

Additional File 3 – *Quality assessment tool for qualitative studies*

FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING QUALITATIVE EVALUATIONS

Study being appraised

Findings	A) Appraisal questions	B) Quality indicators (possible features for consideration)	C) Notes on study being appraised
1	How credible are the findings?	<p>Findings/conclusions are supported by data/study evidence (<i>i.e.</i> the reader can see how the researcher arrived at his/her conclusion; the 'building blocks' of analysis and interpretation are evident)</p> <p>Findings/conclusions 'make sense'/have a coherent logic</p> <p>Findings/conclusions are resonant with other knowledge and experience (<i>this might include peer or member review</i>)</p> <p>Use of corroborating evidence to support or refine findings (<i>i.e.</i> other data sources have been used to examine phenomena; other research evidence has been evaluated: see also Q14)</p>	
2	How has knowledge/understanding been extended by the research?	<p>Literature review (where appropriate) summarizing knowledge to date/key issues raised by previous research</p> <p>Aims and design of study set in the context of existing knowledge/understanding; identifies new areas for investigation (<i>i.e.</i> in relation to policy/practice/substantive theory)</p> <p>Credible/clear discussion of how findings have contributed to knowledge and understanding (<i>i.e.</i> of the policy, programme or theory being reviewed; might be applied to new policy developments, practice or theory)</p> <p>Findings presented or conceptualized in a way that offers new insights/alternative ways of thinking</p> <p>Discussion of limitations of evidence and what remains unknown/unclear or what further</p>	

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		information/research is needed	
3	How well does the evaluation address its original aims and purpose?	<p>Clear statement of study aims and objectives; reasons for any changes in objectives</p> <p>Findings clearly linked to the purposes of the study – and to the initiative or policy being studied</p> <p>Summary or conclusion directed towards aims of study</p> <p>Discussion of limitations of study in meeting aims (<i>i.e. are there limitations because of restricted access to study settings or participants, gaps in the sample coverage, missed or unresolved areas of questioning; incomplete analysis; time constraints?</i>)</p>	
4	Scope for drawing wider inference – how well is this explained?	<p>Discussion of what can be generalized to wider population from which sample is drawn/case selection has been made</p> <p>Detailed description of the contexts in which the study was conducted to allow applicability to other settings/contextual generalities to be assessed</p> <p>Discussion of how hypotheses/propositions/findings may relate to wider theory; consideration of rival explanations</p> <p>Evidence supplied to support claims for wider inference (<i>either from study or from corroborating sources</i>)</p> <p>Discussion of limitations on drawing wider inference (<i>i.e. re-examination of sample and any missing constituencies: analysis of restrictions of study settings for drawing wider inference</i>)</p>	
5	How clear is the basis of evaluative appraisal?	Discussion of how assessments of effectiveness/evaluative judgments have been reached (<i>i.e. whose judgments are they and on what basis have they been reached?</i>)	

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		<p>Description of any formalized appraisal criteria used, when generated and how and by whom they have been applied</p> <p>Discussion of the nature and source of any divergence in evaluative appraisals</p> <p>Discussion of any unintended consequences of intervention, their impact and why they arose</p>	
6	How defensible is the research design?	<p>Discussion of how overall research strategy was designed to meet aims of study</p> <p>Discussion of rationale for study design</p> <p>Convincing argument for different features of research design (<i>i.e. reasons given for different components or stages of research; purpose of particular methods or data sources, multiple methods, time frames etc.</i>)</p> <p>Use of different features of design/data sources evident in findings presented</p> <p>Discussion of limitations of research design and their implications for the study evidence</p>	
7	How well defended is the sample design/target selection of cases/documents?	<p>Description of study locations/areas and how and why chosen</p> <p>Description of population of interest and how sample selection relates to it (<i>i.e. typical, extreme case, diverse constituencies etc.</i>)</p> <p>Rationale for basis of selection of target sample/settings/documents (<i>i.e. characteristics/features of target sample/settings/documents, basis for inclusions and exclusions, discussion of sample size/number of cases/setting selected etc.</i>)</p> <p>Discussion of how sample/selections allowed required comparisons to be made</p>	
8	Sample composition/case inclusion – how well is the eventual coverage described?	<p>Detailed profile of achieved sample/case coverage</p> <p>Maximizing inclusion (<i>i.e. language matching or</i></p>	

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		<p><i>translation; specialized recruitment; organized transport for group attendance)</i></p> <p>Discussion of any missing coverage in achieved samples/cases and implications for study evidence (<i>i.e. through comparison of target and achieved samples, comparison with population etc.</i>)</p> <p>Documentation of reasons for non-participation among sample approached/non-inclusion of selected cases/documents</p> <p>Discussion of access and methods of approach and how these might have affected participation coverage</p>	
9	How well was the data collection carried out?	<p>Discussion of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who conducted data collection • Procedures/documents used for collection/recording • Checks on origin/status/authorship of documents <p>Audio or video recording of interviews/discussions/conversations (<i>If not recorded, were justifiable reasons given?</i>)</p> <p>Description of conventions for taking field notes (<i>i.e. to identify what form of observations were required/ to distinguish description from researcher commentary/analysis</i>)</p> <p>Discussion of how fieldwork methods or settings may have influenced data collected</p> <p>Demonstration through portrayal and use of data, that depth, detail and richness were achieved in collection</p>	
10	How well has the approach to, and formulation of, the analysis been conveyed?	<p>Description of form of original data (<i>i.e. use of verbatim transcripts, observation or interview notes, documents, etc.</i>)</p> <p>Clear rationale for choice of data management method/tool/package</p> <p>Evidence of how <u>descriptive</u> analytic categories, classes, labels etc. have been generated and used</p>	

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		<p><i>(i.e. either through explicit discussion or portrayal in the commentary)</i></p> <p>Discussion, with examples, of how any <u>constructed</u> analytic concepts/typologies etc. have been devised and applied</p>	
11	Contexts of data source – how well are they retained and portrayed?	<p>Description of background or historical developments and social/organizational characteristics of study sites or settings</p> <p>Participants' perspectives/observations placed in personal context (<i>i.e. use of case studies/vignettes/individual profiles, textual extracts annotated with details of contributors</i>)</p> <p>Explanation or origins/history of written documents</p> <p>Use of data management methods that preserve context (<i>facilitate within case description and analysis</i>)</p>	
12	How well has diversity of perspective and content been explored?	<p>Discussion of contribution of sample design/case selection in generation diversity</p> <p>Description and illumination of diversity/multiple perspectives/alternative positions in the evidence displayed</p> <p>Evidence of attention to negative cases, outliers or exceptions</p> <p>Typologies/models of variation derived and discussed</p> <p>Examination of origins/influences on opposing or differing positions</p> <p>Identification of patterns of association/linkages with divergent positions/groups</p>	
13	How well has detail, depth and complexity (i.e. richness) of the data been conveyed?	<p>Use and exploration of contributors' terms, concepts and meanings</p> <p>Unpacking and portrayal of nuance/subtlety/intricacy within data</p>	

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		<p>Discussion of explicit and implicit explanations</p> <p>Detection of underlying factors/influences</p> <p>Identification and discussion of patterns of association/conceptual linkages within data</p> <p>Presentation of illuminating textual extracts/observations</p>	
14	<p>How clear are the links between data, interpretation and conclusions - i.e. how well can the route to any conclusions be seen?</p>	<p>Clear conceptual links between analytic commentary and presentations of original data (<i>i.e. commentary and cited data relate; there is an analytic context to cited data, not simply repeated description</i>)</p> <p>Discussion of how/why particular interpretation/significance is assigned to specific aspects of data – with illustrative extracts of original data</p> <p>Discussion of how explanations/theories/conclusions were derived – and how they relate to interpretations and content of original data (<i>i.e. how warranted</i>); whether alternative explanations explored</p> <p>Display of negative cases and how they lie outside main proposition/theory/hypothesis etc; or how proposition etc. revised to include them</p>	
15	<p>How clear and coherent is the reporting?</p>	<p>Demonstrates link to aims of study/research questions</p> <p>Provides a narrative/story or clearly constructed thematic account</p> <p>Has structure and signposting that usefully guide reader through the commentary</p> <p>Provides accessible information for intended target audiences(s)</p> <p>Key messages highlighted or summarized</p>	
16	<p>How clear are the assumptions/theoretical perspectives/values that have shaped the form and output of</p>	<p>Discussion/evidence of the main assumptions/hypotheses/theoretical ideas on which the evaluation was based and how these affected the form coverage or output of the evaluation (<i>the</i></p>	

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	the evaluation?	<p><i>assumption here is that no research is undertaken without some underlying assumptions or theoretical ideas)</i></p> <p>Discussion/evidence of the ideological perspectives/values/philosophies of research team and their impact on the methodological or substantive content of the evaluation (<i>again, may not be explicitly stated</i>)</p> <p>Evidence of openness to new/alternative ways of viewing subject/theories/assumptions (<i>i.e. discussion of learning/concepts/constructions that have emerged from the data; refinement restatement of hypotheses/theories in light of emergent findings; evidence that alternative claims have been examined</i>)</p> <p>Discussion of how error or bias may have arisen in design/data collection/analysis and how addressed, if at all</p> <p>Reflections on the impact of the researcher on the research process</p>	
17	What evidence is there of attention to ethical issues?	<p>Evidence of thoughtfulness/sensitivity about research contexts and participants</p> <p>Documentation of how research was presented in study settings to participants (<i>including, where relevant, any possible consequences of taking part</i>)</p> <p>Documentation of consent procedures and information provided to participants</p> <p>Discussion of confidentiality of data and procedures for protecting</p> <p>Discussion of how anonymity of participants/sources was protected</p> <p>Discussion of any measures to other information/advice/services etc. at end of study (<i>i.e. where participation exposed the need for these</i>)</p> <p>Discussion of potential harm or difficulty through participation, and how avoided</p>	
18	How adequately has the	Discussion of strengths and weaknesses of data	

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	research process been documented?	<p>sources and methods</p> <p>Documentation of changes made to design and reasons; implications for study coverage</p> <p>Documentation and reasons for changes in sample coverage/data collection/analytic approach; implications</p> <p>Reproduction of main study documents (<i>i.e. letters of approach, topic guides, observation templates, data management, frameworks, etc.</i>)</p>	