Evaluation

What is evaluation?

It is important not to equate evaluation with either reflection or assessment. The general notions of reflection and assessment are much broader in their fields of coverage than simply evaluation. Think of evaluation as an extension of reflection, and as a data gathering process that will provide information about many aspects of the learning and teaching context that you have been thinking about (or reflecting upon). Reflecting upon your work will guide your choices of evaluation styles and methods (for example: your purposes or desired outcomes, questions to pose, directions or aspects to evaluate, methods to use, people to ask, use of the ‘findings’).

Evaluation involves reflecting upon all aspects of the learning and teaching process in order to identify areas in need of improved practice. This involves asking questions about yourself and your teaching, as well as about the content and teaching strategies employed, and assessment tasks used. Evaluation could simply be a set of generic questions that guide your reflection on the success or otherwise of your lessons, teaching styles or methods, or any other aspect of the unit of study, for example assessment.

How is evaluation different to reflection?

The difference lies in viewing reflection as quality thinking about aspects of our work, and evaluation as specifically attending to the objects of our thinking (what am I reflecting upon). In the teaching context evaluation strategies aim to inquire into and indicate the value of your work. This refers to:

- **effectiveness** (Did things work as I had hoped? Were student learning outcomes achieved? To what levels?)
- **efficiency** (Did things work as well as other ways would or could? Was student interest, motivation and involvement maintained?)
- **economics** (Was it cost and time effective, affordable? Did it avoid wastage?)
- **intrinsic value** (Did it work at a standard or quality that I am prepared to accept and continue? Did students benefit from the activity? Why or why not?)
- **diversity** (Was it valuable to students from diverse backgrounds? Were some students advantaged or disadvantaged?).

Therefore evaluation is logically connected with every aspect of learning and teaching, and importantly (like assessment), evaluation must always refer back to the learning outcomes, and your stated educational intentions.

Why evaluate?

Evaluation involves more than just thinking about aspects of the learning and teaching process and context. It aims to:

- identify areas in need of change, modification or improvement
• determine students’ perceptions of your teaching and the unit of study
• develop a picture of the experiences of students.

As such it involves asking questions about yourself and your teaching, as well as the unit of study design, content, learning and teaching strategies and assessments, and their use and effectiveness. Importantly it involves finding out how others have experienced the event that is you, your teaching, and your unit of study, especially students.

**Methods of evaluation**

In its simplest form evaluation may be facilitated by a set of generic questions that guide your and/or students’ reflections on the success or otherwise of the various components of your unit of study. More sophisticated evaluations are carried out by the Institute of Teaching and Learning (ITL) as a regular and ongoing part of your teaching, student learning and accountability. Other people (colleagues, students, supervisor) may also evaluate your teaching or individual components of it (for example unit of study, lectures, tutorials, learning and teaching strategies used, level of student engagement, assessment tasks, group work, or other more specific aspects of your teaching). Such evaluations provide an excellent source of feedback and are highly regarded methods of self-reflection in terms of professional development and scholarly teaching.

Evaluation can occur via formal and/or informal mean and can involve diagnostic, formative and/or summative methods. The choice of what, how and when to evaluate is entirely yours (except when using University prescribed evaluation methods which are standardised and carried out at the end of each semester of teaching). It is important to know what you want to evaluate, and an [evaluation checklist](#) can facilitate this process.