



WP3

Evaluation Procedure for Incubator Functionality

Monitoring and Evaluation Instrument for the AI-Driven Industry 5.0 Incubator

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
1. Introduction	3
2. Scope	3
3. Definitions	3
4. Evaluation Principles	4
5. Evaluation Framework	4
5.1 Activity KPIs	4
5.2 Outcome KPIs	5
5.3 Quality and Satisfaction KPIs	5
6. Evaluation Methods and Tools	6
6.1 Participant Surveys	6
6.2 Interviews	6
6.3 Prototype and Solution Scorecards	6
6.4 SME Feedback Reports	6
6.5 Internal Progress Reports	6
6.6 Final Project Presentations and Panel Evaluation	6
7. Evaluation Procedure	6
8. Roles and Responsibilities in the Evaluation Process	7
9. Evaluation Cycle and Timeline	8
10. Reporting	8
11. Records Management	9
12. Continuous Improvement and Corrective Actions	9
13. Required Evaluation Templates	9

1. Introduction

This Evaluation Procedure establishes the formal instrument through which the functionality, performance, and outcomes of the AI-driven Industry 5.0 Incubator are systematically assessed. It operationalises the monitoring and evaluation framework outlined in the WP3 Comprehensive Methodology and gives practical effect to the quality assurance principles set out in the WP3 Standard Operating Procedure, translating both into a concrete, repeatable evaluation workflow.

The purpose of this procedure is based on 3 levels: first, to verify that the incubator operates according to its intended design and delivers the activities, outputs, and outcomes for which it was established; second, to provide the host institution, and the project consortium with reliable, evidence-based information to support decision-making; and third, to generate the feedback needed to continuously improve incubator operations across successive incubation cycles.

This procedure is intended to be applied consistently regardless of the institutional level at which the incubator operates (laboratory, faculty, or university level), and is designed to be replicable by other institutions adopting the same incubator model.

2. Scope

This procedure applies to the evaluation of all incubator activities across the full incubation lifecycle, from participant intake and challenge validation through team formation, training, prototype development, and final solution validation. It governs the evaluation of:

- The operational activity of the incubator (participation levels, challenges processed, training delivered, mentoring provided);
- The outputs and outcomes generated by incubation teams (prototypes, AI-based solutions, technical documentation, sustainability improvements);
- The quality of the participant and SME experience (satisfaction, perceived usefulness, competency gains);
- The overall functioning of the incubator as an institutional structure, including its long-term sustainability.

3. Definitions

Term	Definition
Incubation Cycle	A complete iteration of incubator activities, from intake and challenge validation to final evaluation, typically corresponding to one academic term or project phase.
Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	A measurable value used to track the activity, outputs, or outcomes of the incubator against its objectives.
Evaluation Panel	The body of academic and industry representatives convened to assess final project presentations and validate outcome scores at the end of an incubation cycle.
Final Evaluation Tool	The standardised scoring instrument used to assess developed prototypes or solutions against predefined criteria such as feasibility, innovation, sustainability impact, and applicability.

Corrective Action	A documented adjustment to incubator procedures, resourcing, or support mechanisms, introduced in response to evaluation findings.
Follow-up Assessment	An evaluation activity conducted after the formal close of an incubation cycle to verify whether developed solutions progressed toward further development, pilot implementation, or startup creation.

4. Evaluation Principles

The evaluation procedure is guided by the following principles, ensuring that assessment activities are credible, fair, and genuinely useful to the incubator's development:

- **Objectivity** – evaluation criteria and instruments are applied consistently across teams and cycles, using predefined tools rather than ad hoc judgement.
- **Transparency** – participants and SME partners are informed in advance of how, when, and against what criteria their work will be evaluated.
- **Proportionality** – the intensity of evaluation activity is proportionate to the scale and risk profile of each incubation cycle, avoiding unnecessary administrative burden.
- **Evidence-based decision-making** – conclusions and recommendations are grounded in documented data (KPI records, surveys, scorecards) rather than informal impressions.
- **Continuous improvement** – evaluation findings are systematically fed back into the methodology, SOP, and training program to strengthen subsequent cycles.

5. Evaluation Framework

The evaluation framework assesses the incubator at three complementary levels: activity (the volume and consistency of operations), outcome (the tangible results and impact generated), and quality/satisfaction (the experience and perceived value reported by participants and SME partners). Each level is supported by a dedicated set of indicators, building directly on the Key Performance Indicators defined in the incubator methodology and extending them with the data sources and collection frequency needed to operationalise routine evaluation.

5.1 Activity KPIs

Activity KPIs measure the level of participation and operational activity within the incubator.

Indicator	What it measures	Data source	Frequency
Number of student participants involved in incubator activities	Reflects the reach and uptake of the incubator among the student population.	Participant application forms; attendance records	Per incubation cycle
Number of SME participants and partners engaged	Reflects the breadth of industry engagement achieved by the incubator.	SME challenge submission forms; partnership agreements	Per incubation cycle
Number of challenges identified and submitted for incubation	Indicates the incubator's capacity to source relevant innovation challenges.	Challenge submission register	Per incubation cycle

Number of training sessions, workshops, and capacity-building activities delivered	Measures the volume of capacity-building activity provided to participants.	Training Attendance Sheets	Per incubation cycle
Number of interdisciplinary teams formed	Reflects the incubator's ability to organise participants into functioning project teams.	Team formation records	Per incubation cycle
Number of mentoring sessions conducted	Measures the level of technical and methodological support provided to teams.	Mentor Assignment Sheet; session logs	Per incubation cycle

5.2 Outcome KPIs

Outcome KPIs measure the tangible results and impact generated by incubator activities.

Indicator	What it measures	Data source	Frequency
Number of prototypes developed and validated	Measures the incubator's tangible technical output.	Prototyping Progress Reports; Final Evaluation Tool	End of cycle
Number of AI-based solutions tested or implemented in SMEs	Reflects the practical, real-world uptake of incubator outputs.	SME Feedback Form	End of cycle / follow-up
Number of innovation projects completed	Measures overall project completion rate within a cycle.	Final Evaluation Tool	End of cycle
Number of case studies, technical reports, or project documentation outputs produced	Reflects the documentation and dissemination output of the incubator.	Internal progress reports	End of cycle
Number of projects progressing to further development, pilot implementation, or startup creation	Measures the longer-term impact and continuation rate of incubated projects.	Follow-up monitoring records	6–12 months post-cycle

5.3 Quality and Satisfaction KPIs

Quality and satisfaction indicators capture how participants and SME partners experience and value incubator activities, complementing the activity and outcome indicators with a subjective, experience-based dimension.

Indicator	What it measures	Data source	Frequency
Participant satisfaction rate (training, mentoring, overall experience)	Captures participants' subjective assessment of the value and quality of incubator activities.	Participant Satisfaction Survey	End of cycle
SME satisfaction and perceived usefulness rate	Captures SME partners' assessment of the relevance and applicability of solutions developed.	SME Feedback Form	End of cycle
Rate of participants reporting improved AI and sustainability competencies	Measures the educational impact of the incubator on participant skills.	Participant Survey (pre/post)	Start and end of cycle

6. Evaluation Methods and Tools

The incubator draws on a combination of quantitative and qualitative instruments to ensure that evaluation findings are both measurable and contextually meaningful. Each tool listed below corresponds to a template already defined in the incubator's required documentation, ensuring that data collected for evaluation purposes is consistent with the documents produced throughout the incubation lifecycle.

6.1 Participant Surveys

Structured surveys should be administered at the start and end of each incubation cycle to assess training effectiveness, learning outcomes, and overall participant satisfaction. Pre/post administration allows the incubator to estimate competency gains directly attributable to the program.

6.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with students, SME representatives, and mentors are used to gather qualitative feedback that surveys alone cannot capture, particularly regarding the practical relevance of challenges and the quality of mentoring support.

6.3 Prototype and Solution Scorecards

The Final Evaluation Tool is applied by the AI Specialist, the Industry 5.0 and Sustainability Expert, and, where applicable, the Evaluation Panel, to assess each team's solution against predefined criteria covering technical feasibility, innovation level, sustainability impact, and practical applicability.

6.4 SME Feedback Reports

The SME Feedback Form is completed by participating SME partners to assess the usefulness, relevance, and implementation potential of the solutions developed in response to their submitted challenges.

6.5 Internal Progress Reports

The Operational Team maintains internal progress reports throughout the cycle, consolidating activity data, milestone status, and any operational issues encountered, which feed directly into the aggregated evaluation dataset.

6.6 Final Project Presentations and Panel Evaluation

At the close of each incubation cycle, teams present their solutions to academic supervisors, SME representatives, and, where convened, a dedicated Evaluation Panel. Panel assessments contribute to the final scoring of outcomes and inform recommendations for further development.

7. Evaluation Procedure

The evaluation procedure follows a structured sequence of activities spanning the full incubation cycle, from initial planning through to validation and feedback. The table below sets out each step, the actors responsible, and the expected inputs and outputs, consistent with the operational format used in the incubator's Standard Operating Procedure.

Activity	Responsible Actor(s)	Description	Inputs	Outputs
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Evaluation Planning	Incubator Manager, Operational Team	Define the scope, indicators, instruments, and schedule of evaluation activities for the upcoming incubation cycle, aligning with the methodology's monitoring and evaluation framework.	Incubator methodology; prior evaluation reports	Evaluation plan for the cycle
Instrument Preparation & Distribution	Operational Team, Administrative Support	Prepare and distribute the relevant evaluation instruments (surveys, scorecards, feedback forms) to participants, mentors, and SME partners at the appropriate stages.	Evaluation plan; template library	Distributed evaluation instruments
Ongoing Operational Monitoring	Incubator Manager, Operational Team	Continuously monitor participation, training delivery, and project progression throughout the cycle, recording activity-level data.	Attendance sheets; progress reports	Activity KPI dataset
Mid-Cycle Review	Incubator Manager, AI Specialist, Sustainability Expert	Conduct an interim review of team progress, identifying risks or support needs and adjusting mentoring or resource allocation where necessary.	Prototyping Progress Reports	Mid-cycle review notes; corrective actions (if needed)
Participant and SME Data Collection	Operational Team	Administer participant surveys and SME feedback forms, and conduct interviews where deeper qualitative insight is required.	Participant Survey; SME Feedback Form	Completed surveys; interview notes
Prototype / Solution Assessment	AI Specialist, Sustainability Expert, Mentors, SME Partners	Apply the Final Evaluation Tool to assess each team's solution against technical, innovation, and sustainability criteria.	Final Evaluation Tool; team prototypes	Completed scorecards
Reporting	Incubator Manager, Operational Team	Compile the Final Evaluation Report, summarising KPI performance, evaluation outcomes, and recommendations.	Consolidated dataset; panel assessment	Final Evaluation Report

8. Roles and Responsibilities in the Evaluation Process

Effective evaluation depends on the clear assignment of evaluation-specific responsibilities across the incubator's governance and operational structure, complementing the general role descriptions set out in the Standard Operating Procedure.

Role	Evaluation-Specific Responsibilities
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Management and Advisory Board	Validates the Final Evaluation Report; reviews annual incubator performance; issues strategic recommendations based on evaluation findings.
Incubator Manager	Coordinates the overall evaluation process; ensures instruments are deployed on schedule; compiles and submits evaluation reports.
AI Specialist	Assesses the technical feasibility and quality of AI-based solutions; contributes to scorecard scoring.
Industry 5.0 and Sustainability Expert	Assesses the sustainability and Industry 5.0 alignment of developed solutions; contributes to scorecard scoring.
Administrative Support	Manages the distribution and collection of evaluation instruments; maintains evaluation records.
SME Partners and Mentors	Provide feedback on the practical relevance and applicability of solutions; participate in evaluation panels where applicable.
Participants (students/researchers)	Complete self-assessment and satisfaction surveys; contribute documentation supporting the evaluation of their project.

9. Evaluation Cycle and Timeline

Evaluation activity is distributed across the incubation cycle to ensure that data is collected at the points where it is most informative, while also supporting a longer-term view of incubator performance through follow-up and annual review.

Evaluation Moment	Timing	Focus	Primary Output
Baseline / Intake Assessment	Start of cycle	Participant profile, expectations, initial competency self-assessment	Baseline dataset
Ongoing Monitoring	Throughout the cycle	Participation, training delivery, project progression	Activity KPI data
Mid-Cycle Review	Midpoint of the cycle	Team progress, risk identification, support needs	Mid-cycle review notes
Final Evaluation	End of cycle	Prototype/solution assessment, outcome KPIs, satisfaction	Final Evaluation Report
Follow-up Assessment	6–12 months after cycle completion	Solution adoption, further development, startup creation	Follow-up monitoring report
Annual Strategic Review	Annually	Overall incubator performance, sustainability, strategic alignment	Annual Incubator Performance Report

10. Reporting

Evaluation findings are consolidated into the following reporting outputs, each directed to a specific audience:

- Internal Progress Reports – prepared throughout the cycle by the Operational Team for internal monitoring purposes.
- Annual Incubator Performance Report – consolidating the findings of all incubation cycles completed within the year, submitted to institutional leadership and, where relevant, to the project consortium for reporting purposes.

All reports are prepared in a consistent format to support comparability across cycles and institutions adopting this evaluation procedure.

11. Records Management

All evaluation instruments, completed forms, scorecards, and reports are recorded and archived in accordance with the records management principles defined in the Standard Operating Procedure. Evaluation records are stored in the incubator's centralised digital repository, with access restricted to the Incubator Manager, the Operational Team, and designated institutional representatives, and retained for a minimum of 12 months following the completion of each incubation cycle, or longer where institutional or project-specific requirements so require.

12. Continuous Improvement and Corrective Actions

Evaluation is not treated as a closing formality but as an input to the ongoing refinement of incubator operations. Where evaluation findings identify performance gaps, participation barriers, or recurring issues, the Incubator Manager proposes corrective actions, which may include adjustments to training content, mentoring intensity, challenge sourcing methods, or resource allocation. This evaluation procedure itself is reviewed periodically, at minimum 2 years or following the completion of an incubation cycle, to verify its continued relevance and to incorporate lessons learned from its application.

13. Required Evaluation Templates

The implementation of this procedure relies on the following templates. Several are already defined among the incubator's required documents; the remainder are evaluation-specific instruments to be developed and maintained by the Operational Team.