

Annex 18: Quality Assurance Approach Paper

Prosperity Fund Evaluation & Learning Team

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Acronyms	
QA	Quality Assurance
ISO	International Organisation for Standardisation
PFMO	Prosperity Fund Management Office
DFIF	Department for International Development
EQUALS	Evaluation Quality Assurance and Learning Service
E&L	Evaluation and Learning
PF	Prosperity Fund

This report was prepared during the inception phase of the Prosperity Fund Evaluation and Learning contract. It forms an annex to the main Inception Report.

It was produced and approved by the Prosperity Fund Management Office before the main Inception Report and Workplan were finalised and agreed.

If there is any inconsistency between this annex and the main Inception Report and Workplan, the main Inception Report and Workplan provides the agreed position.

1 Introduction

This paper outlines the roles and processes involved in ensuring that the evaluation and learning outputs produced during the Prosperity Fund Evaluation & Learning contract meet the standard required by PFMO and wider stakeholders, including other Whitehall departments and programme delivery teams.

The guidelines set out here are drawn from the project management and quality assurance arrangements of the consortium companies (WYG, LTS, Integrity). WYG holds an accredited ISO 9001 Quality Management Systems certification. This means their internal company systems have been audited by an independent quality management organisation, and found to be fit for meeting the needs of customers and stakeholders as well as statutory and regulatory requirements.

2 Definition of Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance (QA) is defined here as the independent advice provided to project teams and E&L directors to ensure that work undertaken and final outputs (e.g. evaluation reports) are delivered to a high standard.

QA activities are carried out at specific moments in the project cycle, and are typically carried out by more than one person. Although special QA procedures are in place to assure quality for all E&L deliverables, it is the responsibility of all team members to ensure that their work contributes to research excellence. QA procedures are therefore additional to, and not a replacement for day-to-day quality control activities.

While QA procedures will be applied to all client outputs, any evaluation study will be reviewed according to standards based on those set out by DFID's Evaluation Quality Assurance and Learning Service. As such, the procedures will focus not only on the technical robustness of evaluation work but also the extent which evaluations are useful for programme managers, PFMO staff and other stakeholders.

Other outputs (including those produced by the Learning team) will also be quality assured, but this may follow a less stringent approach than that required by EQUALS. In practice, the intensity of QA work will depend on the amount of effort involved in producing the output in question (e.g. a blog or short article will receive less scrutiny than a full evaluation report or thematic study).

3 QA Staffing

QA work will be undertaken by:

- A pool of QA Reviewers who will be evaluation experts¹.
- A Content Editor to undertake copy-editing and proof-reading, (supported, where required, by contracted-in copy editors)

¹ In some cases, members of the E&L leadership team may undertake a QA role, so long as they have not been directly involved in producing the output undergoing quality assurance.

- A Formatting Editor, to ensure that reports and other materials conform to style guidelines (who may also be an external resource, contracted-in for a particular output or outputs)

The QA Reviewer will be an expert evaluator, with ten or more years of experience designing, managing and reporting on the results of evaluation studies. Their role is to ensure that

- All client deliverables are of a high standard, including checking the design of individual evaluation studies before they begin, and also interim and final reports
- QA protocols are followed
- QA work is completed in a timely manner

The reviewer will have extensive experience of undertaking mixed methods evaluations, including both quantitative and qualitative methods.

4 Scope of Quality Assurance

At a minimum, QA is to be carried out for:

- The scoping and planning stage of any evaluation study. This will include separate review of the initial Terms of Reference and also the Approach Paper² for each evaluation study
- Data collection processes and tools
- The final stage of each evaluation study, i.e. production of final reports

5 QA procedures at the scoping and planning stage

For each evaluation, the E&L Team Leader will appoint the Programme Evaluation Lead (or Thematic Evaluation Lead) to oversee and deliver all activities and outputs. Working together, the Programme Evaluation Lead and the E&L Team Leader will agree with the PFMO the scope of work and expectations for each deliverable.

The Programme Evaluation Lead is then responsible for:

- Defining a detailed workplan and an associated risk assessment. This will establish that the project can be delivered on time, and that time and resources are sufficient to ensure the project achieves its objectives
- Developing terms of reference for each team member, clearly setting out the activities and outputs they are expected to deliver
- Reviewing and signing-off all research instruments
- The Programme Evaluation Lead also defines QA requirements and builds these into the evaluation workplan, ensuring there is sufficient time to resolve issues

This initial QA review will be carried out at an early enough stage for the Programme Evaluation Lead and evaluation team to respond to any concerns, and before the

² Equivalent to an inception report

implementation of any study begins. Subsequent reviews will include the QA Reviewer checking that evaluation work continues to reflect the needs of programme managers and other stakeholders (for instance, by discussing programme evaluation needs with the relationship manager allocated to be the first point of contact with PF programme staff).

Any changes that are required following the QA process will need to be aligned with what has been agreed with the PFMO in the work plan. As a result, changes are expected to focus on refining the approach and methods, rather than changing these substantially.

Based on their assessment, the QA Reviewer either:

- Agrees follow-up action with the Programme Evaluation Lead and evaluation team
- Escalates to E&L directors, if significant QA concerns are raised

Outputs from the QA process will be saved for future reference in the internal Dropbox.

6 QA for data collection

QA mechanisms are also built into data collection processes. The project team will develop research protocols, topic guides and survey implementation guides to ensure data collection is focused, reliable, consistent and comparable³. These will be quality assured by the Programme Evaluation Lead prior to use. Where external data collectors are used (e.g. national consultants in countries where the PF is operating), the project team will provide training to data collectors to familiarise them with the research tools and protocols for data collection, recording and storage. The Programme Evaluation Lead will then oversee piloting of all research tools and revise the tools based on pilot feedback to ensure they are fit for purpose.

7 QA for final deliverables

This will be based on an amended version of the EQUALS template⁴, which allows the cross-checking and scoring of evaluation outputs under the following headings:

- Structure and clarity
- Clearly demonstrated understanding of the evaluation context
- Clear articulation of evaluation purpose, scope and objectives
- Evidence and description of robust evaluation methodology, design and implementation
- Robust analysis and synthesis of evaluation data (qualitative and quantitative)
- Clear and logical articulation of evaluation findings, recommendations and lessons learned

³ Data collection in this context refers, for instance, to undertaking key informant interviews for contribution analysis. It is not envisaged that PF evaluations will include substantial collection of primary data.

⁴ The precise form of the template is still under discussion at the time of writing this paper.

The EQUALS scoring system will be used:

Individual criteria rating guide	Rating	Description	Explanation
	4	Excellent	The criterion was fully met (or exceeded) and there were no shortcomings
	3	Good	The criterion was met with only minor shortcomings
	2	Fair	The criterion was partially met with some shortcomings
	1	Unsatisfactory	There were major shortcomings
	0	N/A	Not applicable - the question will be omitted from the scoring and rating

QA of final deliverables will be undertaken at an early enough stage for teams to respond to any concerns prior to submitting the output to the client.

To ensure compliance with agreed house styles, every external deliverable will also go through the following three step process⁵:

- Copy editing
- Proof reading
- Formatting

This work will be carried out or overseen by the Content and Formatting Editors, as discussed above. It will ensure that the product meets EQUALS criteria for clarity, in particular to ensure that the product is accessible to the intended audience, and is free of jargon, written in plain English, makes appropriate use of tables, charts and diagrams etc.

Summary of QA process for final evaluation deliverables

QA Stage	Responsible Team Member	E&L Deliverables	Description
1	Programme Evaluation Lead	All deliverables	Each Programme Evaluation Lead oversees and quality assures the work of respective team members throughout the project, to ensure that deliverables meet the technical requirements of the terms of reference.
2	QA Reviewer	Evaluation reports	The QA Reviewer subjects draft written evaluation reports to review, making comments in the QA template and the report document itself.

⁵ This will apply not only to evaluation reports, but also to knowledge products created by the Learning Team (e.g. briefing notes, evaluation summaries etc.)

3	Programme Evaluation Lead	Deliverables for PFMO and external audiences (reports, presentations)	<p>The Programme Evaluation Lead reviews the evaluation product independently of the QA Reviewer at both draft and final stage.</p> <p>The Programme Evaluation Lead and Technical Reviewer then compare scoring and notes to form one consolidated set of comments which they feed back to the evaluation team.</p>
4	QA Reviewer	Deliverables for PFMO and external audiences	<p>Once the QA Reviewer is satisfied that all the outstanding actions have been addressed, the evaluation product is then submitted to the PFMO for review, comment and QA. If there are any outstanding issues, these may be escalated to the Team Leader, Technical Lead, or E&L directors.</p>
5	PFMO	All deliverables submitted to the PFMO	<p>The PFMO reviews and comments on submitted deliverables. Upon receipt of the PFMO comments, stages 1 to 4 are repeated as necessary.</p>