

# PLE and Civil Justice

## The development of evaluation tools and guidances

Cardiff seminar: 13 November 2008



---

### 1. The PLEAS Task Force

The PLEAS Task Force identified the lack of learning from experience, and sharing of that learning, as key obstacles to the development of quality and effectiveness in PLE. One way in which Plenet is seeking to remedy this is by raising funds for the development of evaluation tools and guidance to be shared on the Plenet website and refined through use over time.

### 2. Key features of PLE evaluation

- PLE evaluation is about impact and outcomes, and so may be both intrinsically difficult and costly to undertake
- PLE evaluation needs a stronger, clearer theoretical and conceptual framework in which to operate
- The theories and concepts that underpin PLE evaluation should inform both evaluation principles and models as these develop

### 3. Plenet and PLE evaluation tools and guidance

- a) Plenet is now putting together a proposal for funding the development of PLE evaluation tools and guidances, linked to the PLE pilot projects now under discussion with potential PLE providers.
- b) The proposal will be built around:
  - A review of past practice and literature to locate the proposal in terms of current thinking on PLE
  - A review of the international PLE situation
  - A review of relevant practices in related disciplines
  - One or more illustrative examples of PLE evaluation tools and guidances
  - A development approach based on piloting through demonstration projects
  - Requirements to produce tools and guidance that rely on the best knowledge of PLE available – theories and concepts, as well as good practice
- c) The proposal will set out the following principles for PLE project evaluation, drawn from work done to date:

- PLE project evaluation is in part about serving outcomes that originate in other work or concerns, and needs to allow for this
- PLE evaluation goals need to be devised in terms that meet the goals of the projects within which they operate
- PLE project evaluation must be sufficiently practical and grounded to appeal to projects that are seeking specific social changes
- PLE project evaluation must be developed to be capable of achieving results even when resources to fund evaluation are limited

#### **4. Suggested issues for discussion**

- a) Is the goal of ensuring that PLE evaluation takes full account of theory and concepts too ambitious? Are there practical ways in which we can approach this? What can academics bring to this work that will help PLE to progress as a research focus?
- b) Because in practice PLE is 'about' things other than itself, what are the ways in which we can bring together evaluation of the goals of, say, a project aimed at supporting young homeless people, and the PLE elements of such a project. What would the distinctiveness of PLE evaluation be in such a case? Does anyone have experience of this in related fields?
- c) Small-scale evaluations are notoriously dismissed as 'unrepresentative'. But in reality these may be the only sort most PLE-related projects can afford. How can we work to create PLE evaluation models that are affordable but that can still produce results that are reliably informative and replicable?

John Seargeant  
November 2008