



# SEMINAR REPORT:

## **AES Seminar – Using rubrics in evaluation: Towards a universal scale?**

*By Amy Lawton, Social Research and Information Officer, WESTIR Limited*

**November 2019**



© WESTIR Limited A.B.N 65 003 487 965 A.C.N. 003 487 965

This work is Copyright. Apart from use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part can be reproduced by any process without the written permission from the Executive Officer of WESTIR Ltd.

All possible care has been taken in the preparation of the information contained in this publication. However, WESTIR Ltd expressly disclaims any liability for the accuracy and sufficiency of the information and under no circumstances shall be liable in negligence or otherwise in or arising out of the preparation or supply of any of the information  
WESTIR Ltd is partly funded by the NSW Department of Family and Community Services.

**WESTIR LTD**

ABN: 65 003 487 965 | ACN: 003 487 965



mail@westir.org.au



(02) 9635 7764



Suite 7, Level 2  
154 Marsden Street  
Parramatta, NSW 2150  
PO Box 136 Parramatta 2124

## **AES SEMINAR – USING RUBRICS IN EVALUATION: TOWARDS A UNIVERSAL SCALE?**

By Amy Lawton, Social Research and Information Officer, WESTIR Limited

WESTIR Limited attended an [Australian Evaluation Society](#) (AES) professional learning seminar in November 2019 on the use of rubrics in evaluation. The presenter for the session was Dr George Argyrous from the [UTS Institute for Public Policy and Governance](#).

Dr Argyrous explained that the rubric is a scale that can be used to measure progress toward outcomes. It usually has two elements – a performance rating scale and performance descriptors. It is the performance descriptors that really make the rubric, as they define and describe the rating that the assessor is giving.

The presentation then moved on to discussing whether there were some common underlying scale points that can be used to develop consistent rubrics across a range of contexts. Dr Argyrous, using an example around behaviour change, suggested that there could be common scale points, ranging from ‘opposed’ to ‘leading/innovating’ (See Table 1).

**Table 1: Common scale points on rubrics**

<b>Typical label</b>	<b>Behaviour change example</b>
Opposed	There are barriers or oppositions to behaviour; people are fearful or hostile; people believe that it could never come about; people feel that they will be punished.
Absent	No sign of behaviour, but this is for ‘benign’ reasons e.g. it is not thought of as required.
Beginning but limited	Behaviour is occurring but it may be flawed and/or frustrating.
Making progress	Behaviour is happening, but only in some of the areas or instances where it should. Behaviour is sometimes done well but may contain errors, inefficiencies, inconsistencies.
Fully realised	Behaviour is operating regularly, consistently and well and by everyone.
Leading/innovating	Behaviour is recognised as a benchmark by others; pushing the boundaries of best practice; helping establish new or stronger standards.

Source: Argyrous, 2019, UTS Institute for Public Policy and Governance

Seminar attendees were then asked to work at their tables to construct rubric statements for evaluation in program design using the common scale points. Some statements that groups came up with included:

- *“Opposed: using program evaluation is seen as devaluing expertise such as practice wisdom”.*
- *“Beginning but limited: evaluation is being used in program design but lacks staff awareness and resources”.*
- *“Making progress: use of evaluation is underway but inconsistently applied. Quality is improving but more training is required. Most but not all milestones met”.*

- *“Leading/innovating: establishing a best practice model and advocating for the use of evaluation for future program design”.*

Dr Argyrous highlighted that organisations may not use all common scale points as it may not suit their situation (for example, some organisations may not want to be leading/innovating as they do not have the resources to do so). He also suggested that evaluators may also want to add qualitative ‘measures’ to their rubrics to supplement their scores. These conditional questions would identify:

1. Barriers to moving up the scale
2. Effective activities or program components
3. Enablers of change
4. Future needs
5. Impact/other outcomes

When using rubrics in evaluation, it is also important to determine who scores and how the data is collected. There were several approaches to scoring and data collection that were discussed, which are outlined in Table 2.

**Table 2: Who scores and how to collect data from them**

<b>Approaches to scoring</b>	<b>Approaches to data collection</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Self-assessment</li> <li>2. Assessment by others/experts</li> <li>3. Hybrid scoring</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Using the rubric as the data collection instrument</li> <li>2. Using surveys/observation sheets as the data collection instruments</li> <li>4. 3. Bringing in other data</li> </ol>

Source: Argyrous, 2019, UTS Institute for Public Policy and Governance

To finish the presentation, Dr Argyrous reflected on some of his learnings from his years of working with rubrics. This included:

- Rubrics has a range of applications, but it may not be necessary if an organisation already has robust outcomes measurement in place.
- Is the unit of analysis organisational or individual?
- Rubrics can capture different perceptions of what is the ‘state of affairs’ in an organisation (for example, managers may think things are going well but policy staff think otherwise).
- In some cases, there may be a justification to use one rubric or multiple rubrics.
- Rubrics can be linked to performance reporting and decision making.

Overall, Dr Argyrous suggested that practitioners could work towards a common performance rating scale used in rubrics, but the performance descriptors would need to be tailored to each situation it is used in. There are good resources out there to assist practitioners in developing rubrics, such as E. Jane Davidson’s text book [‘Evaluation Methodology Basics: The Nuts and Bolts of Sound Evaluation’](#).

