

8. What is monitoring and evaluation?

Monitoring can be defined as a continuing function that aims primarily to provide the main stakeholders in a learning programme with early indications of progress (or lack of progress) in the achievement of results. Monitoring is seen as particularly important in an ongoing intervention, such as a learning programme, as it continuously tracks performance against what was planned. It does this by collecting and analysing data on the indicators established for monitoring and evaluation purposes. It provides continuous information on whether progress is being made toward achieving results (outputs, purposes, goals). It achieves this through record keeping and regular reporting systems.

Monitoring looks at programme processes and changes in conditions brought about by the programme activities in target groups and institutions. It also identifies strengths and weaknesses in a programme. The performance information generated from monitoring enhances learning and improves decision-making. Managers and programme implementers typically conduct monitoring.

Evaluation is a broad-based inquiry at key stages or the end of a project to answer the big questions about the effectiveness and value of its design and execution. It is a periodic, in-depth analysis of project or programme performance. It is a selective exercise that attempts to evaluate systematically the achievement of outcomes. All evaluations assess relevance, performance and other criteria in a manner that is linked to outcomes, as opposed to implementation or immediate outputs.

Evaluation relies on data generated through monitoring activities as well as information obtained from other sources (e.g. studies, research, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, surveys, etc.). Evaluations are often (but not always) conducted with the assistance of external evaluators to improve reliability.

Both monitoring and evaluation are used by organizations for a number of reasons, for example:

- to identify areas of weakness in a programme (design or delivery) in order to improve these
- to identify areas of strength in a programme (design or delivery) in order to duplicate or extend these
- to ensure that the people involved in design, development and delivery, and the provider itself, are accountable to various stakeholders such as clients and learners
- to ensure ongoing review of a programme to keep it up to date.

You will find more on Monitoring and Evaluation in the Useful Guidelines section.

[Answer to FAQ 8, The NQF and Learning Programme, the NQF Gateway]