

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION TO EVIDENCE

By the end of this section you will be able to:



Define and apply data and evidence to various contexts within higher education.



Extend your learning, access the Digital Glossary in the Appendix to continue to define and apply key terms.



Apply your learning, review the case studies throughout the rest of this Guide to help you consider 'real life' examples associated with the content of this section and others.

What is data and evidence in higher education?

The first four sections of this Guide will ask you to think critically about how you are using/intend to use data and evidence in higher education.

Section 1 provides an overview of the content of the Guide and an introduction to key terms which are explained using short videos. Use this section to plan your use of the Guide.

Section 2 provides an overview of how and why evidence might be used by staff in higher education. A short activity will ask you to think about the different ways evidence is used in your institution/role. A case study with reflective questions is included which can be discussed individually or in small groups.

Section 3 provides an overview of the types of data that could inform your decision making. This includes the strengths and limitations of quantitative and qualitative data and challenges you to think about which evidence is dominant and which evidence is overlooked in your context. A case study with reflective questions is included which can be discussed individually or in small groups.

Section 4 will ask you to think critically about the evidence you use and how it is collected. This section will guide you through the questions you should ask at the beginning of a project and those you should reflect on continuously. This includes ethical questions and considerations of methodological quality. A case study with reflective questions is included, which can be discussed individually or in small groups.

This Guide then outlines the variety of data sources in higher education that can be analysed to help you explore a topic area or identified problem.

Section 5 provides detail of existing data sources that you may want to access and where to find them. This is introduced as [secondary data analysis](#). There is a typology that can be used to collate your sources and another case study with reflective questions that can be discussed individually or in small groups.

Section 6 discusses how you can choose the best method and design your own data collection tools using a suitable methodology. This is introduced as [primary data collection](#) and starts by outlining a process for rationalising research questions. The survey and focus group method are discussed in detail and incentives for data collection are debated. A case study with reflective questions is included, which can be discussed individually or in small groups.

Section 7 is designed to support you with the communication of your evidence and contains checklists and reflective questions to ask yourself in 'evidencing the evidence'. This section includes practical techniques such as action planning and scenario modelling to ensure that evidence is used effectively. The Critical Checklist for Using Evidence Effectively should be completed after engaging with Sections 1–6. To consolidate learning in this section, a further case study with reflective questions is included, to be critiqued individually or in small groups.

Section 8 - the final section - focuses on impact and ongoing action and is designed to summarise and utilise all the content and learning from the previous seven sections. In contrast to other sections, this starts with a case study of success, in which things go well to help identify important points in the process. This includes leadership skills and building effective relationships. It is highly recommended that all previous sections are completed before engaging with this section.

What is data?

Data is information collected for a specific purpose, including [research](#) and [evaluation](#).

A[method](#) is required to generate data.

These methods produce [quantitative](#) (numbers) or [qualitative](#) data (words/visuals).

A[nalysis](#) is necessary to make sense of data or data only exists as numbers or words/visuals.

What is evidence?



Evidence brings together the analysis of your chosen data to answer a specific question. More than one source of data can be analysed to produce evidence. [Triangulating](#) data can provide a more robust evidence base and can strengthen any conclusions you are making. This would include identifying any data gaps or outliers in the evidence.



1.1 Evidence Essentials One

Collating evidence is not always a logical or linear process. Data sources may not neatly corroborate and may even contrast each other. To make sense of your data landscape, spend some time reflecting on the process and the outcome. Evidence can include notes of unintended outcomes of the research/evaluation and personal reflections of the researcher(s). Once a conclusion has been reached, it is also important to state any limitations in the evidence base.



References and Further Reading

Creative Arts Cluster (2018) (Collaborative authorship: Gunn, V, Mackay, J, Schrag, A, O'Neill, S, Bennett, S, Miller Judd, P, Kanhye, R, Campbell, A and Sexon, S) Scoping the Creative Arts Territory in the Scottish Context: Teaching Enhancements, Evidence Development, and the Interconnections with the Cultural Ecology of Scotland. Glasgow: QAA Scotland

Spence, C W (2019). 'Judgement' versus 'metrics' in higher education management. Higher Education, May 2019, 77(5): pp 761–775

Trowler, V, Trowler, P and Saunders, M (2018) Responding to Student Voice: Insights into international practice. Glasgow: QAA Scotland