

**Evaluation and impact
measurement in the context
of the OFFA / HEFCE
National Strategy – An
institutional case study**

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BIS National Strategy for Access and Student Success

- o Whole lifecycle approach
- o Partnership / collaborative learning
 - o NNCOs
 - o National evaluation framework
 - o Co-ordinating national research
- o Evidence-based practice

“Institutions must be able to demonstrate that the widening access and student success activities they undertake are *worthwhile and effective*. This principle applies both to public funding, and to institutions’ expenditure through agreements with OFFA: there must be convincing evidence of value for money for taxpayers, students and the institution.”

University of Sheffield

- o Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Unit (WPREU)
 - o Established in 2012
 - o Located in Academic Learning Services
 - o Remit for evaluation and research (already some evaluation going on)
 - o Dedicated resource
 - o 1 x Manager, 1 x Researcher, 1 x Admin support
 - o Institutional governance

Progress to date:

- o Mixed methods approach – across whole lifecycle
 - o Data – producing analysis
 - o Producing evaluation toolkit for practitioners
 - o Dedicated evaluation projects – focusing on particular projects
 - o Supporting projects led by academics
 - o Post-doc qualitative research project
 - o Developing framework / tools

Progress to date:

- o Communications
 - o Encourage development of dialogue across institution
 - o Researcher – practitioner forums
 - o Bulletins
 - o Gather and present existing research and evaluation in a ‘skimmable’ format
- o Contribute to sector wide developments
 - o Respond to consultations
 - o Liaise with OFFA / HEFCE
 - o Conferences, academic papers etc

Evaluation Toolkit

- o Consistent questionnaires for outreach activities
 - o agreed core questions
- o Focus groups and interviews, participants, parents, teachers, practitioners
 - o provide general feedback
 - o plan to do more in the way of case studies
 - o plan to do more thematic analysis of this data
- o Student Tracking
 - o Y13 destination survey
 - o HEAT
- o Focused evaluation projects
 - o template
 - o develop a patchwork approach to knowledge acquisition
 - o student success
- o Provision of resources
 - o digest of external information
 - o summaries of key research and evaluation outcomes



Looking Forward
Challenges and Potential Solutions

Challenge #1 Structural

Supporting institutional response to evaluation outcomes

- o Dispersed decision-making at a number of levels

Possible solution:

- o Regular feedback cycles at different levels
 - o Strategic
 - o Provision overview
 - o Practice
- o Feedback on relevance of feedback outcomes to practitioners and decision makers

Challenge #2 Methodological

Need to move beyond 'happy sheets'

- o Develop a methodology that doesn't just rely on reported outcomes

Possible solutions:

- o Qualitative case-study approach
- o Adopt research tools from other disciplines (e.g. psychology)
- o Focus on developmental progress of individuals rather than activities
- o Test skills development

Challenge #3 Methodological

Current objectives aren't really 'evaluatable'

- o Often objectives are high level and it is difficult to map them on to concrete practice

Possible solution:

- o Adopt a more 'granular' approach to intervention objectives
- o Agree on objectives that can be meaningfully achieved and measured

Challenge #4 Methodological

The complexity of context...

- o Recognition that impact is context bound (e.g. circumstances and background of participant)

Possible solution:

- o Qualitative case-study approach to better understand context on individual participants
- o Define objectives that are less likely to be impacted by external factors
- o Test objectives against success

Challenge #5 Methodological

Survey fatigue...

- o Participants over-surveyed.

Possible solutions:

- o Strategic approach to evaluating intensive sustained interventions
- o Qualitative case-study approach
- o Look for alternatives to questionnaires
 - o Can objectives be 'tested' or measured in other ways

Challenge #6 Methodological

Shifting goalposts...

- o 'Slippage' between Access Agreement guidance and subsequent Monitoring Return guidance

Possible solutions:

- o Use latest Monitoring Return guidance when formulating Access Agreement

Challenge #7 Methodological

Difficulty in undertaking randomised control trials

- Need to increase robustness of evaluation by including RCT or even control group, very difficult for practical reasons

Possible solution:

- Work closely with practitioners with good relationship with relevant stakeholder to increase chance of buy-in
- Be pragmatic....

Challenge #8 Methodological

Ensuring institutional consistency in data analysis

- Plurality of possible datasets and providers / complexity of data framing could result in inconsistent outcomes

Possible solution

- Work closely with data providers to benchmark outcomes
- Highlight any expected deviations

Group Discussions

1. How do you currently do impact / evaluation work?
2. What do you focus on?
3. How are you resourced?
4. What approaches do you take?
5. What are your current developments / projects?
6. What do you see as potential limitations on developments?
7. What are the key evaluation challenges from your perspective / for your institution?