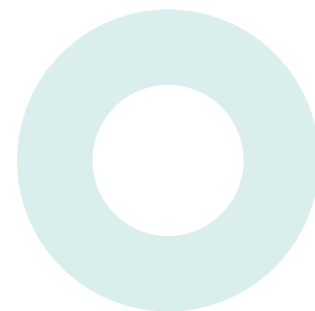


Harnessing the power of evaluation
to build better international strategic
partnerships between universities

**The EVALUATE framework and handbook
- condensed version**



This handbook has been produced by the EVALUATE project – Developing a Framework for Evaluation of International University partnerships.

The EVALUATE project consortium

The University of Copenhagen, Denmark

University College Dublin, Ireland

The University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom

The University of Helsinki, Finland

Leiden University, Netherlands

The University of Sydney, Australia

EVALUATE is funded under ERASMUS+ Key Action 2. The University of Edinburgh was the project coordinator.

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



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Executive summary

A young person has a life changing experience through a student exchange programme; a researcher combines data with their peers around the world to advance their field; a collaborative educational programme creates a powerful space for students across jurisdictions to share learning.

These are just three examples of the many benefits international partnerships between universities can provide. Yet, our understanding of how such partnerships perform can be quite limited. We often don't know if a partnership has made a difference over and above what can be achieved independently.

Evaluation gives us the evidence to understand the value of partnerships - and to use that evidence to inform monitoring and decision-making. The EVALUATE project - Developing a Framework for Evaluation of International University partnerships, hopes to help more universities generate that evidence for their own benefit, and that of the wider field

In this concise handbook, you'll find a summary of guidance, resources, and analysis to help you do just that. Some of the condensed learnings include:

- How to consider the **context** and **purpose** of your evaluation. When you evaluate, what you set out to do, and who you involve can all be hugely significant.
- Guidance on developing a **clear central question**, and supplementary questions, to focus your evaluation.

The project has also published a full version of the handbook that also features:

- An introduction to a range of evidence-based **methods**, qualitative and quantitative, for conducting your evaluation.
- Case studies with **first hand, on the ground accounts** of building partnerships and delivering evaluations.
- A comprehensive **literature review**.

The project brings together a range of universities with varying experience in developing and delivering all types of partnerships:

The University of Copenhagen, Denmark
University College Dublin, Ireland
The University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom
The University of Helsinki, Finland
Leiden University, Netherlands
The University of Sydney, Australia

This project consortium brought together an interdisciplinary team of international partnerships professionals and evaluation scholars to create the Evaluation Framework through an iterative process of case-study development and exploration of established evaluation methods. The Evaluation Framework development process and design were led by scholars at the Centre for Science and Technology Studies, at Leiden University, and Science and Technology and Innovation Studies at The University of Edinburgh. EVALUATE is funded under ERASMUS+ Key Action 2. The University of Edinburgh was the project coordinator.

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About the EVALUATE Framework

While Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) enter into strategic partnerships with a range of different kinds of actors, the EVALUATE project focusses primarily on international strategic partnerships between HEIs. For the purpose of what follows, we define such partnerships as formal arrangements between two or more HEIs located in different nation states. The focus of this project is on evaluation of strategic partnerships, including a framework to help with the design and implementation of evaluations.

The framework is outlined in the rest of this condensed handbook, with a fuller version available in the full handbook. It consists of a number of questions, split into 3 categories:

1. The evaluation and its context

These questions are outlined and explained on **page 7** of this handbook. They are intended to guide you as you design your evaluation, and follow up on it after completion. The focus is on the evaluation process.

2. The central evaluation question

These questions are outlined and explained on **page 8** of this handbook. They are intended to give you ideas for a “central question” or a focus, that you can use to guide the evaluation. The focus is on the content of the evaluation.

3. The partnership and its context

These questions are outlined and explained on **page 10** of this handbook. They are intended to provoke thought on the history and goals of the partnership and its relationship with other policies. The focus is not on evaluation as such, but on information that can be relevant to an evaluation.

How to use the framework



The EVALUATE framework is designed to fit different types of partnerships, in different phases of their life. It presents questions that can be **adjusted and appropriated to various situations**.

As such, the EVALUATE framework **cannot cover every possible question**. Instead, the framework shows you **the type of questions you might want to ask, examples of issues to take into account, and possible approaches to evaluation**. We encourage users to identify questions relevant to their situation. It is also worth noting that the EVALUATE framework supports the evaluation of a strategic partnership, yet it **does not dictate or predict the outcome of this assessment**.

Finally, evaluating every strategic partnership at every stage of its life-cycle to the fullest extent possible requires capacity, and it **might not be feasible (or necessary) to do this every time**. As such, you will need to decide when to do a comprehensive evaluation, and when not.

Throughout this compact version of the EVALUATE Handbook, you will find short excerpts from case studies of evaluation in action. These case studies are published in the extended version of the EVALAUTE Handbook.

The evaluation and its context

The evaluation of a strategic partnership is often part of a larger process and not a stand-alone effort. Some important general questions to consider as you plan, or consider whether to plan, an evaluation include:

- **Why evaluate now?**
- **Who is asking for the evaluation?**
- **Who else is involved (other than those asking for the evaluation), and in what roles?**
- **What is at stake? What are the consequences?**
- **What will the follow up look like? What will happen with the results of the evaluation?**

Questions that address the more technical aspects of the evaluation include:

- **When should the evaluation take place?**
 - **Prior to formalising the partnership**
An evaluation preceding a partnership will inform a decision to enter into that partnership.
 - **During the partnership**
Evaluation of an ongoing strategic partnership is often dedicated to monitoring or improving that partnership.
 - **Towards the end of an agreement term**
Towards the end of a term of a partnership, it is useful to identify what the contributions, impacts and challenges of that partnership were.
- **What is the goal of the evaluation?**
 - To decide: **“do we want to partner with university X?”**
 - To reflect and improve: **How has the partnership developed?**
 - To understand outcomes: **What are the results of the investment?**
 - To monitor: **What are the investments, activities and results?**
- How is the evaluation / decision organized?
 - **What will be used as evidence?**
What evidence is seen as relevant depends on the strategic partnership and its goals, as well as on the evaluation question and goals
 - **What methods will be used to collect and analyse information?**

Questions to support the decision on methods and data include:

- **What information is available / collected already?**
- **Are there any targets or goals, and if so, what are they?**
- **How will the evidence be presented?**
- **Who is responsible for collection and analysis of data and for presentation of results?**
- **Who will decide; who will assess?**

The central evaluation question

An evaluation is based around a central question, that requires the collection of evidence, and the formulation of a judgement. For example:

- **With what university in country X can we best enter into a strategic partnership?**
- **Do we want to renew our strategic partnership with university Y?**
- **How can we improve our strategic partnership with university Z?**

This subsection describes typical evaluation questions. The first set of questions is centered around the ways a partnership relates to wider university strategies, policies and aspirations. The remainder of the questions are presented according to the phase of the partnership to which they relate.

Questions regarding the relationship with certain strategies / policies / aspirations

Typical evaluation questions include:

- **To what extent does the partnership contribute to strategy X / policy Y / impact Z?**
- **How do we ensure the partnership will contribute to strategy X / policy Y / impact Z?**

Phase-specific questions

A strategic partnership evolves and changes over time, and so do evaluation questions.

A typical strategic partnership can be divided into three distinct evaluation phases: (1) before the formal start of a strategic partnership; (2) during the partnership and (3) late in an agreement term, or even afterwards.

Phase one: before the partnership

In this phase, two kinds of issue may be considered by an evaluation. The first is deciding on the partner, the second is the functioning of the strategic partnership. The latter includes aims and goals, an implementation plan, and a risk mitigation.

- **Who do we want to partner with and why?**
Note: This question suggests that there is consensus on what a strategic partnership is, what it should look like and what it will deliver.
- **What can the partnership deliver? To us (and who is us?), the partner, society?**
- **What are the aims/goals and how can they be reached?**
- **What are the potential risks? How are they mitigated?**

Phase two: during the partnership

During the lifetime of a strategic partnership, evaluation can be used as a governance tool, to allow for reflection, development and implementation.

- **What can be done to improve implementation?**
- **What can be learned for other partnerships?**

Phase three: Late in, or after, the term of an agreement

- **Do we want to renew the partnership?**
- **What has been achieved?**

The University of Helsinki case study shows the value of conducting a mid-term evaluation. It helps to re-align the partnership goals, roles, responsibilities and resources in line with the evolution of the interests of the parties.

The partnership and its context

Taking the context of a strategic partnership into account - its history, rationale, goals, ambitions, activities, strategy, and implementation - helps encourage well informed decisions. This section addresses these aspects of the partnership. These questions ask: what do you know about the partnership? And also: who knows?

Questions focused on the partners

- **What external partners are involved (what university, or network, or other organisation)?**

- **What is your institution's history with this partner/these partners?**

Some partnerships develop over time and they start with a focus on teaching or research only, before they develop into more fully fledged 'strategic' partnerships covering multiple activities, that are governed at the central level of the university. Other partnerships have a shorter history and start with a Memorandum of Understanding between two universities.

- **What departments are involved in the university?**
- **Are there any champions that play a key role in the partnership?**

Questions focused on the goals and ambitions of the partnership

Partnerships can be broad, including multiple disciplines or subjects, but they can also focus on specific themes or topics, e.g. health research or cultural heritage.

- **What is the rationale for the partnership?**
- **How is the partnership formalized? (will be/has been)**
- **What are the goals of the partnership?**
- **And what are goals and expectation of the partner? Has this been discussed?**
- **How is the partnership implemented?**

The university of Copenhagen case study describes how one of the main goals of the first strategic partnership was to explore the concept of strategic partnerships. The lack of a more specified set of goals was a challenge when implementing of the partnership. However, the evaluation uncovered unanticipated outcomes of the partnership.

Questions focused on the partnership activities

- **What activities are part of the partnership?**
- **What is the starting situation?**
- **Who is involved in the partnership?**
- **What are strategies for the partnership?**
- **Is there an implementation plan?**
- **Has the university made funding available?**

Questions focused on expectations regarding the partnership

- **What does success/value mean? And at what cost?**
- **What results are expected?**
- **What further impacts are foreseen?**
- **What are potential risks? Perceived by whom? How about risk mitigation?**

The University of Sydney case study explores the value aligning student mobility and research goals within one strategic partnership, in the expectation that the sum will be greater than the parts. The case study concludes that whilst there are collateral benefits to an alignment strategy, student mobility and research are functionally distinct, and outcomes in one area are unlikely to materially affect outcomes in the other.

Other questions about the partnership

- **What is the history of this partnership / of collaboration between the universities?**
- **What funding opportunities are available?**
- **What regional/national/supranational policies are relevant?**
- **What specific institutional policy arrangements and contexts are relevant?**

The University of Edinburgh – Galapagos case study revealed the power of seeking external perspectives. Stakeholders in the Galápagos Islands viewed the partnership mainly through the lens of community benefit – this provided the evaluators with distinct, yet complementary, data to build a richer understanding of the value of the partnership.

Lessons Learned from the EVALUATE Project



The EVALUATE project has been an extraordinary learning journey for the entire project team. Here we attempt to summarise the most important lessons learnt.

- #1 Know your stakeholders and their (naturally diverse) interests
- #2 Integrate evaluation with existing data and systems
- #3 Get to know evaluation methods
- #4 Expect change in ideas about evaluation – and to invest time and effort

Lesson one: Know your stakeholders and their (naturally diverse) interests

- Identify the key stakeholders and their key responsibilities/mandates in relation to the evaluation, and create a roadmap for the partnership together.
- There can be lots of individual and unconnected conversations between key stakeholders when it comes to international partnerships. It is important to have a coordinated approach.
- How does each partner think about success in relation to strategic partnerships? The definition of success is not self-evident.
- What are the broader objectives of the strategic partnership for each university?

Lesson two: Integrate evaluation with existing data and systems

- Look for opportunities to embed evaluative methods into existing processes and practices within the partnership.
- Consider where evaluation fits within the wider context of priority projects. There might be competing institutional priorities.
- Think about the evaluation as a capacity building exercise more than just collecting and analysing information.
- To ensure that an evaluation is meaningful, the ownership of it needs to sit in the appropriate place within each institution.
- Universities need to consider what data will be available that will assist with the evaluation of the partnership.
- Tangible KPIs or outputs can be established in all areas of collaborative activity, including education, student mobility and research.
- In our experience it is often more challenging to identify and benchmark against qualitative KPIs. The risk of this “what get measured gets managed” approach, however, is that less measurable yet important factors can be underplayed.

The Leiden University evaluation team combined quantitative and qualitative methods to create a richer understanding of partnerships. From bibliometric analysis they learned about collaborations that have produced joint publications. From survey and interviews they discovered the drivers for collaboration that shape education and research activities with partners.

Lesson three: Get to know evaluation methods

- Workshop-based interactive and participative methods of stakeholder engagement in evaluation practice (e.g. in planning how to carry out the evaluation, and deciding on the methods together) can produce meaningful results in form of common understanding which enhances a feeling of ownership for the participants.
- Many outcomes often identified as being important by a university are too broad or too indirect to be attributable to a particular partnership or indeed, suite of partnerships.
- An often-overlooked criterion relates to the structural robustness of the partnership. For example, universities might make it their objective to build the resilience necessary to allow the partnership to survive the departure of key personnel on either side, or leadership shifts.
- It is important to consider who will conduct the evaluation of a specific project and to adjust expectations with stakeholders and decisionmakers accordingly.

The University College Dublin case study shows how principles and tools of stakeholder engagement can reconceptualise evaluation as a change process for creating better collaborative spaces through continuous feedback on agreed 'engagement criteria'. This case study highlights the importance of collecting qualitative data to evaluate the value produced within strategic partnerships.

Lesson four: Expect change in ideas about evaluation - and to invest time and effort

Our understanding about the power of evaluation changed radically as a result of the intensive discovery process we went through in the course of the EVALUATE project. In common with many experiences of radical change, our preconceptions were disrupted. We strove to find meaning. And finally, we came to terms with a new reality. It's also worth reflecting on the significant scale of this intensive discovery process - and ensuring that those involved have the time and resources they need.



First awakening.

Understanding: low

Confidence: high

Desire for simple common definitions and an evaluation framework to deliver a clear assessment.

Building awakening.

Understanding: moderate

Confidence: low

Grappling with the complexity of contextual factors and diverse stakeholder perspectives.

Maturing awakening.

Understanding: better

Confidence: better

Understanding of the partnership, its context and evaluation methodologies to deliver a fit for purpose evaluation.