

Summary of instruments that might be used in evaluations of value and impact

Instrument	Uses	Considerations	Advantages	Possible disadvantages
Surveys	<p>Used to gather:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic information • Descriptive information • Attitudes, opinions, values, experiences • Expectations, goals, needs • Self-reported behaviours • Numerical data 	<p>Content – be clear about what you are trying to find out or measure</p> <p>Census v sample (see sampling issues under discussion/focus groups)</p> <p>Closed or open questions</p> <p>Pilot to test out reliability/validity (see below), then refine if necessary</p> <p>Are specialist skills required (eg, in questionnaire design and analysis)?</p> <p>Co-ordinate the timing of the survey to avoid questionnaire fatigue</p> <p>Reminders to boost response rates</p> <p>Are there ethical issues to consider?</p> <p><u>Reliability and validity</u> <i>Reliability</i> is the extent to which a set of items consistently measures the same thing across respondents and institutional settings. It is also the extent to which students respond in similar ways at two different points in time (although this is costly to test).</p> <p><i>Validity</i> is the extent to which the instrument measures what it is intended to measure. This can be achieved by ensuring that items are clearly worded and well-defined, and logical relationships exist between the items.</p>	<p>Inclusive (assuming a census and a good response rate)</p> <p>Can provide quantitative <u>and</u> qualitative information</p> <p>Can provide information about the relationships between different variables/responses</p> <p>Does not require a great deal of time commitment from individual students</p>	<p>Establishing robustness (reliability/ validity) takes time</p> <p>Questionnaires tend to be backward looking.</p> <p>The accuracy of self-reported behaviour can be affected by inability or unwillingness to provide accurate information</p> <p>The reporting of intentionally inaccurate information can also be a problem; as is the 'halo effect' where behaviour might be inflated</p> <p>Response rates may be low, which will raise issues about representativeness of responses and generalisability of conclusions drawn</p> <p>May be costly in terms of staff time spent on analysis and interpretation of results</p>

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Discussion/ focus groups	<p>Used to gather:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on a specific topic • Varied attitudes, opinions, values, experiences • Information through the interaction of a group of participants (between 6-10) • More detailed and rich information • More detailed information about reasons for survey results 	<p>Content – be clear about what you are trying to find out or measure</p> <p>Question format – structured, semi-structured, unstructured</p> <p>Pilot then refine if necessary</p> <p>Sampling issues: probability v non-probability (see below)</p> <p>Vocal students may dominate discussion</p> <p>Requires specialist/skilled (and objective?) input to secure effective facilitation and discussion</p> <p>Useful to have a note-taker in addition to the facilitator</p> <p>Are there ethical issues to consider – consent forms and participant information sheets</p> <p>Consider over-recruitment to compensate for non-attendance</p> <p><u>Sampling issues</u> <i>Probability</i> sampling includes random sampling, which enables generalisations to be made about the whole ‘population.’ <i>Non-probability</i> sampling includes ‘purposeful’ (ie, handpicked), ‘snowball’ (ie, recommendations), ‘convenience’ (ie, captive audience) sampling, which only enables generalisations to be made about those taking part.</p>	<p>Useful for engaging students in dialogue and highlighting issues of concern</p> <p>Can provide a rich source of information</p> <p>Good opportunities for dialogue and testing out ideas</p> <p>Provides opportunities for students to hear others’ views</p> <p>Enables exploration of an issue(s) in depth</p> <p>Facilitator can be neutral</p>	<p>May be resource intensive (in terms of student/staff time, analysis and interpretation of results)</p> <p>Can be difficult to manage</p> <p>May be intimidating for some students (consider the alternative of individual interviews if the topic is sensitive/contentious)</p> <p>Compromises student anonymity and confidentiality</p> <p>Students may not attend (incentives may be required)</p> <p>Logistics of organisation</p>
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Discussion/ focus groups (cont.)		If the intention is to include 'non-users', then close attention will need to be paid to sampling considerations.		
Interviews	<p>Used to gather:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on a specific topic that may be sensitive/contentious • Perceptions of experiences • Stories • Opinions • Extent of knowledge acquisition 	<p>Content – be clear about what you are trying to find out or measure</p> <p>Question format – structured, semi-structured, unstructured</p> <p>Pilot then refine if necessary</p> <p>Sampling issues</p> <p>Number of interviewees</p> <p>Credibility of the evaluation (ie, there needs to be sufficient interviewees) v 'saturation' (are the same issues coming up at each interview?)</p> <p>Face-to-face or telephone</p> <p>Data (quantity/complexity) and analysis (time required)</p> <p>Timeframe</p> <p>Budget (staff time, equipment, transcription, analysis, incentives)</p> <p>Are there ethical issues to consider – consent forms and participant information sheets?</p>	<p>Useful for engaging students in dialogue and highlighting issues of concern</p> <p>Can provide a rich source of information</p> <p>Enables exploration of an issue(s) in depth</p>	<p>May be resource intensive (in terms of student/staff time, analysis and interpretation of results)</p> <p>Logistics of organisation</p>