IS IT WORKING ?

A practical guide to

Monitoring and Evaluating

your

Community Safety project

by

Andrew Thompson

on behalf of

the Thames Valley Partnership

and sponsored by …

March 1999

FOREWORD

The subjects of monitoring and evaluation are often enshrouded in terminology that make it all sound terribly difficult. It can all feel rather inaccessible to those who aren't experienced in the field.

What does all the jargon mean ? Why are we being asked to demonstrate our results anyway ? Don't others believe that we're doing our best ? Does it just mean that we're being checked up on ? Or is it an excuse to justify the withdrawal of funding ?

The thought of having to conduct the evaluation yourself can be an even more daunting prospect. What information will we have to collect ? How long will it take ? How can we prove that we've been effective ? Who'll believe us ?

Traditionally, it has all been left to the 'experts'. Now, however, it's regarded more as something that project staff themselves can and should get involved in - after all, it's really only a formalised way of doing what you're probably doing anyway. You're bound to have wondered - even if you haven't attempted to measure - what it is that you've contributed and to what extent you've improved the lives of your users.

This booklet shows that whatever the trigger was for the evaluation, knowing whether or not the project is "working" must be a positive thing as it can allow the project to develop or to grow.

Those working with young people find it particularly difficult to know what information to collect about their project, especially when it takes the mid-to-long term to see the benefits of their efforts. So although many of the principles of monitoring and evaluation are universal and do not depend on the nature of the project, this booklet focuses on the subject of monitoring and evaluation *as applied to community safety work.* It makes particular reference to youth projects.

We explore the arguments in favour of external evaluation as opposed to self-evaluation, but essentially this is a **'do-it-yourself'** manual. We therefore expect it to be of interest to managers and practitioners from:

- education, youth and community services
- social services
- schools and other youth organisations
- community safety partnerships
- criminal justice agencies such as the police, probation services and youth offender institutions.

Andrew Thompson
March 1999

CONTENTS

Appendices:

1. INTRODUCTION

Project staff often wrestle with the difficulties of evaluating youth projects, which by their very nature tend to have longer term benefits and can be difficult to measure. This booklet will reinforce the point that monitoring and evaluation are essential for the continued success of a project and will provide practical help on how to set about conducting your own evaluation.

What this booklet shows is that evaluation is really just a formal way of stepping back and assessing whether your project is “working”. By applying a few common sense principles, the whole ‘monitoring and evaluation’ task can be broken down into manageable chunks. In fact, you may find that you’re doing many of the monitoring tasks as a matter of routine anyway.

It has been written in the form of a series of introductory notes, designed to guide you through the maze of terminology and to steer you towards an evaluation strategy that’s right for your circumstances. Once you have formulated an approach, the lists of possible data items set out in the appendices should help you to decide what information you will need to record.

The starting point for the document is the assumption that your project has already set its overall aims and objectives. Although the process of defining them is outside the scope of this publication, some definitions are provided in Appendix A. This should ensure that where these (and associated) terms are used in the document, there is a clear understanding of what is meant by them. Before embarking upon an evaluation, it’s worth checking that the documented aims and objectives are up-to-date. If they were written some time ago they might not reflect the current priorities.

2. KEY TERMINOLOGY

Certain phrases and expressions have been used extensively throughout this document and it is important that the reader shares the same interpretation as the author. We do not claim that these definitions are shared universally, but feel that they are widely enough accepted in this particular context as to make them valid ones.

Inputs

The resources brought to the project, such as money, staff time or skills.

Outputs

Measures of what the organisation running the project has produced, defined in terms of what it has actually done.

In other words, assessing the outputs involves gathering and examining data about *the organisation itself.* Examples of data items might include the number of project sessions run or the number of contacts made with each user of the project.

Outcomes

The wider consequences of the project's efforts.

Outcomes result from:	a mechanism … **(the project)**	which …	operates in a specific context **(the way it is delivered and the people involved)**

Assessing the outcomes involves gathering and examining data about what impact the project has had upon people - how it has *influenced or affected* them. This could include both the actual users of the project and those who have less of a direct involvement with it.

Gauging the effects on people is often found to be less than straightforward, as it implies using some kind of measure of the extent to which their thinking or actions have changed.

By using examples, the relationship between inputs, outputs and outcomes is explored in the diagram on the following page.

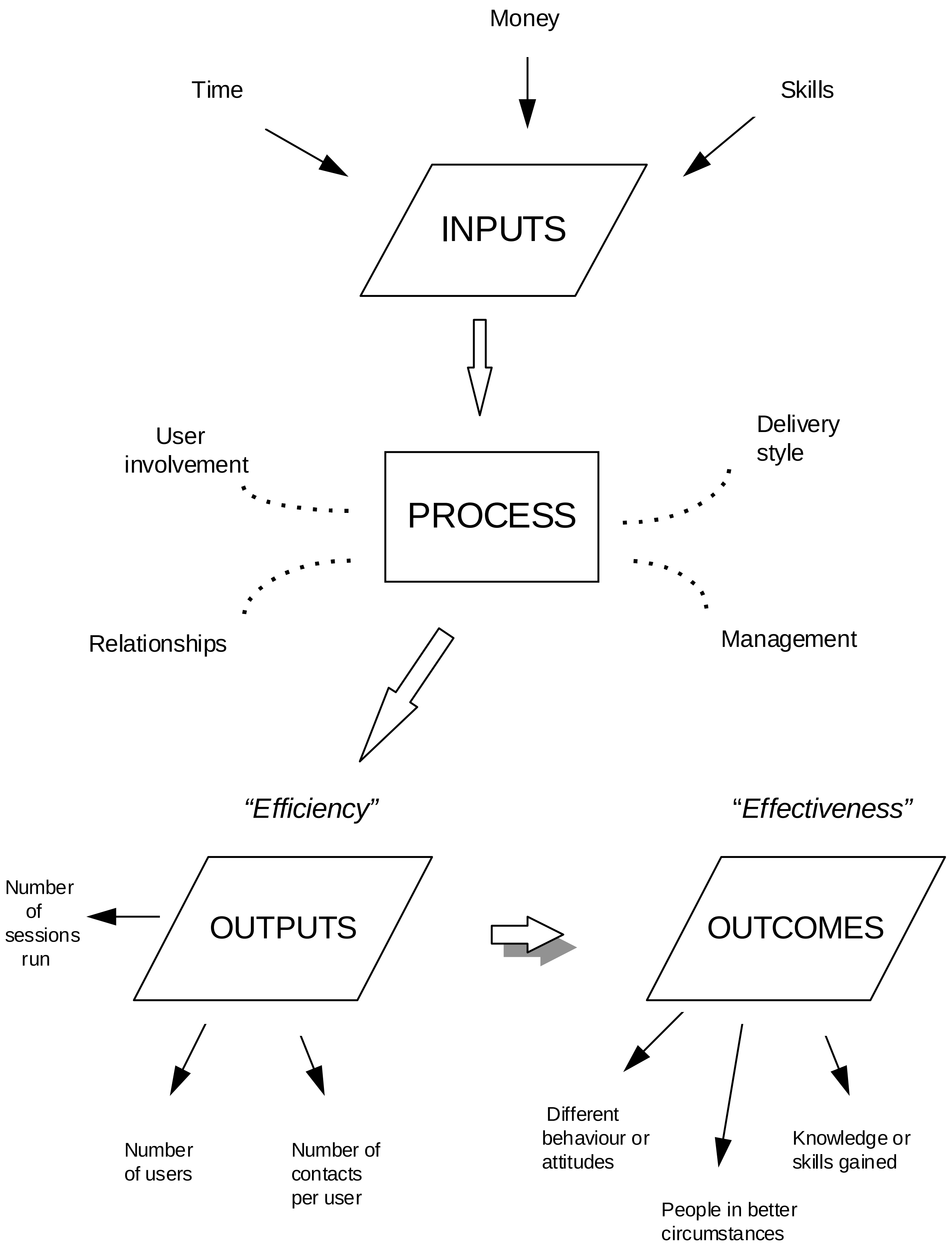
Monitoring and Evaluation

Evaluation is often used as a generic expression, to refer to both monitoring and evaluation. Indeed the two expressions are sometimes used interchangeably.

In fact, the two terms mean different things:

- **Monitoring** = regular, systematic, collection of basic information about a project
- **Evaluation** = finding out whether or not a project has achieved its aims and objectives

EXAMPLES OF INPUTS, OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES



3. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring involves the recording of information about a project, such as what resources are being used, what activities are taking place, and what is being produced.

It is a way by which you can check, on an on-going basis, whether or not you are meeting your budget and other targets. It may also allow you to spot historical patterns and emerging trends.

There is no attempt to *value* the project, however, or to judge the results. Monitoring is about gathering information about *whether the organisation is doing what it planned to do.*

An **evaluation** is an assessment of the merits of a project and an expression of *how successful it has been.*

"Success" is usually gauged in terms of how well the project's aims and objectives have been met.

Evaluations can just look at either the outputs or the outcomes of the project, but when work with people is involved, it is more enlightening to include both.

They should attempt to *explain*, rather than merely *describe* what has been going on in the project. You would usually wish to argue that there is a link between the outcomes and your efforts rather than just suggest that they both existed in isolation. Knowledge of the nature and strength of the relationship between what the project does and the outcomes is powerful and can be used to help shape future practice.

The ideal sequence of events would be:

strategy - aims and objectives are formulated and targets set

↓

planning - evaluation is anticipated at some future point and monitoring systems are designed accordingly

↓

execution - monitoring data is generated continually

↓

review - assessment of monitoring data prompts minor adjustments to project

↓

execution - monitoring data continues to be generated

↓

evaluation - evaluation pulls together monitoring and other data

↓

planning - the evaluation report is used to influence the future direction

So although evaluation is often thought of as a one-off exercise, it can in fact be repeated periodically as part of a planning and review cycle. But in view of the effort involved in conducting an evaluation, it's unlikely that you'd want to repeat it more often than every couple of years.

We accept, however, that this is very much the *ideal*. Evaluation, or even monitoring, is often an after-thought: you may find yourself trying to evaluate without having much of the necessary data on hand and without any targets to compare against. Although it might be more difficult in these circumstances, it needn't be regarded as an impossible task.

4. WHY EVALUATE ?

This section does not try to present a full argument in favour of monitoring and evaluating projects - plenty of existing material does that very well. Instead, we have assumed that you know you want to perform an evaluation, but are looking for some ideas as to how to go about it.

Whatever the trigger was for the evaluation - an expressed desire by the staff to know how the project is working or a request from someone else - it is useful to decide upon what you are actually trying to achieve. The following may be useful as a checklist:

√

- ❑ to address issues of cost and cost-effectiveness
- ❑ to help focus resources on those areas where you're making the greatest impact
- ❑ to identify strengths and weaknesses and avoid repeated mistakes
- ❑ to check that the problems you're trying to address still exist
- ❑ to identify and plug any gaps in service provision
- ❑ to gain an external perspective on the project.
- ❑ to demonstrate to supporters that you've done what you said you'd do
- ❑ to gain confidence in the service you provide
- ❑ to help attract further support
- ❑ to inform and motivate your staff.

It may be interesting to note that projects that have conducted evaluations* typically report benefits such as:

- helping them to present themselves with greater clarity
  (e.g. in annual reports and funding applications)
- resources being freed up unexpectedly
- staff becoming more involved in the project planning and having higher levels of motivation and confidence in dealing with those outside of the project
- the mere act of performing an evaluation being a good discipline, even if the results are not ultimately used.

* Source: *A Report on Evaluation by Voluntary Organisations*, Anne Connor for the Scottish Office Central Research Unit, 1993

5. PLANNING AN EVALUATION

Now that you know why you're doing the evaluation, it's time to think about the 'how'. This will mean deciding upon what information is to be collected, by whom, from whom, when, over what period and using which methods.

5.1 Who's it for ?

It's important to establish who the audience is and what their specific requirements are, as different people may view 'success' in different ways. Some of your partners may be looking for the acquisition of certain skills or evidence of learning, whereas others may wish to focus purely on behaviour or changes in offending or re-offending levels.

The information gathered from the monitoring activities could, in theory, be used to drive a number of different evaluations, each of which could focus upon different aspects of the project's performance and perhaps come up with different conclusions. In most practical situations, however, it would not be feasible to conduct more than one evaluation. There will therefore need to be some compromise amongst those who have conflicting requirements about what information should be collected and analysed.

Ideally, one evaluation report would also satisfy all interested parties, but you may not be able to find a format that works for all situations. It would not be uncommon to have to write one report for internal purposes, for example, and another for wider 'public' consumption; much of the material would be common to both, however.

Establish up-front what the end product is supposed to be. Will you recommend definite courses of action as a result of what you find out about the project or will you just provide a range of alternative actions which would need to be explored further ? The audience may be disappointed if they are expecting the former and get the latter.

5.2 Who should carry it out ?

Being part of the everyday 'housekeeping' activities, monitoring would usually be carried out by project staff. But evaluation need not be.

There's a range of options available as to who the evaluator could be - from self-evaluation (where the project members themselves perform the evaluation) to employing an external consultant.

The choice will depend upon a number of factors and must fit your circumstances. The following are just a few points that may help you to make your decision:-

(The advantages of one option are often the disadvantages of the another, of course, so we have just listed some of the "pro's" for each.)

Internal or self-evaluation:

- You can work to your own agenda and it may be easier to maintain control and ownership over the whole process
- You have a vested interest in seeing the results used to the advantage of the project
- You may acquire new skills or develop existing ones in the process
- You are already familiar with the ways of working of the project and should have easier access to the required data.

Peer evaluation:

- Others in your field may already be familiar with your work
- They may have an understanding of (and possibly empathy for) what you're trying to achieve
- They may have access to the right people
- They may be used to working with and communicating with clients such as yours
- They may have the necessary expertise in administering specialist tests or questionnaires.

External consultants/researchers:

- They are able to offer a fresh viewpoint
- They can bring independence and objectivity (*and be seen to be doing so)*
- They should be less likely to overlook the project's shortcomings
- They should already possess the necessary skills
- The time they spend should not detract from the provision of the project's services (though you should still budget for having to spend time with them).

There are also various intermediate (joint working) solutions, in which consultants either simply advise on methods of working or become more involved than that and actually participate in the interviews, observation, analysis and write-up.

In practice, the choice may be more determined by cost than by ideological considerations and it is fairly typical for the project staff to conduct the evaluation themselves. Often that would mean the project co-ordinator or project manager leading the evaluation, working closely with other staff and with staff from the partner agencies. Much of the remainder of this document has been written from this viewpoint.

5.3 What resources are required to do it yourself ?

Skills in areas such as research, report-writing and analysis would be helpful. But the key to effective evaluation is not just having the right technical skills - it's also about having management support for the process and the administrative back-up.

In addition, everyone concerned will need to have attitudes that are conducive to the process, such as being open to criticism and to change. This may come more easily if there is confidence in the person doing the evaluation and a belief in their honesty and integrity. They should aim to be constructively critical rather than destructive and judgemental.
The true reasons for the evaluation and the willingness of those involved to respond to the results should also be clear to all, in order that investigations can be conducted in a climate of mutual trust.

Many people are worried that the effort expended will detract from the service that the project is there to provide, which is regarded as the priority call on the time of the project staff. But it shouldn't be necessary to spend huge amounts of time each month compiling monitoring statistics. Recording of information should become integrated into the day-to-day routine; perhaps much of it already is. Since it's simply a question of stepping back periodically and looking at what information exists about what has been achieved, many projects may already be conducting some form of 'evaluation' periodically without recognising it as such.

Whilst there's no denying that setting up new data collection systems can be an additional demand on time in the short term, there's no need to regard monitoring as a long-term burden, because it should become easier once the systems have become well-established.

5.4 What's a realistic scope ?

It should certainly amount to more than piecing together a few glowing accounts of the project from its current and past users. Some projects merely ask users to complete a form retrospectively - to give them feedback on how well things went - use this selectively and call it an 'evaluation'. Although a useful indicator of client satisfaction, this is not usually sufficient on its own.

Equally, the "full works" is unrealistic and probably unachievable for most. But it's important to try to do whatever is feasible and appropriate in the circumstances rather than be overwhelmed at the whole prospect and do nothing at all. Even for those projects that run with few staff - maybe just one part-time member of staff - something useful can be generated.

Below, we have described three different levels of evaluation, together with a few pointers as to how to decide upon the level that is right for you. Bear in mind that if one of the three standard levels on the scale of complexity does not suit your needs, then you may develop a solution which is somewhere in between the others.

5.4.1 Entry level

This essentially involves developing a statement about:

- Where you are now, i.e.
  - what you've been doing
  - how it's gone
  - why
  - how you know
- Where you'd like to be
- What changes need to be made to help you get there.

This does not really amount to much more than monitoring the outputs and making a statement about whether they were as planned; there is little or no reference to outcomes. As such, the exercise can usually be conducted by the project staff themselves, with little external help.

This approach is suitable for low cost projects that don't have to generate many benefits in order to demonstrate their worth and justify their cost; a very simple cost/benefit analysis would usually suffice.

5.4.2 Intermediate level

This involves putting more effort into examining how the services have been delivered and is effectively an evaluation of the *process* as well as the *results*.

You will still not be evaluating every single aspect of the project: outputs should always be included, but it may not be necessary to cover all of the possible outcomes. It's useful to prioritise and focus your resources on where they will yield the most powerful information.

There may be a need to seek the services of an external evaluator, but perhaps only in a limited capacity.

5.4.3 *Advanced level*

This may be appropriate only for particularly expensive projects, where it is worth conducting a more detailed investigation to identify and quantify some of the harder-to-find outcomes.

The areas typically addressed are the:

- Project rationale
- Project design
- Inputs (target and actual)
- Process (comparison of actual with planned service delivery)
- Outputs (target and actual)
- Outcomes (target and actual)
- Relationship between the project's efforts and the outcomes
- Value for money (full cost / benefit analysis)
- Lessons learnt

This would usually require heavy involvement from external evaluators, or the work would be conducted almost entirely by them.

5.4.4 *How to decide*

In deciding upon the level of evaluation that will be appropriate for your particular project, you will need to take account of:

1. Whether the costs of a full, comprehensive, evaluation would be disproportionate to the cost of the initiative or the value of the benefits.

2. How much evidence already exists to demonstrate that initiatives similar to yours are effective. If there is some evidence already, it might just be necessary to show that the mechanism works in your particular context, rather than trying to prove from scratch that the methods you are using are appropriate and valuable for youth diversion work.

3. How much data you ordinarily collect and whether it might be sufficient for monitoring and evaluation purposes or become so with some small adaptation.

4. The fact that although detecting reductions in offending (if that is what you are aiming to do) can be time-consuming, you may only need to be able to show a small reduction in order to demonstrate cost-effectiveness.

Our advice would be not to be too ambitious the first time you attempt an evaluation. The experience of carrying out your first evaluation will allow you to identify any gaps in your monitoring systems and to plug them. You can then enter into subsequent evaluations with more confidence about having access to the required information and the ability to apply the necessary techniques.

5.5 What information will I need to collect ?

Check what it is that needs to be proven to whom and then see what information is gathered already, e.g. through regular monitoring.

Assess the gaps and try to fill them, making best use of what information gathering methods already exist. Record-keeping systems don't always need to be completely redesigned - simple amendments to existing forms may allow a few extra pieces of information to be recorded.

The grids in Appendix B give some ideas for data collection headings. They are there to guide, not to dictate, and you should not feel compelled to use anywhere near all of them.

Don't just ask for information because it sounds as if it'll be interesting; if it won't make a contribution to the argument you are hoping to build, then don't make a special effort to collect it.

5.6 What are the potential difficulties ?

A number of demands may be placed upon you when developing a framework for an evaluation. You may consider some of them to be unfair, so it's useful to know how to respond to them.

5.6.1 Pressure to prove something too soon in the lifecycle of the programme:

Whereas success of your project may sometimes only be properly shown through a long-term follow-up of participants (e.g. two or three year re-conviction rates), publishable results are often wanted quickly.

The paradox is that while partner bodies may understand the theoretical need to look for long-term sustained changes in behaviour, they may still want the results of your evaluation sooner than that ! However much you may protest on the basis of social research requiring longer follow-up periods than those allowed for, it's important to provide intermediate information when it's asked for (with disclaimers, if appropriate). Otherwise, decisions on funding could well be made without your input or influence.

In that instance, you could:

- pull together an argument that relies upon the current process (as observed) but using the outcomes in respect of previous years' participants
- use interim measures of impact upon future behaviour (e.g. effects upon academic attainment or social skills as predictors of future criminality)
- produce and publish incremental reports.

5.6.2 Demands for the proof of an effect that was not intended:

For example, you might be asked to demonstrate "how much crime you've prevented" when that wasn't one of the explicit objectives. Don't look upon it as a failing if you can't detect or demonstrate such an effect - just as a bonus if you <u>can</u>.

Also, you can only be expected to produce outcomes in those areas addressed fairly directly by the project (and which are capable of being influenced). With many types of youth diversion project, for example, you could not hope to influence certain social conditions, such as poor housing or poverty; it would be pointless looking for an effect in those areas.

5.6.3 Qualitative data v quantitative data:

The distinction between quantitative and qualitative data is covered in Appendix A.

You may often be asked to rely upon *quantitative* results. Your first reaction may be to feel that it is impossible to collect quantitative data when the project is about people and their personalities. There are standard ways of measuring changes in people's attitudes, beliefs and behaviour, however, and a number of recognised scales exist. Questionnaires, surveys and tests have proved useful in this context. John Huskins' 'Quality Work With Young People' (details in section 9.) may stimulate some ideas.

Although quantitative data can indeed be a valuable indicator of success, resist pressure to focus upon it to the exclusion of all else. A balanced evaluation will also include an analysis of the *qualitative* data about outcomes; this can provide context and an overall picture, as well as a deeper understanding of people's motivations for their observed or reported behaviour. It need not just amount to anecdotal evidence - it should not be too difficult to collect other evidence to justify your assertions that certain changes have taken place in people.

5.6.4 Other barriers to effective evaluation:

Some common barriers are listed below, in the hope that by advance planning you will be able to avoid them in the first place:

- Not having targets and 'baselines' (therefore not having anything to compare against)
- Unrealistically high targets
- Poor record keeping
- Imposing an evaluation process on staff without sufficient explanation
- Having doubts as to whether any changes recommended will be put into effect
- Making evaluation an after-thought rather than an integral part of the project
- The results not reaching the right people at the right time or not addressing their concerns
- Not being critical enough - just trying to prove that you're "doing a good job".

5.7 What's the role of the funding bodies ?

Evaluation should be an independent process, quite distinct from any reporting back to the funder on the use of their funds.

Having said that, many funders may have views (if not detailed requirements) on the extent and rigour of the evaluation that should be taking place. While they are by no means the only people that you will need to keep satisfied, it is worth establishing their requirements and taking them into account when making arrangements to monitor and evaluate.

By stipulating their requirements, funders may not necessarily be looking to exert undue influence over your project - they are perhaps just exercising their right to be satisfied that they are making a good investment. Equally, just because you are asked by a funder to evaluate a project that has been running for some time, it does not always mean that they are looking to pull the plug on the funding. Perhaps just that they need to convince themselves that it continues to represent money well spent.

A 1994 survey* revealed that funders rarely asked for a detailed description of activities and services or an indication of the way in which they were linked to the project's specific aims and objectives. It was also uncommon for them to require evidence of the benefits to the users or the wider community or of the achievement of specific outcomes. They usually just wanted to see a statement about the project's aims and objectives and have some rudimentary financial information.

We would suggest that the climate has changed since this survey was conducted and that funders are now likely to be more demanding in terms of the required extent and rigour of the evaluation and subsequent feedback. Most potential funders like to see reference to monitoring and evaluation in project funding proposals, for example. It has even become accepted practice to build in an allowance for the cost of the evaluation or to seek small grants from other bodies specifically to carry out the work.

But requirements still vary between funders. Their demands sometimes (but not always) reflect the level of financial contribution that they have made. Service level agreements or contracts sometimes specify the frequency and format of the required feedback, but in the absence of any such instructions it is better to ask. To guess and to misjudge the situation can prove to be a costly mistake.

In the past, the results of evaluations might simply have been disseminated via informal communication channels, but it is now more common for formal written and verbal reports to be required.

* *A Report on Evaluation by Voluntary Organisations*, by Anne Connor for the Scottish Office Central Research Unit, 1993

5.8 What methods and tools are available ?

Monitoring of changes in people needs to be conducted over a relatively long period, otherwise the results will not be either meaningful or credible. Outsiders may expect to see evidence of *long-term*, sustainable, changes in behaviours or attitudes - typically over at least two years in criminality terms.

In the book 'Quality Work with Young People', John Huskins argues that there's lots of evidence that demonstrates a causal link between the development of social skills and the reduction of risk behaviour. If this is the case, then the demonstration of the *enhancement of appropriate skills* ought, in theory, to be accepted as evidence of a successful diversion project.

It is debatable as to whether the climate is yet such as to permit the extensive application of this logic to practical situations. What is fairly widely-accepted practice is to rely upon interim indicators of longer-term change, such as noticeable shifts in attitudes and improvements in skills.

It might also be possible to find research that demonstrates that schemes such as yours are inherently useful if they use recognised methods of influencing behaviour or reducing criminality. In that case, what might really be needed instead of full-scale evaluation is:

a) an examination of the extent to which the necessary conditions that help make success more likely are in place (i.e. effective targeting and an efficient service delivery) and

b) proof that the scheme, as applied to those within the target group, actually results in diminished offending or more positive behaviour, i.e. measurable improvements in the key indicators of "risk".

Collection methods (the 'tools') could include any or all of the following:

- Interviews
- Focus groups / user group discussions
- Analysis of historical records (e.g. diaries and sessional reports)
- Assessment / self-assessment scales (to measure shifts in behaviour and attitudes)
- 'Before' and 'after' user surveys (oral or written)
- Tests
- Direct observation
- Evidence from those who know the users' circumstances and who are in a position to notice change (parents, teachers, peers, other members of the community).

Where possible, use *a combination of methods* - some to collect qualitative data, some to collect quantitative data, some short-term indicators of change and some longer-term indicators. Applying a 'basket of indicators' usually helps to build up evidence in a more convincing way (especially if they agree).

It would be unwise to rely upon sheer volume of evidence, however. It's more important to choose methods that are appropriate for the type of user that the project is working with and to get high quality results from them.

Whatever the theoretical arguments in favour of certain methods, in practice the choice may depend heavily upon the amount of time and other resources that are available. Consider whether complex assessments might be over-elaborate for your purposes - simple yardsticks are often good enough.

As a suggestion, the following tools could be used for the information types shown:

Attitudes	-	questionnaires to participants
	-	self-assessment scales
	-	reports from or interviews with third parties
	-	focus groups
Behaviour	-	observation checklists
	-	reports from or interviews with third parties
	-	third party statistics (e.g. police or school)
	-	self-reports
Skills/knowledge	-	performance tests
	-	self-assessment scales

It might be helpful to compile a grid of:

- what types of indicator are to be used
- what specific information needs to be collected (see hints in Appendix B)
- whom it needs to be collected from (e.g. referring agencies, project staff, parents, the participants themselves)
- which collection methods are to be to used to get the information.

An example of an information collection grid for 'process' and 'outcomes' is given in Appendix C.

6. USING THE DATA COLLECTED

This is about making sense of the data - working out what it's really saying to you - and then using it to support your conclusions.

6.1 Attributing outcomes to the effect of the project

It's highly unlikely that you'll be able to establish 'cause and effect' with a sufficient degree of certainty, so you won't be able to prove that the project alone caused the outcomes. In fact, the existence of your project is likely to be only one of a number of factors that might have contributed towards the achievement of your objectives.

It's important, therefore, to put your results into the context of what else has been going on locally and nationally. Look at general trends in your outcome indicators; if you're measuring school exclusions, for example, and they have been falling locally or nationally anyway, your results may begin to look less impressive.

In building up an argument that the effects would not have happened had your project not existed it would be helpful if you could identify and quantify any extraneous influences that might have impacted upon the results. These could be changes to social conditions such as housing or employment opportunities, for example, or policing perhaps. Where possible, isolate the effects that they may have had, as this will help you to understand what (if anything) your project has contributed towards the outcomes.

You wouldn't want to claim credit for results that aren't strictly attributable to your project. Equally, however, you shouldn't undersell the effects of your efforts. So, if you've managed to detect them, it's quite legitimate to say that the effects *have happened* and that those results *are associated with* use of your services.

6.2 Use of control groups

Having a 'control' (or comparison) group - one that resembles the project's user group in its characteristics and circumstances, but which has not received its services - can help. In this way you can compare the effects of receiving the service against not receiving it.

There are a number of practical difficulties in composing a control group, however - as shown in the table below. For this reason, and because of the sheer amount of effort involved in conducting a statistically valid study, it is suggested that this approach may be out of reach for many projects.

Composition of control group:	***Possible problems:***
Those on the waiting list	They may not share the same characteristics as the actual users; priority cases are often allowed to 'jump the queue', for example.
Those referrals who choose not to attend	They may not share the same characteristics as the actual users; self-selection often plays a part in determining who turns up.
Those denied the service specifically in order to create a control group	This approach is probably unethical !

6.3 Use of predictive data

It might be possible to make predictions about likely future behaviour for the members of the user group, against which their actual behaviour could be compared. This would allow you to draw conclusions about what might have happened had your project not intervened.

For example, Home Office data could be used to generate predicted re-conviction figures from records of existing convictions. The drawback with this approach is that the data is based upon a national sample and hence may be limited in its applicability to local areas. Also, it only allows predictions to be made for *any* (and not a *specific*) ‘standard list’ offence.

Predictions of offending behaviour are less useful where the individuals are not judged to be significantly at risk of offending and where the offences likely to be committed are not of a very serious nature.

6.4 Gauging value for money

A common failing of evaluations is not to address issues about the use of resources. The aim should be to show whether the effects of the project justify the cost, i.e. whether it is ‘cost effective’.

The main questions to be answered are:

£ *What is the total cost per annum (or other period) ?*

This could involve apportioning capital costs over the expected lifetime of the project and adding the revenue costs for the year in question.

£ *What is the unit cost per participant ?*

How does it compare with some of the alternatives (taking into account any differences in project length) ?

£ *What is the value of the outcomes ?*

The value of the outcomes for criminality reduction projects can be calculated by a complex process involving quantifying the saving to the criminal justice system and to other agencies (resulting from a reduction in the number of offences committed or in the number of ‘clients’ seen).

In practice, however, this is likely to be over-complicated and to keep it simple, many people use secondary methods of estimating savings. There is existing research* to show that youth crime prevention projects do not have to prevent many crimes before they start to recover their costs and thus become ‘cost effective’. This is often quoted in evaluation studies.

£ *How do the costs compare with the value of the outcomes ?*

Complications may arise when costs are incurred in one period, but the corresponding benefits emerge in another. Watch out also for shifting of costs, where a saving for one agency may mean extra work for another.

Commonly-used benchmarks:

* Research undertaken by the accountants Coopers and Lybrand for the Prince's Trust ('Preventative Strategies for Young People in Trouble', 1994) estimated the cost of each youth crime at ***£2,300***. If prevented, 50% of the costs would be recoverable. For a sample of projects, it was estimated that they would need to prevent an offence by something between 1:5 and 1:14 of participants.

The figure of £2,300 is reckoned to be an under-estimate, however, because it does not include benefits which cannot be given a monetary value, such as the absence of distress to the victims or lower levels of fear of crime.

According to the 1996 Audit Commission report 'Misspent Youth' (M.Perfect and J.Renshaw) it costs £1000 to identify a young offender and it costs the police a further £2,500 to prosecute an offender successfully.

6.5 Assessing the rationale for the project

You will need to describe the way in which the project hopes to achieve its aims and objectives. For example, how does it expect to influence behaviour ?

You may wish to consider the following questions:

✓

- ❑ Is there a good theoretical basis for suggesting that it ought to work ?
- ❑ Has it been validated or evaluated elsewhere ?
- ❑ Does it use - in Home Office speak - "what works" or "what's promising" methods?

6.5 Assessing the quality of the design

You may need to describe the extent to which your methods are consistent with your stated aims and objectives.

The following are said to be indicators of good design:

✓

- ❑ The project assesses need and targets accordingly
- ❑ It can react quickly to expressed need
- ❑ The aims are appropriate and realistic for those in the target group
- ❑ The objectives are clear and prioritised
- ❑ The activities have a participatory style
- ❑ Training is accredited
- ❑ The project is long enough and sufficiently intense
- ❑ There are incentives to stay the course
- ❑ There are links to home, school and community life
- ❑ There is scope for progression - both within the project and on to something else

7. WRITING THE EVALUATION REPORT

Think again about your intended audience. What do you need to prove to them ?

A single report is unlikely to satisfy the needs of all audiences simultaneously - the decision-makers, the users and the general public, for example - so you might have to write more than one version, drawn from the same core material.

7.1 A typical report structure

1. Executive summary

2. Introduction:
   - Background information (context, aims of the scheme, etc.)
   - Why the evaluation was conducted

3. Evaluation methods employed

4. Findings:
   - Comments on rationale and design
   - Comments on process
   - Actual inputs v planned inputs
   - Actual outputs v target outputs
   - Actual outcomes v target outcomes
   - Value for money

5. Significance:
   - Progress against pre-defined indicators / targets

6. Conclusions and recommendations for action

7. Appendices:
   - Case studies
   - Results from surveys, summary of interviews, notable quotes
   - List of names / organisations involved

7.2 What to include

You will doubtless have too much information to put in the report, and it is natural to want to include all of it, partly to justify the amount of time you’ve spent on it. But it’s vital to prioritise the information and to include only that which is the most important and the most relevant. Remember that what you’re trying to do is to demonstrate clearly what has happened and why.

It can be tempting to try to make too much out of too little data. Your whole argument may be pulled apart if the data is statistically insignificant or if you have made unsustainable or unjustifiable inferences from it.

If you have identified some weaknesses in your project, then it is usually better to be honest about the fact. If you can show that you understand why there has been some kind of failure and what you would do (or have done already) to remedy it, then you can turn the situation to your advantage.

7.3 Case studies

Including case studies can be useful, as they can help illustrate the argument and bring it to life. They focus upon providing explanations for what has gone on - the ‘how’ and the ‘why’. When choosing which cases to study, think about why each one should be included - it should both reveal some new discovery and contribute something to the overall cross-case analysis and argument.

7.4 Reviewing the draft

Once you’ve written the draft report, re-read it yourself as if you were a member of the audience. You will want the report to be both read and absorbed by others, so check that it has an accessible style.

Also ask your colleagues and others who participated in the study to review your drafts. Be clear in your briefing to them that they are being asked to check the accuracy of the facts; they do not necessarily have to agree with your conclusions.

7.5 Using the report

Having performed the evaluation and written the report, you will still need to share the results if they are to be considered by the right people and the necessary actions taken. So think about ways of getting the results across. As well as formal reporting back to steering groups or committees, this may mean running discussion groups or seminars with the results or writing articles for the press, for example.

In some forms of evaluation - such as ‘action research’ - interim findings are released to the project management during the course of the research. In this way, corrective action can be taken straight away.

One of the main reasons for carrying out an evaluation is to yield ways in which the project can improve upon what it does and how it does it. If changes to the project are agreed, also agree upon who is to be responsible for implementing those changes and the mechanism for reporting back on progress against each action point.

Even highly successful projects can still improve in some areas, so it’s worth revisiting the “lessons learnt” to ensure that the implications are thought through and any relevant action points generated.

In order not to attract unfair criticism, you may decide not to publicise the results of the evaluation more widely until due consideration has been given to any weaknesses revealed and plans formulated for ways in which to rectify them. But don't find an excuse to hold onto the results indefinitely !

8. CONCLUSION

We hope that this booklet has given you something of an insight into the practicalities of monitoring and evaluating youth projects.

Remember that what you're trying to demonstrate through the:

MONITORING	and the	EVALUATION
of your		of the
ACTIVITIES		IMPACT

…. is that you have:

⇒ generated the intended **OUTPUTS**

⇒ helped to achieve the intended **OUTCOMES**

…. and hence:

⇒ met your **TARGETS**.

Should this booklet have inspired you to do some further reading on the topic, then see section 9. for an indication of some good starting points.

A range of useful material is also available from **Charities Evaluation Services**, an independent charity committed to increasing the effectiveness of the voluntary sector. It offers training, information, advice, evaluation and other consultancy services. Tel. 0171 713 5722 or e-mail enquiries@cesuk1.demon.co.uk

9. FURTHER READING

Some suggestions:

- ***A guide to setting up and evaluating programmes for young offenders***
  by Simon Merrington (1998)
  for The Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency
  ISBN 0 901541 55 9, £11.50

- ***Measure for Measure, a Guide to Monitoring and Evaluation of Crime Prevention Initiatives***
  by John Palmer Research and Management Consultancy (1998)
  for the Scottish Office
  Stationery Office ref. Dd 8403679 2/98

- ***A Report on Evaluation by Voluntary Organisations***
  by Anne Connor (1993)
  for the Scottish Office Central Research Unit
  ISBN 0 11 494228 5, £14

- ***Monitoring and Evaluation Made Easy: a Handbook for Voluntary Organisations***
  by Anne Connor (1993)
  for the Scottish Office Central Research Unit
  ISBN 0 11 494229 3, £12.95

- ***The Youth Action Scheme: a Report of the National Evaluation***
  by Alan France and Paul Wiles (1996)
  for the Department for Education and Employment
  ISBN 0 85 522542 4

- ***How to Assess the Effectiveness of your Youth Action Group***
  by the Pru Youth Action team.
  Available (free) from the Pru Youth Action team at:
  Crime Concern, Beaver House, 147-150 Victoria Road, Swindon SN1 3BU.

- ***Quality Work with Young People: Developing Social Skills and Diversion from Risk***
  by John Huskins
  for Youth Clubs UK.

- ***Finding Out: An informal guide to self-evaluation for Family Centres***
  by Willem van der Eyken (1997)
  for the National Council for Voluntary Child Care Organisations
  ISBN 1 870575 04 0. £9.95 from the NCVCCO at Unit 4, Pride Court, 80-82 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF (tel. 0171 833 3319)

- ***Evaluation in the Voluntary Sector***
  by Mog Ball (1998)
  for the Forbes Trust
  £5.50 from the Forbes Trust at 9 Artillery Lane, London E1 7LP (tel. 0171 377 8484).

- ***Evaluating Community Safety Projects***
  by Professor Michael Hough (1998)
  for the Local Government Information Unit (1998)
  ISBN 1 897957 44 0, £15

APPENDICES:

A. Glossary of associated terminology

B. Ideas for data items to collect

C. Example of an information collection grid

D. Example of a behaviour / attitudes profile

E. Example of a self-assessment questionnaire

F. Example of an observation grid

APPENDIX A: Glossary of associated terminology

Aims

These are the general results that you would like to achieve, in the form of a description of the situation that, ideally, you would like to see exist.

Objectives

A description of the more specific results that you want to achieve. They are sometimes referred to as the 'goals' or the 'purpose' of the project.

By definition, if you are achieving your objectives, you will be going some way towards meeting your aims.

Success criteria

A general term for the things you can measure in order to determine whether your actions have been successful.

Often, the criteria to be applied when measuring success will be stated in the project's stated objectives, but it's perfectly possible to add further ones when evaluating.

Targets

These are forecasts - in measurable terms - of what you plan to put into the project and see come out of it.

Performance indicators

These are also measures, but only of your efforts and the results of those efforts, not the inputs.

Efficiency

How well run the project is, the level of activity and whether the production of results is achieved through good and economical use of resources.

Effectiveness

Whether the intended effects are being produced.

Impact

The effect of the project in terms of those specific outcomes that you set out to achieve (i.e. those planned outcomes that featured in the objectives).

The table on the following page is a summary of which of these expressions are normally associated with 'inputs', which with 'outputs' and which with 'outcomes':

	Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes
Targets	√	√	√
Performance indicators		√	√
Success criteria	√	√	√
Efficiency		√	
Effectiveness			√
Impact			√

We have deliberately avoided using expressions such as ‘visions’ and ‘missions’ in this document, as we are not aware of universally-accepted definitions or interpretations of those terms in this particular context.

QuaLitative data

The use of words to describe events, behaviours and attitudes.

Analysis of qualitative data involves making sense of and interpreting people’s perceptions and experiences. Going back through diaries, interview notes, etc. can help to identify any emerging patterns or associations.

QuaNtitative data

The use of numerical values to describe events, behaviours and attitudes. In the context of monitoring and evaluation, it refers to the measurable inputs, outputs and outcomes.

Analysis of *quantitative* data involves looking at:

- frequencies
- proportions / percentages
- trends over time
- distributions
- the association with other variables (“cross-tabulation”)

… and establishing any patterns that exist.

APPENDIX B: IDEAS FOR DATA ITEMS TO COLLECT

The following pages may be photocopied if desired, so that they can be used as the basis for the recording of information.

Inputs: Notes:

- Total number of users involved
- Breakdown of users by:
  - age
  - gender
  - ethnic grouping
  - geographical area
  - other.
- The proportion of those referred who were accepted
- How many events / sessions held
- Numbers attending
- Number of staff (paid / volunteers)
- Amount of time spent on training staff
- Budget and the extent of any divergence from it
- Number of different funding sources
- Use of practical resources:
  - premises
  - equipment
  - etc.

Process:

This relates to the project delivery and the standards of service adopted.

You will need to assess and describe the extent to which the conditions are in place which ought to help to bring about the desired outcomes. The following headings might help:

Notes:

Bringing the users in:

- Users' characteristics compared with those of the target group
- Assessment and prioritisation of needs
- Effective marketing to referring bodies
- Plans for the recruitment of future users

Delivery style:

- The range and appropriateness of the activities provided
- Relations between staff and users
- Extent of tailoring to individual needs
- Concentration of effort on high risk cases
- Levels of participation and enjoyment being shown
- Quantity and quality of follow-up support provided

Project management:

- Organisation and execution of activities
- Communication (internally and externally)
- Collaboration and inter-agency working
- Staff training and levels of motivation
- Involvement of young people in the management

Views of users: Notes:

- Satisfaction with the services provided
- Extent to which they feel involved
- Extent to which they are able to evaluate their experiences

Views of those providing referrals:

- Satisfaction with process
- Suggested improvements

Outputs:

You will need to record and describe the level of activity, together with an account of the differences between what you expected to do or produce and what you actually did or produced. The following headings might help:

Notes:

The level of service provided:

- The total number of users receiving the project's services
- The total number of contacts with users
- The number of contacts of each type per:
  - week
  - month
  - year
  - other period
- The proportion of users 'staying the course'
- The proportion for whom assessment records exist

Other activity:

- The number entered for qualifications
- The number with material for their Records of Achievement
- The number of items of positive PR generated
- The number of items of recruitment activity
- Level of feedback given to those who refer users

Outcomes:

Essentially, you will be looking to establish the *number of people that have benefited* from the project and the *ways in which they have benefited.*

Also be on the lookout for any unintended outcomes, however - for which targets will not exist - as they may be useful indicators of the overall worth of the project.

The following headings may be useful:

Notes:

How people have changed: (behaviour / attitudes)

- Criminal activity (frequency and severity of offences)
- School attendance levels
- Disruptive behaviour at school
- Other anti-social behaviour
- Outlook on life
- Sense of achievement and success
- Motivation
- Self-confidence and self-esteem
- Respect and consideration for others
- Relationships with others

How their circumstances have changed:

- Number whose employability has improved
- Number helped back into the education system
- Number moving into other constructive activities
- Number for whom mentors have been appointed
- Change of peer group associated with
- Change in other 'risk factors'

Notes:

What people have learned:

- Vocational skills
- Technical knowledge
- Literacy skills
- Decision-making / problem-solving abilities
- Control of feelings and actions
- Social and interpersonal skills
- Awareness of effects of behaviour on others

How expectations have been met:

- What the users think about the services delivered
- What they think they've gained
- The extent to which the referring staff feel the desired learning outcomes have been achieved
- Whether the partner bodies have confidence in the project
- Impact upon other agencies and services
- Impact upon family and other members of the community

APPENDIX C:

Example of an information collection grid for a youth diversion project

(In this example, only process and outcome indicators are shown.)

PROCESS:

Indicator	Data to collect	From whom
How the young people are targeted / selected	• Information and views on the selection methods that are used	← School staff
Whether the referrals meet the target criteria	• Risk factor assessment	← School staff ← Police ← Youth Service
To what extent young people were attracted by the project	• Reasons given for attending • Reasons given for not attending	← Young people attending ← School staff ← Young people selected but not attending
Post-project follow-up contact made	• Views on extent and usefulness of follow-up contact	← Young people attending

OUTCOMES:

Indicator	Data to collect	From whom
Learning objectives achieved	• Extent to which those objectives identified during the referral process have been achieved	← School staff
Changes of peer group	• Any changes noticed / evidenced	← School staff
Uptake of youth provision	• Information on engagement with constructive group activity	← School staff ← Young people ← Youth Service ← Other youth bodies
Changes in commitment to school	• 'Before' and 'after' truancy / exclusion rates • 'Normal' patterns over the same period	← School staff ← Education Social Workers ← School staff / LEA
Changes in offending behaviour	• 'Before' and 'after' cautioning / offending rates • 'Normal' trends over the same period	← Police / Home Office Offender Index ← Police / Home Office Offender Index
Other changes in attitudes / anti-social behaviour	• Changes evidenced	← Schools ← Youth bodies (in respect of those who have joined)

APPENDIX D: Example of a behaviour / attitudes profile

Name: .... Age: ....

Please rate the above-mentioned young person against each of the criteria set out below, circling what you consider to be an appropriate point on the scale.

(A definition has been supplied for some of the terms, where they might otherwise have been open to interpretation).

Note that the scores will not be used as absolute measures - not least because a number of different assessors may be used - but to help compare the 'before' and 'after' positions for each individual.

Please give specific examples of behaviour exhibited or other forms of substantiation where possible.

	Low									*High*	*Comments:*
Co-operation with others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Respect for others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Self-respect (treating oneself as a valuable person)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Self-discipline (control of own feelings and actions)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Self-esteem (feeling good about oneself)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Self-confidence (feeling comfortable in situations)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Sense of achievement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Honesty	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Use of initiative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

Specific learning outcomes you are hoping to see achieved:

....

....

....

APPENDIX E: Example of a self-assessment questionnaire

Please mark with a ✓ the box that best applies to you

CONFIDENTIAL

Use the middle box if your answer lies in between the others

How well do you get on with your teachers ?	Not at all	Badly		Well	Very well
How well do you get on with other pupils ?	Not at all	Badly		Well	Very well
How well do you get on with your family ?	Not at all	Badly		Well	Very well
How much do others listen to you ?	Never	Sometimes		Often	Very often
How well do they understand you ?	Not at all	Not very often		Well	Very well
How good do you feel about yourself ?	Not at all	Not very good		Good	Very good
How confident are you at joining in with groups ?	Not at all	Not very		A little	A lot
How easily can you talk about your feelings ?	Not at all	Not very		Easily	Very easily
How well do you control your feelings ?	Not at all	Not very well		Well	Very well
How often do you think about what others are feeling ?	Never	Not very often		Often	Very often
How well do you tackle problems ?	Not at all well	Not very well		Well	Very well
Do you like to get your own way ?	Not at all	Not much		A little	A lot
Are you generally pleased with your decisions ?	Never	Not very often		Often	Very often
If things go badly for you, do you think about why ?	Never	Not very often		Often	Very often
How much do you think you've achieved so far in your life ?	Nothing	Not much		A little	A lot

APPENDIX F: **Example of a grid in which to record observed behaviour**

Name:	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
Getting views across			
Listening to others			
Concern for others			
Co-operating with/ getting on with others			
Discipline/ sticking to the rules			
Enjoyment levels			
Trying hard/ pushing self			
Confidence			
Use of initiative (problem-solving/ asking for help)			
Motivation			
General observations			

Notable quotes: