



# Pearson

## Efficacy FAQs

### What is efficacy?

Efficacy means helping people make measurable progress in their lives through learning. To make that progress, Pearson needs to deliver on our promises to learners. That's why we are identifying the outcomes that matter most to learners and educators, designing and developing products based on evidence from learning science of what works to improve those outcomes, measuring the impact the use of our products can have on learning, and working to continuously improve. As part of our commitment to efficacy we produce on an annual basis public, audited and independently reviewed Efficacy Reports about the impact use of our products can have on outcomes for learners.

### Why report on the efficacy of your products?

We report because we want to be open and transparent about the impact on learning that use of our products can have. We have our research audited because we want to provide assurance to our customers and learners that the statements we make about impact of use of our products are valid and reliable. Although we're proud of keeping our promise and what we've learned, reporting has never been our ultimate goal. Our goal is to support better learning for more learners in the future.

Our commitment to Efficacy and Research means that Pearson is learning about the impact of use of our products. We are applying what we learned about the impact of use of our products as well as using our expertise in learning research and design to inform a continuous cycle of product ideation, exploration, design, development and improvement so we can build better digital products in the future as well.

## What defines Pearson's approach to efficacy reporting?

There are three things that define our approach:

1. our commitment both to the rigor of our research methods and to producing relevant findings for our customers and product development;
2. our transparency about our findings. Through external third-party audit and independent review we are ensuring that our statements on the efficacy of our products accurately reflect the research that has been conducted and we have committed to sharing that research even if the results are unfavorable;
3. our open-access approach to our research and audit methods and processes. We are opening up all of our work to the education sector so that we can learn from others on how we might improve our approach, while also hoping to drive the sector towards an increased focus on learner outcomes

When you combine these three elements with the fact that we are executing this at scale across our portfolio, this is unparalleled in the education sector.

## You have three parts to your efficacy reports for each product: Technical Research Report, Product Efficacy Report and Educator Guide. Which one should I read?

To be as open and transparent as possible about how we design, develop, and evaluate the impact of use of our products on learning, the audited report has three parts:

1. Technical Research Reports each describe a single piece of impact evaluation research into the use of a product, undertaken to meet the standards expected for publication in peer-reviewed academic journals.
2. Product Efficacy Reports summarize all the relevant impact evaluation research related to the use of a single product, based on one or more Technical Research Reports. They also include information about the learning research that informed the product's design, and how the product is designed to be used.
3. The Educator Guide shares more information and insights from the educators involved in the study.

## Why are the assessment and qualifications reports are so different?

The reports on our [assessment products](#) are not externally audited, because the auditing framework is organized around learner outcomes, and we do not typically expect our assessment products to have a direct effect on learner outcomes. Instead, we focus on ensuring that our assessments are valid, reliable and fair. Qualifications are different to stand alone assessments as they include both subject matter that must be taught as well as aligned assessments. Much of our qualification research to date focuses on the validity, reliability and fairness of the assessment. As a result, the current qualifications reports are not audited. This does not diminish the rigor of the research. In England, the process for the design and development of qualifications is highly regulated by Ofqual. We are, however, increasingly focusing on the impact on learner outcomes of qualifications including learner experience and progression. We have partnered on this with the world's number one institute for education, University College London (UCL), Institute of Education and we are exploring how we would approach adding a further level of assurance to the research shared in this efficacy report in the form of independent auditing by PwC and independent verification and independent review by SRI.

## How do you consider pre-existing, external research on your products when you create your efficacy reports?

You can see how we consider pre-existing research in our Efficacy Reporting Framework. Before we create a plan for efficacy studies on a product, we search external research databases to identify existing publicly available research on our products. The efficacy reporting process that we have created ensures that when we report on the efficacy of a product, we treat research that has been produced externally in the same way that we treat the studies we have commissioned. This means that we review any publicly available peer-reviewed external studies on a product against the same criteria our own studies have to meet to establish whether a particular study should be included in the efficacy report. We have a number of examples of externally produced studies that we have included in our reports.

## The industry standard is to peer review research reports. Why have you decided to complete an audit as well?

SRI Education provided independent review of Pearson's reports and efficacy statements about learner outcomes. However, because we are a commercial organization, we wanted to provide additional assurance to our stakeholders and build trust in our statements about impact by subjecting our research processes and statements to the same level of scrutiny as our financial results by completing an audit. By doing this, we are setting new standards of transparency for commercial organizations across the sector.

## What types of questions does the auditor require to be answered?

Please refer to review documents for questions required to be answered in the Efficacy Reporting Framework dated 20 March 2019.

## How might our efficacy reports fail their audit?

An audit failure would occur if a material misstatement was found during the course of the audit work. A material misstatement, in this instance, would be an efficacy statement that does not reflect the study design and quality of underlying research, or, the omission of key information from a relevant study.

## What does it mean that we have “clean” audit opinions for our efficacy reports?

Using the language given to us by PwC, it means that:

“Based on the procedures PwC have performed and the evidence they have obtained, nothing has come to their attention that causes them to believe that the efficacy statements set out in the Product Efficacy Reports have not been prepared and reported, in all material respects, in accordance with the Pearson Efficacy Reporting Framework.”

In short, it means that the auditors feel that the statements we make about the efficacy of our products accurately reflect the research we have completed, as well as any third-party research (commissioned and not) and publicly available research presented in our reports.

## How can we be sure the audit is independent?

PwC apply the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) Code of Ethics, which includes independence and other requirements founded on fundamental principles of integrity, objectivity, professional competence and due care, confidentiality and professional behaviour.

## What is the significance of limited assurance audit and how does it differ from a financial audit?

A traditional financial audit engagement is designed to provide reasonable assurance on financial statements. In contrast, a limited assurance approach is typically used for non-financial subject matter that has been relatively newly defined, and so has less mature processes and standards around generating, reporting and auditing. For

example, organizations typically use limited assurance for their corporate responsibility disclosures. PwC provided limited assurance on Pearson's efficacy statements. Pearson commissioned this limited assurance engagement as a way to build trust and provide assurance to our customers, learners and investors about the way we approach evaluating the impact of the use of our products. We believe this demonstrates a level of transparency about our efficacy research that is unparalleled within the commercial education sector.

## **I have a question about the audit that is not answered here. Who can I contact?**

You can email questions about the audit to [efficacy@pearson.com](mailto:efficacy@pearson.com)

## **What other types of research does Pearson use?**

We use foundational learning science, learning design and short-cycle exploratory studies at the early stages of product design and development. This involves developing the idea for the product, gathering education research, exploring and validating the learner outcomes and identifying the right level of evidence for the product. These types of research are used to help us to improve our products in an ongoing cycle of improvement.

## **Surely the effectiveness of an education product depends much more on the educator not the digital product?**

Nothing surpasses the importance of an inspiring, high quality educator in terms of improving the outcomes of learning. When digital products are used in the context of teaching and learning, outcomes are, however, achieved as a result of a combination of factors. Three critical factors are the educator (e.g. their teaching and learning experience and their knowledge and experience of using the product), the product (e.g., the role it is designed and used to play in learning), and the student (e.g., their learning background and prior experience, goals and motivation). Our focus on efficacy and research is to make sure that our digital products are:

- outcomes-focused in their design,
- designed based on evidence about how to improve learning, and
- created in partnership with educators and learners to support how they are integrated into teaching and learning.

This is with a focus on helping them to achieve the outcomes that matter most to them.

## **These reports are not evidence of “real” efficacy (i.e., providing evidence of a causal relationship between a product and outcomes). Is there really any value in studies which are not causal, such as implementation or correlational studies?**

We have sought to foster innovation in efficacy research by valuing the use of a range of research methods and ensuring their application, to agreed standards, as appropriate to the lifecycle stage of a product. By placing value on a range of research methods, including correlational and implementation studies, alongside causal research, we are seeking to produce evidence that is rigorous, relevant and actionable to our customers and learners. We also want it to inform product development and improvement at different stages in a product’s lifecycle.

## **What's the value of statements about different types of learner outcome? (e.g., are statements about access as useful as statements about progression?)**

The four categories cover the full learner journey through a course, qualification or institution. A learner needs to gain access first and have a positive experience before they can begin to learn. Once this is achieved, they are more likely to go on to complete the course of study. Once complete, they can actually achieve and have developed a skill or competence. Having a qualification or skill enables the learner to make progress.

## **I'm an instructor using a Pearson digital product, and I'd like to do an efficacy study with you. How can I make this happen?**

If you are interested in partnering with us, we would love to hear from you at [efficacy@pearson.com](mailto:efficacy@pearson.com).

## **Will Pearson be providing new or updated efficacy reports for the same products in future years?**

We intend to carry out efficacy reporting on an annual basis. Each year’s reporting will include both new efficacy reports on new products and updates to our existing efficacy reports, when there is new research to add.

## **Will you be reporting on all your products?**

We have initially reported on some of our most widely used in-market products. Our aspiration is for efficacy reporting to become an activity undertaken by new products once they reach a certain stage in the product lifecycle and volume of usage.

## Why do I have to accept terms and conditions to access the efficacy reports?

Part of our efficacy reporting commitment is to be fully transparent about the impact, or 'efficacy', of our products. So, we asked PwC to audit our Research Reports and efficacy statements to make sure that they conform to the Efficacy Reporting Framework. The PwC audit report can be found at the end of each Product Efficacy Report. However, PwC also have an obligation to make readers aware of the purpose and limitations of our reports, and their role in the process. That is why we provide the terms and conditions upfront.

## Pearson's efficacy commitment

Efficacy is core to all we do. Our commitment to improving learner outcomes means that the products and services we provide to learners around the world are designed to help them make measurable progress in their lives through learning. In practice, this involves identifying the outcomes that matter most to learners and educators, and then designing products based on evidence from learning science about what will help realize those outcomes. We iteratively explore the impact that the use of our products has on learning and apply these insights to continuously improve our products and services.

[Pearson.com/corporate/efficacy-and-research](https://www.pearson.com/corporate/efficacy-and-research)