

Evaluating healthcare innovation: Common challenges and practical solutions

Saba Savul, Katie Edwards and Sophie Carlisle

Analytics and Evaluation Service

25th June 2026



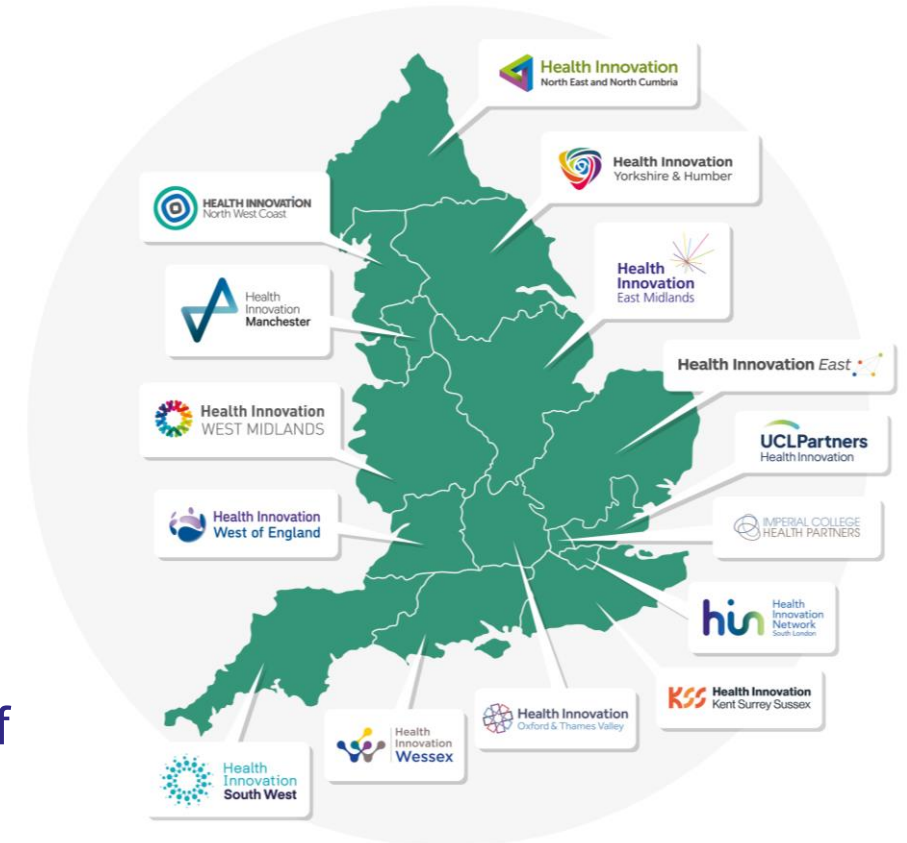
Housekeeping

- 🕒 Today's session will last 60 minutes
- We'll record the session to share with anyone who could not make it today
- We will keep mics off as default to avoid disruption
- There will be a Q&A at the end – please also feel welcome to type questions throughout each presentation to in the chat



An innovation ‘docking station’

- 15 Health Innovation Networks (HINs) across England – commissioned to bring together the NHS, industry, academia and the third sector to help drive health innovation across the NHS, at pace and scale.
- HINs tackle national problems with local understanding, and local problems with national expertise.
- We are embedded in our local health and research ecosystems.
- This drives economic prosperity and growth in all parts of the country and ensures that everyone benefits from innovation.



The session will cover

- What is evaluation and why does it matter
- Types of evaluation and when to use them
- Common barriers and pitfalls that can undermine evaluation
- Practical ways to overcome challenges and good practice



Poll - How familiar are you with evaluation in healthcare?



Poll – Why do we do evaluation?



What is evaluation and why does it matter



Real World Evaluation (RWE)

The process of measuring the effectiveness, impact, or outcomes of something as it operates in actual practice or real-life environments



Why RWE matters



Healthcare decisions have significant implications for lives, budgets and public trust



Determines whether an intervention, programme or service works as intended



Distinguishes activity from impact



Decision making and evidence-based care



Aligns with the Government's 10-Year Health Plan to deliver practical, scalable improvements

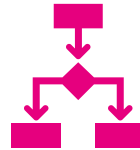
What evaluation is for



Learning



Improvement



Decision-
making



Equity



Accountability
& Assurance



What evaluation is not

Not just data
collection

Not just
proving
success

Not a one-
off event

Not separate
from delivery

Not
performance
review

Not Audit

Not
Research



Evaluation strengthens and sustains innovation



Ideas into proven
practice



Encourages iterative
improvement



Builds credibility and
trust



Supports long-term
sustainability



Types of evaluation and when to use them



Types of evaluation

Process Evaluation

What can be learned
from how the innovation
was delivered?

Impact Evaluation

What difference has an
innovation made?

Value for Money Evaluation

Is this innovation a good
use of resources?



RWE vs Research

	RWE	Traditional Research	Key Difference
Objectives	Deliver value, usability, reliability	Validate hypotheses, prove concepts	Impact vs Knowledge
Environment	Uncontrolled, dynamic environments	Controlled, lab-like conditions	Noise and variability vs. Isolated variables
Data	Messy, evolving data	Clean, curated datasets	Real-world data is less predictable
Techniques	Cross-sectional studies, Surveys	RCTs, Cohort studies	Techniques are applied to suit objectives



Evaluation methods



Evidence reviews



System data



Surveys



Interviews



Focus groups



Observations



Common challenges and practical solutions



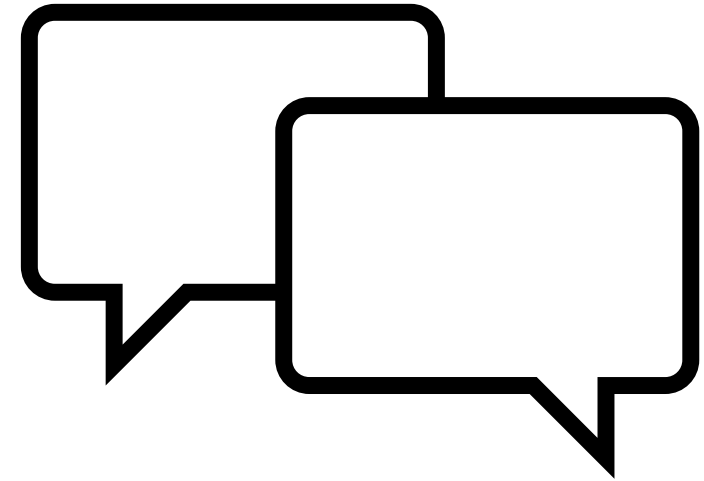
Challenge 1: Understanding the key question

- Too many questions
- Vague ideas
- Differing priorities
- Shifting goals
- Limited time and resource



Solution 1: Understanding the key question

- Clear communication
- Involvement of key decision makers
- Co-develop evaluation questions
- Prioritise



Challenge 2: Team engagement and buy-in

- Competing operational pressures
- Perception of being judged
- Practical burden
- Staff turnover
- Lack of perceived value



Solution 2: Team engagement and buy-in

- Early engagement
- Communication of the “why”
- Involve the team
- Reduce burden as much as possible
- Build relationships
- Provide regular feedback
- Be flexible
- Recognise support needs



Challenge 3: Leadership engagement and buy-in

- Different priorities
- Lack of visibility of the issue
- Fear of negative findings
- Too much detail



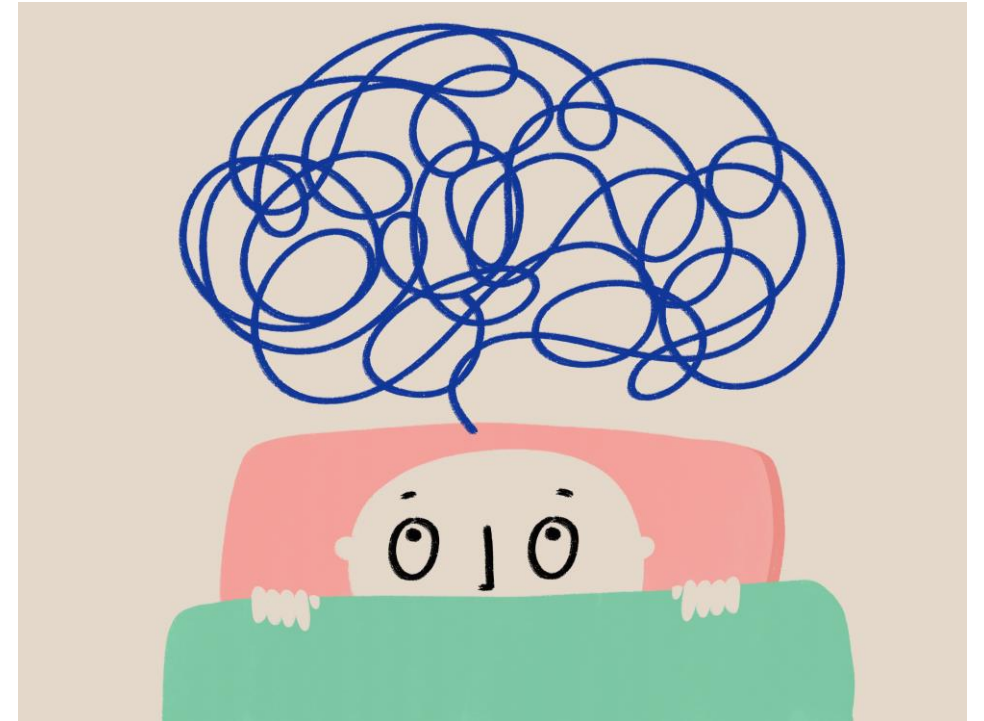
Solution 3: Leadership engagement and buy-in

- Make the evaluation relevant to leadership priorities
- Selective / focused involvement
- Identify a senior champion
- Be upfront about possible evaluation outcomes



Challenge 4: Messy data

- Inconsistencies between sites
- Linking data from different organisations
- Missing data
- Data not designed for evaluation



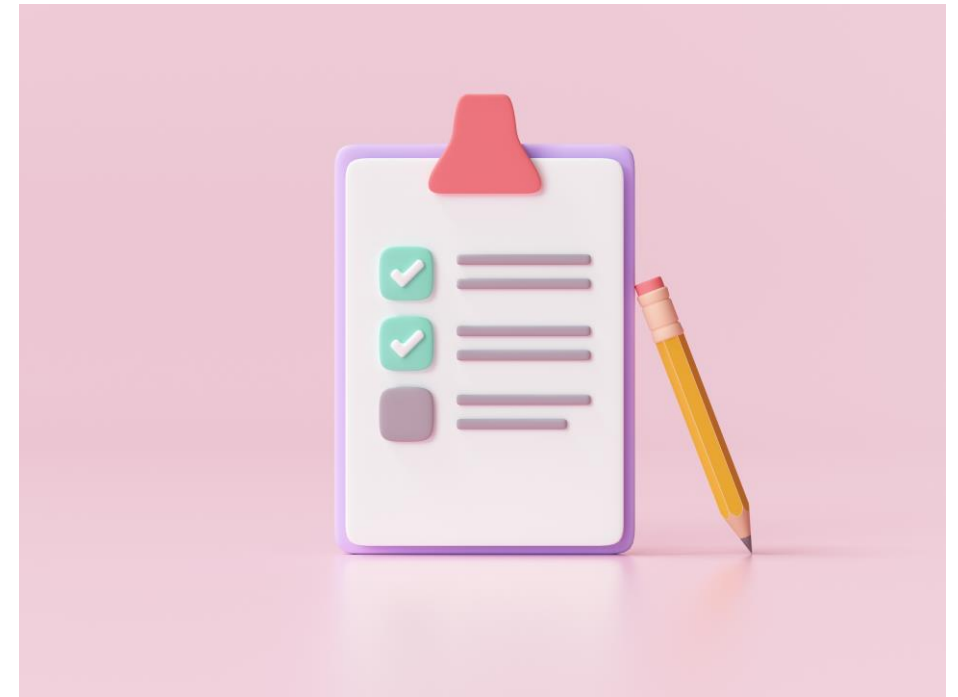
Solution 4: Messy data

- Do a data audit early on
- Be transparent about limitations
- Proxy measures
- Triangulate data
- Embrace the mess!



Challenge 5: Information governance

- The process can be slow
- Different sites / organisations have different policies
- Understanding if data can be shared
- Need for anonymisation
- Understanding when consent is needed



Solution 5: Information governance

- Engage with IG early
- Be clear about what you are doing
- Justify the data needs
- Use the minimum necessary data
- Seek advice from data protection officers
- Plan for delays
- Have back up plans



Challenge 6: Making findings land

- Lack of organisational buy in
- Outputs are too technical or detailed
- Findings are too vague or cautious
- Findings are not linked to decision making
- Outputs are not tailored to specific audiences
- The evaluation stops with the report



Solution 6: Making findings land

- Understand what decisions the evaluation will influence
- Create short summaries and take-home messaging
- Create multiple outputs
- Tailor messaging to different audiences
- Align timing with decision making
- Communicate actionable findings
- Engage stakeholders throughout
- PPI engagement



What does a successful evaluation look like?

Technical success

- Clear purpose
- Well defined questions
- Thought through and appropriate methods
- Reliable data
- Transparent limitations
- Strong analysis

Practical success

- Engaged stakeholders
- Relevant stakeholders
- Successful data collection
- Findings that reflect the real-world context
- Clear, relevant outputs

Impact success

- Findings inform decisions
- Changes are made as a result
- Service improves for users / staff
- Learning is carried forwards

Started early

Realistic

Flexibility

**Poll - What are some other challenges
and/or solutions you've encountered?**



Resources

Magenta Book



NHS Evaluation Toolkit



Resources

Get in touch!

Search ...

[Home](#) [About us](#) [Our work](#) [News and Events](#) [Working with us](#) [Contact us](#)



[Our innovations](#) >

[Previous innovation projects](#)

[Patient and Public Involvement](#) >

[Innovator Hub](#) >

[Patient Safety Collaborative](#) >

[Innovation Academy](#)

[Ignite - making innovation happen](#)

[Environmental sustainability](#)

[Analytics and Evaluation support](#)

Analytics and Evaluation support

[Home](#) > [Our work](#) > [Analytics and Evaluation support](#)



Analytics and Evaluation support

Our Analytics and Evaluation team delivers an evaluation service that aims to turn data into insight and support decision making, whether you are planning to introduce a new innovation or evaluate an existing one.

Our work ensures that you are informed about what works, what doesn't, and how things can be improved, so that your organisation can make confident, evidence-informed choices that lead to meaningful, measurable impact.

How can we help?

[Our services](#)

Any questions?



Thank you!



healthinnovation-em@nottingham.ac.uk



healthinnovation-em.org.uk

