

# evaluation toolkit

easy steps  
to evaluation  
a guide for practitioners



For more information about this guide or the Aimhigher Greater Merseyside evaluation toolkit, Please contact:

**Laura Grant**  
Monitoring and Evaluation Officer  
Aimhigher Greater Merseyside

L.Grant@liv.ac.uk or 0151 794 1313

Aimhigher...  
greater merseyside

Aimhigher...  
greater merseyside

Design: SEA - www.seacomms.co.uk

## Contents

2. Glossary
3. Introduction
4. Considering impact
5. Easy steps to evaluation
6. STEP 1: Programme objectives
7. STEP 2: Evaluation questions
8. STEP 3: Methodology
9. STEP 4: Evaluation materials
10. STEP 5: Sampling
11. STEPS 6&7: Data analysis & reporting
12. Further information

## Glossary of terms

- Closed item** - a question in an evaluation instrument that has a multiple-choice response.
- Desk research** - research that involves reviewing existing resources and literature.
- Evaluation** - the process of measuring the effectiveness of a programme.
- Evaluation instruments/materials** - the means by which you will collect your data.
- Evaluation question** - a research question used in evaluation that yields evidence.
- Focus group** - a group interview, typically with 4-8 participants.
- Formative evaluation** - provides continuous feedback to improve programmes.
- Mixed method** - evaluation using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods.
- Monitoring** - collecting basic information about audiences and activities.
- Needs analysis** - carried out before a programme is delivered to identify gaps in provision.
- Open item** - a question in an instrument that has a free-form (not multiple-choice) response.
- Pilot** - a trial run of an activity or evaluation to identify areas for improvement
- Population** - every individual that takes part in a programme.
- Pre-research** - evaluation with the target audience before a programme is delivered.
- Programme** - an AHGTM (or other) activity, event, scheme, campaign or intervention.
- Qualitative** - research or evaluation that deals with what happens and why.
- Quantitative** - research or evaluation that measures outcomes numerically.
- Research question** - a question used in research that yields hard facts and evidence.
- Sample** - the individuals from the population who take part in the evaluation.
- SMART objectives** - are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.
- Summative evaluation** - is conducted at the end of a programme to 'sum up' its effectiveness.

# introduction

Evaluation is not rocket science. It can be a simple way of demonstrating that your efforts have been worthwhile. This guide starts with a brief overview of evaluation in the context of Aimhigher Greater Merseyside, and then offers step-by-step instructions to conducting a good evaluation.

## Evaluation: proving and improving effectiveness

Evaluation can be used to prove the effectiveness of a programme, and to improve its success. It can help you identify success and learn from mistakes. Effective evaluation has a number of benefits for programme managers:

- Helps clarify project objectives
- Identifies audience demographics
- Demonstrates the effectiveness of your project
  - Measures impact
  - Highlights good practice
  - Helps attract funding
- Provides information on where there is room for improvement – lessons learned

## Monitoring versus evaluation

The terms monitoring and evaluation are often interchanged. Good monitoring should be included as part of all evaluations.

**Monitoring:** Collecting information about audiences and activities, e.g. audience demographics, attendances at events. It is important that monitoring is coherent across Greater Merseyside. For more information on the monitoring templates you could use, please refer to the relevant section of the AHGTM evaluation toolkit.



**Evaluation:** The wider process of measuring the effectiveness of an activity or programme. Involves collecting opinions from participants and others involved as well as monitoring data.

## Types of evaluation

Often, evaluations are referred to as formative or summative. A single evaluation may contain both formative and summative elements.

**Formative:** Formative evaluation is conducted throughout a programme. It provides continuous feedback so the

programme can be improved during the course of delivery. It's the best way to approach the evaluation of a new or innovative activity.

**Summative:** Summative evaluation is usually conducted at the end of a programme or activity, in order to 'sum up' its effectiveness. This type of evaluation usually focuses on programme impact, but information on delivery can also be collected but it is often too late to inform the programme, although it will provide useful lessons and good practice for future projects.

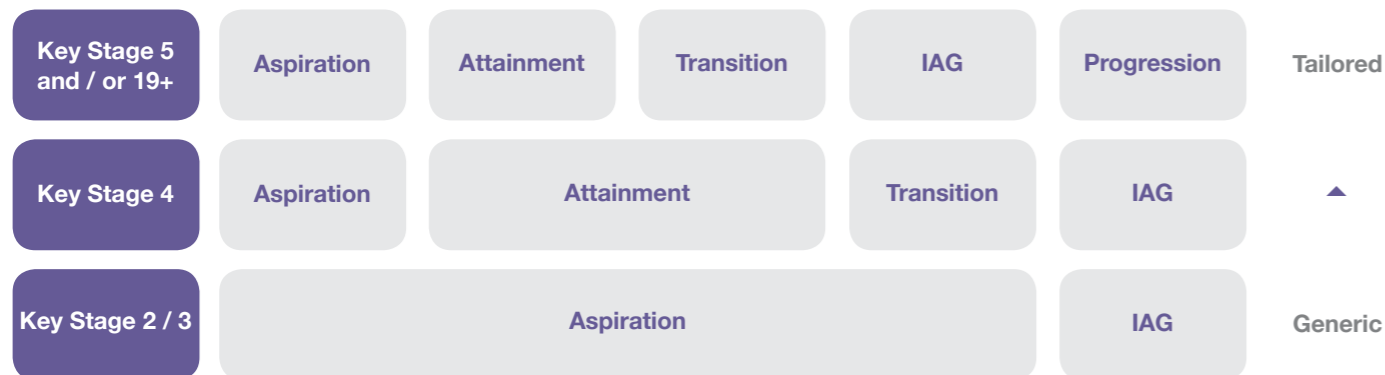
contents &  
glossary

# considering impact

It is important to consider the desired impacts of a programme when planning your evaluation. Think about these at the start of the process and it will be easier to measure the success of your programme.

## Aimhigher Greater Merseyside: desired impacts

Aimhigher Greater Merseyside uses a progression curriculum to target different groups of learners. The diagram below shows the proportions activities focused on different outcomes for cohort members at different stages of their educational journeys.



### The AHGTM progression curriculum

The desired short, medium and long term impacts of the programme follow a similar pattern. This is in line with the psychology of learning, where new knowledge is followed by altered feelings and finally changes in behaviour.



### Desired impacts of the AHGTM programme

## Intended and unintended impacts

When evaluating a programme, it is important to measure its effectiveness against what it set out to do, i.e. the programme objectives. However, an activity or programme may have other, unintended impacts that are either positive or negative. For example, through attending an Aimhigher Greater Merseyside event, an individual may make new friends. This is a positive unintended impact. So with any evaluation it is important to be aware of intended and unintended impacts.

# easy steps to evaluation

So we know we need to evaluate, how do we go about it? Practical evaluation is mostly common sense, and doesn't need any specialist expertise. If we follow a logical thought process, it's relatively straightforward to devise an evaluation strategy for any programme.

## Using this guide

This guide describes one way of approaching evaluation. It is by no means the only way but, used in conjunction with the toolkit resources, it will provide a simple and realistic approach to evaluating Aimhigher Greater Merseyside programmes and activities.

Set aside 3-10% of your project budget if you plan to do this (or more if it is a pilot). The main benefits are freeing up time for the programme delivery team and ensuring your evaluation is objective.

An evaluation conducted in this way will also provide valuable evidence to demonstrate the impact of Aimhigher Greater Merseyside as a whole. The steps are:

Use this guide to help you scope the evaluation, write an invitation to tender and manage the evaluation.

- Step 1: Programme objectives**
- Step 2: Evaluation questions**
- Step 3: Methodology**
- Step 4: Evaluation instruments**
- Step 5: Sampling**
- Step 6: Analysing data**
- Step 7: Writing the report**

## Evaluation planning

It's always best to plan your evaluation as near as possible to the start of your project. This will ensure that you allow plenty of time to complete the evaluation, and will allow the staff and resources to be allocated sooner rather than later. It will also ensure that you collect the right data at the right stages of the programme, and means the process will be generally stress-free.

## Seven easy steps

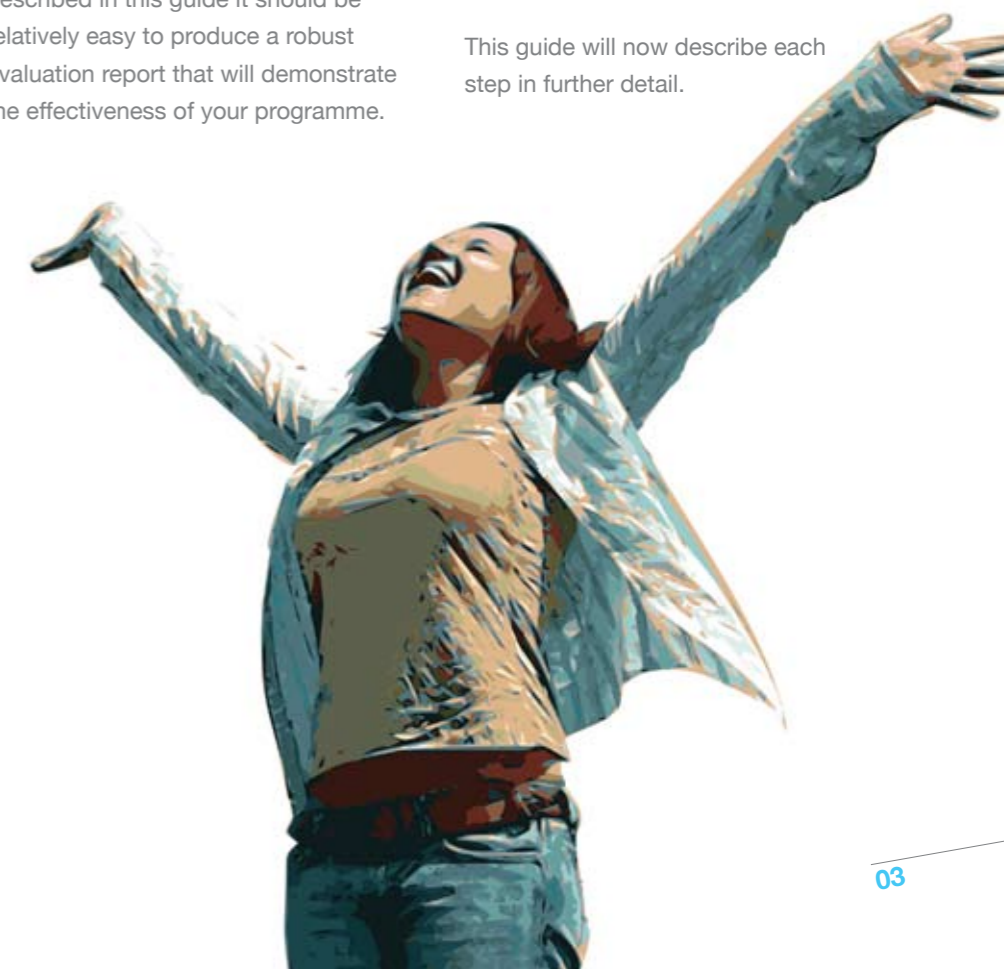
By following the seven logical steps described in this guide it should be relatively easy to produce a robust evaluation report that will demonstrate the effectiveness of your programme.

This guide will now describe each step in further detail.

The evaluation planning template included in the Aimhigher Greater Merseyside evaluation toolkit will help you plan an effective evaluation for your project.

## Hiring an external evaluator

For large, complex or innovative programmes it may be advisable to seek an external consultant to conduct the evaluation.



# step 1. programme objectives

Good evaluation is an extension of good project management. It may sound obvious, but setting clear, measurable objectives for your programme will make the evaluation process much easier. Programme objectives provide a definition of effectiveness for the evaluation to measure.

## Setting SMART objectives

Good project objectives are **SMART**, which stands for...

**Specific** - objectives should specify what you want to achieve.

**Measurable** - you should be able to measure if you met the objective.

**Achievable** - are the objectives realistic given the resources you have?

**Relevant** - do the objectives relate to something the project aimed to achieve?

**Time-bound** - what is the deadline for achieving each objective?

This process will help set useful objectives for the programme. If all of your objectives are SMART, it will be easy to measure whether the programme is effective.

## Using evaluation to set objectives

Sometimes it's a good idea to do a little evaluation work before project objectives are finalised. This is known as front-end evaluation.

Two examples of front-end evaluation are a needs analysis and audience pre-research.

**Needs analysis:** A needs analysis is a piece of research carried out before a programme is funded. It allows areas where there are gaps in provision or underresourced areas to be identified.

**Pre-research:** Pre-research is often used to decide on the final objectives or content of a programme. It usually involves talking to members of the target audience, for example to test whether potential materials are interesting and engaging.



You may also wish to conduct some desk research. This could involve looking at previous work that has been done in the area your programme addresses, or finding out about the wider context in which your programme operates.

The practitioners' section of the Aimhigher Greater Merseyside website is a good place to start:

[www.ahgtm.ac.uk/research](http://www.ahgtm.ac.uk/research)

For previous project reports and reports from AHGTM research projects.

[www.ahgtm.ac.uk/statistics](http://www.ahgtm.ac.uk/statistics)

For facts and figures related to the Greater Merseyside population, as well as the latest data on attainment and uptake of HE courses.

What do you want your evaluation to find out? In order to ensure you use the time allocated to your evaluation in the most productive way, it is essential to decide what you want the evaluation to find out. This is best done by setting yourself evaluation questions, also known as research questions. Evaluation is a type of research, so many of the processes involved are similar.

## Evaluation and research questions

### Research question:

A research question is one that yields hard facts to help solve a problem, produce new research, add to theory, or improve programmes. Because research deals with the real world, the findings should add to knowledge that can be used by other researchers, theorists, or practitioners.

### Evaluation question:

A research question used in evaluation research, that yields evidence regarding the development, delivery and/or impact of a programme or programmes.

Examples of evaluation questions for different programmes could include:

1. Did the intervention help participants learn more about HE?
2. What were the participants' demographics in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, disability and educational level?
3. What did teachers think about the content of the session?
4. How much of the activity did learners recall after 12 months?
5. What elements of the programme would practitioners improve in future?

## Qualitative and quantitative methods

Once you have decided on evaluation questions, it's time to start thinking about evaluation methods. Evaluation methods can be either qualitative or quantitative.

**Qualitative:** For evaluation questions that ask 'what', 'how' or 'why': qualitative methods provide a deep understanding of the ways in which your programme has had an impact on its participants. Ideal if you are unsure of what impact your activity will have, or if your programme aims to have a strong impact on a small number of participants. Often used in formative evaluations

**Quantitative:** For evaluation questions that ask 'how much' or 'how many': quantitative methods provide numbers and statistics, and quantify participants' opinions. These methods work best if you have a good idea of the expected impact of your programme, and if you are working with large numbers of participants. Often used in summative evaluations.

Many evaluation plans will contain both quantitative and qualitative elements (mixed method). For example, a new programme may use qualitative methods at the start to find out what impact the activities are having.

Later, quantitative methods may be used to measure the strength of the impact, or what proportion of participants experience the different impacts.

A different programme may use quantitative methods for evaluation with students, and qualitative evaluation with their teachers and parents.

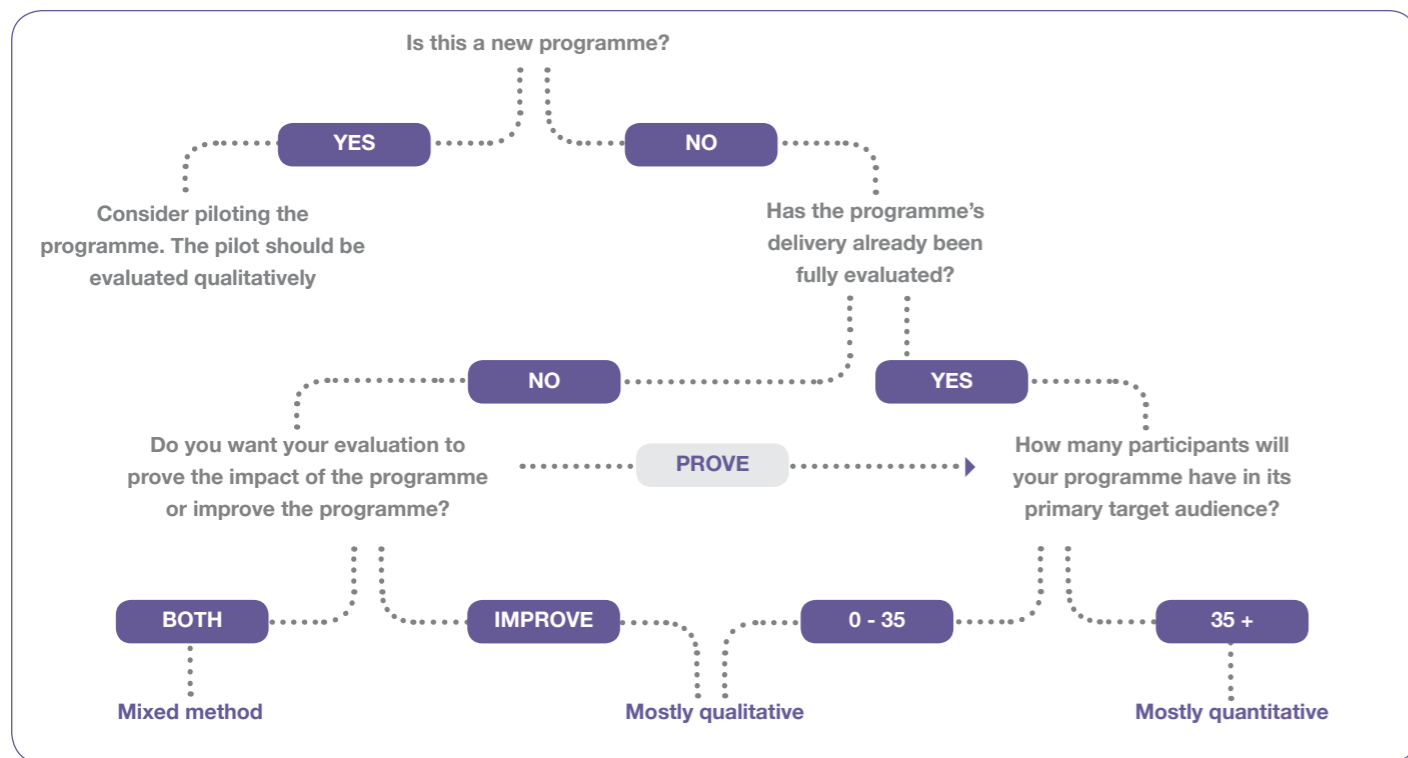
# step 2. evaluation questions

# step 3. methodology

Now that you have an idea of what questions the evaluation will address, it's important to choose an appropriate method, and the best instruments to collect the information you need.

## Which method?

If you are unsure what method would be most suitable for your programme, use the flow chart below as a guide, but remember it's only a guide! You may want to use different methods for different target groups, such as learners, parents, teachers, or practitioners.



Flow chart for choosing evaluation methods

## Which instrument?

You are probably familiar with common evaluation instruments such as questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups (group interviews). All of these instruments can be used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data, although some are more effective at collecting one type of data than the other. For example, questionnaires are good for collecting quantitative data, while focus groups are often used in qualitative research.

Questions with multiple-choice answers such as rating scales are known as closed items, e.g. "What was your overall opinion of the event on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 is very good and 5 is very bad)".

Questions with free-form answers are known as open items, e.g. "What was your overall opinion of the event?"

Both closed and open items can be included in either questionnaires or interviews. Often, the same instrument can be used to collect quantitative and qualitative data. An example is a questionnaire that has some multiple-choice questions, and some open questions.

# step 4. evaluation materials

Know your audience: in the same way that practitioners know their target audience when developing a programme, it's important to bear in mind that same target audience when designing materials. For example, those with poor written skills will find long questionnaires challenging; it may be possible to collect identical information through interviews.

Technique	Advantages	Disadvantages
Interview	Can collect in-depth information Responses can be probed further Questions can be explained	Potential for interviewer bias Requires skill on the part of the interviewer Time-consuming and expensive
Group interview (Focus group)	Very 'rich' source of data Possible to observe group interactions	Time-consuming and expensive Skilled facilitator required
Questionnaire	Inexpensive Easy to include in an activity Greater anonymity Flexibility with distribution	Inappropriate for use with some groups, e.g. young children, illiterate adults. Potentially low response rate. Self selecting bias Clarification of questions not possible
Secondary sources	Generally inexpensive Convenient	Validity and reliability problems Data categories may not match requirements

## Common data collection techniques

Unfortunately, no evaluation instrument is perfect. The advantages and disadvantages of some common instruments are outlined in the table above.

Of course these are not the only techniques that exist. Feel free to be creative with your evaluation! Successful AHGTM evaluations have collected information using thoughts boxes, post-it notes and videos.

## Designing materials

Now you have chosen your data collection instrument, it is time to design the materials. There are a few basics to keep in mind that will ensure your materials capture the information you need.

1. If you are working with 14-19 year-olds, ensure you include the basic AHGTM quality and impact measures (see the generic questionnaire included in the evaluation toolkit).
2. Refer to your evaluation questions (step 2) to make sure you cover everything.
3. Make sure materials are balanced, e.g. offer space for respondents to give both positive and negative feedback.
4. Question wording should be non-leading, e.g. "Was the event helpful or not?" is better than "Do you agree that the event was helpful?"
5. Use standard monitoring categories such as the approved extended categories for ethnicity. If in doubt, check guidelines in the AHGTM evaluation toolkit.
6. Materials should be easy to complete, e.g. consider layout and instructions.
7. All evaluation instruments should be piloted whenever possible.
8. Questionnaires and interviews should not be too long or too short.

# step 5. sampling

If we consider a population to be every individual that takes part in a programme, then the evaluation sample is a proportion of that population. Depending on the size of the population, the sample could be everyone in the population, or just a few percent.

For example, the whole Aimhigher cohort is a population, but an evaluation of Aimhigher Greater Merseyside would only collect data from a small sample or samples of the group.

Many sampling methods come from the fields of market research and opinion polling, where organisations are looking to capture the views of the whole UK population by asking a small representative sample. Some common sampling methods are given above.

### Common sampling methods

Sample	Description
<b>Census</b>	All members of the relevant population are included.
<b>Random</b>	Sample members selected from the population randomly.
<b>Self-selected</b>	Sample is selected when members of the population decide, for example, whether or not to complete a questionnaire.
<b>Stratified</b>	Groups, or <i>strata</i> , within the population are identified (e.g. learners from different BME groups). Random samples are then taken from each group.
<b>Judgemental</b>	Sample chosen based on evaluator's judgement of who can provide the most valuable information.
<b>Systematic</b>	Selection of the nth member of a population or stratum.

It is important that your sample is representative, and that it is as unbiased as possible. A self-selected sample will usually include those with strongest opinions about the programme (either positive or negative) because those who were indifferent may not bother to give feedback. It is better to avoid this method where possible.

### How big should the sample be?

As a guideline, a quantitative evaluation will need a sample of 35 to 500. Above this upper limit you are likely to find that respondents give similar feedback, and that the proportions responding in a particular way do not change. This figure could rise to 1000 if you are planning to use statistical analyses to explore relationships between subgroups in the sample, although this is well beyond the scope of most AHGTM programme evaluations. If you are running a programme that involves a small number of participants, a census sample is a good way of avoiding bias. For programmes with large populations, a random or systematic sampling method can work well. This will ensure you do not drown in lots of needless data!

For qualitative evaluation, much smaller samples are needed. Between 5 and 35 individuals or groups are usually sufficient. It is not possible to be representative in the same way as with quantitative work, but the individuals involved should be selected to include those with the widest-ranging experiences or opinions.

Analysing data is the process of pulling together all of the information you have collected, and using it to draw conclusions. Analysis can be as straightforward as reporting who or how many respondents said what. More involved analyses might look for patterns or relationships in the data collected.

Think about how you will be presenting your data, and analyse it in the same, logical order:

**1. Analyse the data related to the programme:** number of events, attendance etc.

**2. Describe the population and evaluation sample (size and demographics):** You may need to remove individuals from the sample if they fall outside the programme's target audience (for example a younger sibling who turned up on the day, or a teacher who mistakenly completed a student questionnaire). This is known as cleaning the data. You will need to include in your report ways in which the sample was cleaned.

**3. Descriptive results:** frequencies and averages for quantitative work (illustrate with quotes if available); describe themes that arose from qualitative work.

**4. Analytical results:** if you performed any statistical tests or more complex analyses, such as discourse analysis, report these results last.

It is important to analyse your data fully before starting to draw conclusions.

### Writing the report

It's always helpful to think about what your report will look like while you're planning your evaluation. Who do you want to read it? What kind of information will it contain? This will help you set the evaluation questions described in Step 2

The Aimhigher Greater Merseyside evaluation toolkit contains a template for an evaluation report. A typical report may contain the following sections:

### Typical evaluation report structure

#### Executive summary

1. Introduction, including programme objectives

2. Methodology, including evaluation questions, evaluation methods and instruments, sampling techniques

3. Findings

- a. Description of programme
- b. Description of sample
- c. Descriptive and analytical results

4. Conclusions

5. Recommendations

The executive summary should contain the programme objectives, a brief description of the findings, and your recommendations.

To change the report from an evaluation report into a project report, simply add a section on programme delivery. A good project report will include lots of evidence, so is in fact very similar to an evaluation report.

This guide has outlined an approach to the evaluation of AHGTM programmes. Use the other resources in the toolkit to help plan and deliver an effective evaluation.

# steps 6&7. data analysis and reporting

