feasibility of impact evaluation (i.e., experimental or quasi-experimental design with a counterfactual) for a particular intervention. An 'intervention' may be a project within a programme, a stand-alone project, or one element within a project.

After using this checklist, additional work is needed to assess evaluability for projects that have all 'yes' or a mix of 'yes' and 'maybe' answers.

In all cases, consider good monitoring and process evaluation.

The first question is about strategic fit and can help prioritise resources. If this answer is a 'no', other projects may be a better use of resources. If 'yes', but an answer below is a 'no', there may be ways that the intervention could be adapted for robust impact evaluation.

#	Question	Yes/Maybe or No
1	Strategic fit - Would robust evidence on the effectiveness of this intervention be strategically valuable? <i>(e.g., to inform future scale-up, support a commitment to experimentation and learning, test a novel approach in an area with limited existing evidence, measure effectiveness of a costly project)</i>	

If any of the following are a 'no', it is unlikely that robust impact evaluation is suitable.

#	Question	Yes/Maybe or No
1	Discrete - Are the intervention activities and outcomes sufficiently discrete and distinguishable from other activities to evaluate its impact separately? <i>(as opposed to a complex programme or an intervention with multiple activities and multiple outcomes that cannot be disentangled from other interventions within a programme)</i>	
2	Outcomes - Is the intervention expected to produce a measurable change in specific outcomes of meaningful size? <i>(as opposed to marginal changes that may be difficult to detect)</i>	
3	Scale - Will the project involve enough participants (e.g. areas, individuals, or businesses), allowing for take-up and drop-out, to support a credible impact evaluation? <i>(small trials have limited statistical power affecting the generalisability of findings)</i>	
4	Data availability - Will data on participants (e.g. areas, individuals, or businesses) and outcomes be available (or available with improvements to data collection) both before and after the intervention? <i>(including whether outcome data will become available within the required evaluation timeframe)</i>	

If impact evaluation isn't possible, good monitoring data or theory-based evaluation may help you better understand the project in a non-causal way.

This checklist draws on Table 2.3 in the [Magenta Book](#).

Annex: Examples of answers

Question	'Yes/Maybe' examples	'No' examples
Discrete Are the intervention activities and outcomes sufficiently discrete and distinguishable from other activities to evaluate its impact separately?	Careers counselling advice within a broader employment support programme Tax subsidy within an investment zone programme Start-up advice service	Devolved employment and skills powers (<i>broad policy with multiple outcomes and multiple interventions</i>) New tram route as part of development programme that includes 700 new homes (<i>can't untangle effect of tram route from effect of homes</i>) Start-up advice when offered alongside grants, mentoring, and access to experts (<i>can't untangle effect of start-up advice from mix of interventions that work with the same participants</i>)
Outcomes Is the intervention expected to produce a measurable change in specific outcomes of meaningful size?	Employment programme outcome: Number of participants in employment six months later New bus route outcome: Increase in passenger numbers on improved route Sales and marketing advice outcome: Increase in turnover for participating businesses	Employment programme outcome: Increase in area employment rate (<i>programme is unlikely to have a measurable change on the areas' employment rate</i>) New bus route outcome: Increase in bus passenger numbers across network (<i>one route is unlikely to have a measurable effect on the whole network</i>) Apprentice mentoring outcome: Increase in innovation for businesses participating (<i>impact on business innovation is extremely unlikely</i>)
Scale Will the project involve enough participants (e.g. areas, individuals, or businesses), allowing for take-up and drop-out, to support a credible impact evaluation?	500+ individuals enrolled in a careers counselling programme (allowing for ~20% drop-out) 40+ local authority areas receiving a place-based regeneration intervention 200+ businesses enrolled in a business support programme	20 individuals enrolled in a pilot coaching scheme (<i>too few for statistical power</i>) 6 enterprise zones receive infrastructure investment (<i>analysis at area level is too few for statistical power</i>) 40 businesses in a sector-specific mentoring pilot (<i>too few for statistical power</i>)

Data availability Will data on participants (e.g. areas, individuals, or businesses) and outcomes be available (or available with improvements to data collection) both before and after the intervention?	Young people employment training outcome: YP in employment education or training (EET) 6 months after engagement	Young people employment training outcome: Job titles for those now in employment (<i>only sector and earning data is available through LEO</i>)
	Tram improvements outcome: House prices within 800m of improved routes	Tram improvements outcome: Productivity of businesses within 1km 6 months after route improvements (<i>data lag</i>)
	Business advice outcome: turnover at 12 months and 24 months after engagement	Business advice outcome: Self-reported firm innovative behaviour 12 and 24 months after engagement (<i>insufficient budget to account for attrition + no administrative data</i>)

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