

Guidance for selecting case studies (Work Package 2 of the Implement Project)

What is a case study?

Case studies can range from very simple and brief descriptive material describing a project to detailed information about a complex project in a variety of media. In the BeFlex materials you can see examples of two different ways in which we have prepared case studies. In ‘Curriculum in Partnership’ activity 1 we have used several very short case studies to illustrate diverse approaches to curriculum design. In ‘Regional Collaboration and Partnership’ in activity 3 we have used two much more substantial case studies in order for you to make more detailed comparisons.

We have summarised key points about our approach to case studies below

- Descriptive material about work completed or work in progress which illustrates one or more identified learning points
- Our case studies are written, with some including relevant numerical data. Case studies can also include information presented through a variety of other media
- Case studies are designed to stimulate discussion and encourage people to compare their own experience to those of others working in the field
- They can be brief or extensive – but their content needs to be accessible so people can quickly absorb and work with them

Criteria for selecting case studies – comment on first draft

At the recent Implement ‘kick off’ meeting we worked together to start to draw up criteria which might be used when lead partners are selecting case studies for Work Package 2 – *Development and piloting of national training material*. Below we have developed and expanded the results of that activity to provide a list of selection criteria upon which we hope you will comment. We will then amend the first draft in the light of your comments and re-circulate.

We have grouped the selection criteria into 7 key headings

1. Purpose of case study
2. Size and shape of case study
3. Form of the case study
4. Tone, language and style of the case study
5. Medium of the case study
6. Currency of the case study
7. Complexity of the case study

Purpose of case study

Your first step will be to decide the purpose of your case study. There will be several elements to this

Which learning points from the materials do you wish to illustrate with your case study?

The case study you select will need to demonstrate clearly the particular learning points that you want to illustrate from the learning materials.

Who will be the audience for your case study?

Your knowledge of the audience will influence your choice of the size, shape, medium and complexity of your case study. For example, if you know your audience might find it difficult to absorb long sections of written text you might select a case study which lends itself to being illustrated visually.

How will you present your case study?

The way in which you present your case study will influence your selection. For example if you are using your case study in a short face to face session it may need to be brief enough for your audience to absorb the key points in a short space of time.

Size and shape of case study

You will need to consider the size and shape of case study material, deciding if your choice can be presented in a way that makes it accessible as a learning tool to readers.

How long should it be?

It is hard to offer firm advice about this as much will depend on the purpose of your case study. However you should consider that most learners can only work effectively with limited information about a case they do not know well. I would suggest that for the purposes of illustrating the BeFlex materials a case study is unlikely to be more than three A4 pages of text or equivalent in other media.

How should the material be shaped?

It can be easier for learners to absorb case study material if it is presented in a way which emphasises key points. You may decide to select a case study that lends itself to this type of approach. This would be a case study that can be succinctly described, with a clear and easily articulated context and a recognisable outcome.

Form of the case study

In the BeFlex learning materials we made a conscious effort to refer to both qualitative and quantitative data. If you decide that you would like your case study to include a breadth of data you will need to select a case study that provides such information and ensure that the data is reliable.

Tone, language and style of the case study

It is important that learners understand the content of the case study. The tone, language and style of the case study supports this. You will need to ensure that whoever writes up or designs the elements of the case study has a straightforward style of expression that emphasises learning points with clarity. It will also be important that the case study is described as neutrally as possible allowing learners to make judgements about it rather than the author of the case study expressing a particular opinion.

Medium of case study

You may decide that you want to present the case study in just one medium or in a variety of media. This decision will be influenced by the purpose of your case study.

The media you choose will depend upon the content of your case study and also the amount of time you are able to devote to preparing materials. For example if you decide to make a new podcast, this may take much longer than using an existing powerpoint presentation or a poster. However, using innovative media can enhance the power of the message of the case study and this may make the additional time spent worthwhile.

Currency of case study

You will need to make a decision about the currency of the case study you select. It is hard to make rules about this process. For example, a case study that describes work still in progress may be effective for one purpose, while one that finished some years ago but on which you have received feedback and comment may be equally appropriate.

Complexity of case study

The complexity of your case study is a more difficult criterion to consider. Most case studies will be very complex in their entirety. You may need to select elements of a larger case study to present to your audience to avoid them being overwhelmed with detail. You might also decide to select a case study where things did not work out how you expected them to – things that went wrong often provide an excellent vehicle for learning. When deciding on complexity you will need to judge the extent to which learners can grasp the complexity of a case study in the time and situation available for their learning. For example, a short simple case study presented at a 2 hour session in a conference may have much more impact than trying to share information about a complex one in this period of time. The need to contextualise the case study may also add to the complexity. You may choose to select a case study where the context can be quickly defined to avoid it becoming over complex.

These criteria aim to provide guidance on how to select case studies – we look forward to receiving your feedback.

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