

PURPOSE

These Best Practice Principles on Teaching Impact Assessment are intended to inform the ongoing development of IAIA training courses and to support members of the Association involved in teaching impact assessment in higher education institutions.

BACKGROUND

These Best Practice Principles were identified through a project conducted by researchers from Edith Cowan University in Western Australia and developed by Jenny Pope and Angus Morrison-Saunders in 2018 with the support of an IAIA Innovation Grant. Comments are welcome at any time and should be forwarded to IAIA Headquarters (info@iaia.org).

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Teaching Impact Assessment

Introduction

This document outlines a series of best practice principles for teaching impact assessment. Impact assessment is taught in many different contexts, which may include (adapted from Stelmack, Sinclair, & Fitzpatrick, 2005):

- Undergraduate university teaching
- Post-graduate university teaching
- Online professional development courses
- Short courses (e.g., pre-IAIA training courses)
- Targeted capacity building programs
- On-the-job training

The most appropriate way to teach impact assessment will depend on the specific context. Factors of relevance to consider here are the characteristics of the students including level of experience and roles (for example whether proponents, impact assessment practitioners, or regulators), the abilities and strengths of the teachers or trainers, the cultural and policy context, and the desired learning outcomes.

While acknowledging this variation and its implications, for practicality this document presents a series of best practice principles for teaching impact assessment distinguishing between two broad contexts:

- Teaching at higher education institutions, whether at undergraduate or postgraduate level (designated as "teaching" in this document).
- Professional development training courses, whether online or face-to-face, generic or targeted (designated as "training" in this document).

The principles were identified through a project conducted by researchers from Edith Cowan University in Western Australia with the support of IAIA through an Innovation Grant. A total of 29 draft best practice principles for teaching impact assessment were developed, which were rated for importance by teachers and trainers of impact assessment, noting that some individuals fall into both categories.

While 28 of the principles were rated as very important or extremely important by all participant groups, it is important to emphasize that it may not be possible or even desirable to comply with all principles in a single impact assessment teaching offering. It will be important to identify which principles are most relevant in any given context.

Nevertheless, the complete set of principles represents desirable aspects of impact assessment teaching for university teachers and training course providers, which might be useful in designing and possibly evaluating teaching and training programs and activities.

The principles are presented in the subsequent sections of this document in three categories: the **content** of impact assessment courses, i.e., what is taught (Part 1); **pedagogy** or how it is taught (Part 2); and essential **skills** that should be developed by learners (Part 3). Each principle is expressed in two ways: firstly, a succinct statement of the principle and secondly as a descriptive sentence expressing the principle as the experience or outcome for a learner. The research found that there were some variations between the relative importance of some principles between university teaching and professional development training, and some were considered more important than others overall. Hence each principle is designated as being:

- Extremely important for both teaching and training
- Very important for both teaching and training
- Extremely important for teaching (less important for training)
- Extremely important for training (less important for teaching)

Part 1: Content

These aspects of teaching/training reflect high-level principles **regarding the appropriate content of impact assessment courses**. Note that they do not include specific curriculum topics such as impact assessment process steps (e.g., screening, scoping, prediction etc.), which are taken as given.

Best practice teaching of impact assessment:

Principles	Extremely important for both teaching & training	Very important for both teaching & training	Extremely important for teaching	Extremely important for training
(1.1) Integrates the theory and practice of impact assessment. <i>Practical aspects are discussed with emerging research in the field.</i>	x			
(1.2) Incorporates research contributions. <i>Learners engage with emerging research in the field.</i>			x	
(1.3) Presents international best practice principles. <i>Learners are aware of what constitutes international best practice, regardless of the specifics of the impact assessment systems within which they operate.</i>		x		
(1.4) Presents the requirements of specific standards, regulations, or procedures relevant to the participants. <i>Learners are familiar with the specifics of the impact assessment systems within which they operate.</i>		x		
(1.5) Explores professional ethics. <i>Learners are prepared to face ethical dilemmas and are aware of expected professional standards.</i>		x		
(1.6) Positions EIA as an interdisciplinary process. <i>Learners are aware that impact assessment integrates different forms of knowledge.</i>	x			
(1.7) Presents impact assessment as a pluralistic process. <i>Learners are aware that impact assessment engages with multiple stakeholders with different values and perspectives.</i>	x			
(1.8) Presents impact assessment as being both socio-political and technical in nature. <i>Learners are aware that impact assessment is both an art and a science.</i>	x			
(1.9) Fosters sustainability-oriented norms and values. <i>Learners are prepared to be advocates for the environment and sustainability.</i>		x		
(1.10) Provides practical methods and tools. <i>Learners leave the course with a "tool kit" they can apply in future work.</i>	x			

Part 2: Pedagogy

These aspects of teaching/training reflect **how content is taught**. Note that these are considered important but not necessarily unique to impact assessment teaching and training.

Best practice teaching of impact assessment:

Principles	Extremely important for both teaching & training	Very important for both teaching & training	Extremely important for teaching	Extremely important for training
(2.1) Is tailored to the context, needs, and capacities of learners. <i>The requirements of learners are ascertained in advance and the course is designed to meet these.</i>		x		
(2.2) Is flexible. <i>Teachers/trainers adapt to the emerging requirements of learners as the course progresses.</i>		x		
(2.3) Facilitates co-learning. <i>The knowledge and experience of the learners is drawn upon to complement those of the teacher/trainer.</i>				x
(2.4) Simulates key features of impact assessment practice. <i>Pedagogy incorporates features such as teamwork, communication, transparency, accountability, peer review.</i>		x		
(2.5) Provides opportunities for discussion and debate. <i>Learners are encouraged to participate, challenge, and share views.</i>	x			
(2.6) Utilizes case studies. <i>Actual or hypothetical examples of impact assessment practice are provided to illustrate concepts and as the basis for practical exercises.</i>	x			
(2.7) Provides opportunities to gain practical experience. <i>Activities reflect the realities and complexities of impact assessment practice.</i>				x
(2.8) Facilitates self-learning. <i>Learners are encouraged to apply concepts to their own contexts and to reflect on their personal learning processes.</i>		x		
(2.9) Is memorable and fun. <i>An enjoyable learning environment is created.</i>		x		

The principle that best practice impact assessment teaching should include mentorship and post-course support, which was included in the research survey, has not been included in the above list as it was not rated as very or extremely important by survey respondents. Although it is recognized as being highly desirable, it is outside the scope of most impact assessment courses, with the exception of some targeted professional development courses where this is an integrated component of course design. It is particularly impractical for higher education courses, due to potentially large numbers of students.

Part 3: Skills

These aspects of teaching/training reflect the essential skills that learners of impact assessment should develop. Note that the focus here is on the coordination and management of impact assessment processes and not technical or specialist input (i.e., not biodiversity surveys, air quality modelling, stakeholder engagement, etc.).

It is also important to note that the skills reflected in the principles are very generic; that is, they are important for impact assessment but also for many other disciplines and professional activities. For this reason, it is reasonable to expect that these skills would be acquired through many different learning experiences and not simply one impact assessment teaching/training offering. In a higher education environment, such skills should be developed throughout the learner's degree, and beyond it in their professional lives; while professional development trainers could reasonably expect that many learners participating in their courses would already have developed such skills through their professional experience. Nevertheless, the Skills principles are included here because impact assessment teaching/training should ideally aim to provide learners with an opportunity to develop or enhance and to utilize these skills to the extent appropriate in the learning environment.

Best practice teaching of impact assessment supports the development of:

Principles	Extremely important for both teaching & training	Very important for both teaching & training	Extremely important for teaching	Extremely important for training
(3.1) Integrative and systems thinking. <i>The ability to synthesize information from different sources to develop a holistic understanding.</i>	x			
(3.2) Critical thinking. <i>The ability to make reasoned arguments based upon critical evaluation of information.</i>	x			
(3.3) Judgement. <i>The ability to make decisions in situations of uncertainty, incomplete information, and competing values.</i>		x		
(3.4) Written communication skills. <i>The ability to prepare written materials in a clear and logical way that is comprehensible to non-experts.</i>			x	
(3.5) Oral communication skills. <i>The ability to engage in meaningful two-way communication with a variety of different stakeholders.</i>		x		
(3.6) Collaboration and teamwork skills. <i>The ability to work in diverse, interdisciplinary teams.</i>	x			
(3.7) Project management and coordination skills. <i>The ability to manage a team and complex tasks to achieve a defined goal.</i>		x		
(3.8) Research skills. <i>The ability to formulate, conduct, and report on research.</i>			x	
(3.9) Job readiness. <i>The practical skills required to coordinate an impact assessment in a professional setting.</i>				x

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