


**EVALUATION IN WIDENING PARTICIPATION:  
WHAT THE SECTOR SAYS, WHAT IT DOES,  
AND HOW ME MIGHT IMAGINE IT  
DIFFERENTLY.**

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# A Talk of three parts

- The chapter:
  - Legitimizing And Justifying What Is Done In Access Agreements: The Role Of Evidence-Based Practice Throughout The Whole Student Lifecycle
- The next stage of the journey....
  - *What practitioners say*
- How might we imagine it differently



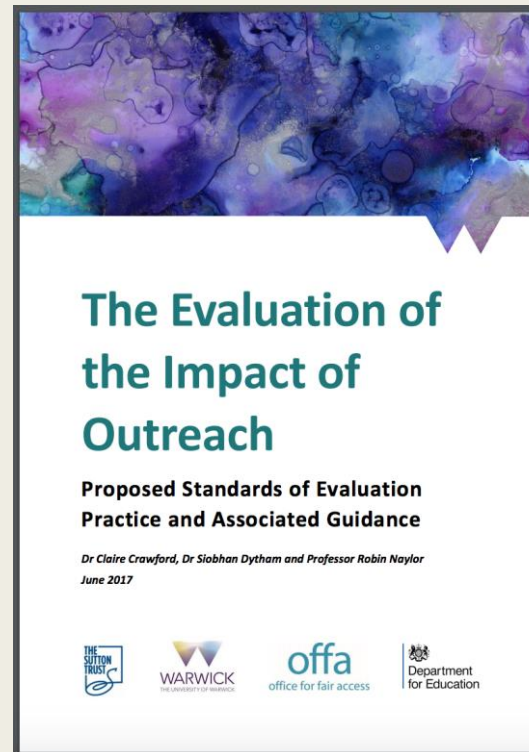
**LEGITIMATING AND JUSTIFYING WHAT IS DONE IN  
ACCESS AGREEMENTS:**

**THE ROLE OF EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE**

**THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE STUDENT LIFECYCLE**



# Steps in the right direction



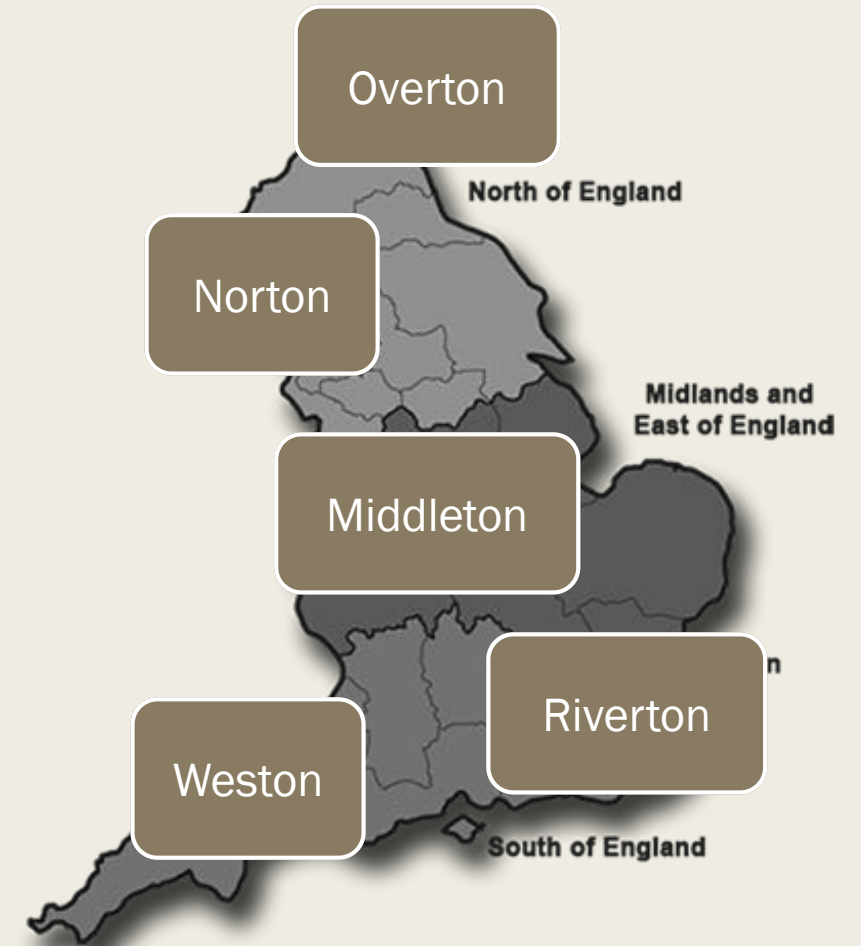
# What are the drivers?

- ministerial guidance setting increasingly challenging goals for 2020, the 'further, faster change' (OFFA 2016:1)
- 'a strong evidence base is crucial to making further and faster progress.' (OFFA 2016:5)
- 2016-17 access agreement guidance:
  - *You should base your decisions on access agreement expenditure on appropriate levels of evaluation of your access activities and other institutions' evidence of what works best.*



# Sample and methodology

- Ten institutions
- Five towns and cities in England
- Matched pairs of pre-1992 / post-1992 institutions
  
- **2 stage project**
- Phase 1: Discourse Analysis
- Phase 2: Interviews with widening participation practitioners and managers



# Evaluation through the lifecycle

## Pre-entry

- Pre-event evaluations
- Post-event evaluations
  - Teacher's Surveys
  - Parental Survey
- Local HE progression data
- Evaluation of collaborations
- Post event de-brief sessions
  - Learner Tracking / HEAT
  - Comparative studies
    - Applicant data
- Small scale qualitative studies
  - Progression data
  - Learner data

## Current Students

- Analysis of HESA entry data
- Analysis of Retention data
  - Withdrawal data
- Analysis of early leaver data
- Bursaries and Scholarships Surveys
- Student income and expenditure survey
- Research with ITT trainees
- Ambassador focus groups
  - Learning analytics
- Learning gain measures
  - Completion rates
- Joint research on bursaries

## Graduates

- Analysis of DLHE data
- Analysis of degree classification
  - Questionnaires
  - Focus groups
- Progression data to postgraduate courses

# Smarter more evidence based spend

investing in smarter, more evidence based spend and investing in the activities that we feel will have most impact in assisting us to reach our benchmarks – such as enhanced outreach activity, expanding our geographical reach  
– New Overton

Recently undertaken an internal survey of bursary holders  
- Old Riverton



We did a survey...



# Challenges of self-evaluation

- Lack of critical distance
- Confirmation bias
- Correlation or causation?
- Who is doing this work?
- Lack of need for rigor or transparency



# Commissioning research and evaluation

- Being done in at least one institution in my sample
  - *Internal or External?*
  - *Transparency*

The University also commissions independent evaluation and research on issues, initiatives and new developments, and outcomes are reported to OFFA as part of the annual monitoring processes.  
- New Overton

# HEAT and the role of external tools

- Higher Education Access Tracker
  - *Used by 9 out of the 10 institutions examined*
  - *Treated in different ways 'tracking tool' or 'comprehensive long-term evaluation'*
  - *Lack of nuance from 'engagements' alone, without critical distance can lead to correlation / causation errors*
- Increased National focus on evaluation
- Future possibilities for more qualitative data collection
  - *Role of standardised questions*

# Increasing evaluative skills

- What are we actually evaluating?
  - *Impact?*
  - *Effectiveness?*
  - *Enjoyment?*
- Role of NEON
  - *Practitioners Training*
  - *Going beyond evaluation leads*



## Part 2: Are access agreements representative of practice?



# What is evaluation for ?

The evaluation in terms of those key questions like are you more likely to consider going, that is what the lead officer will then use to make the reports that go to the annual report, the feedback to OFFA um, that kind of thing.

**Hannah Pre 1992**

**R: Do you evaluate your work?**

We try to. Take from that what you will. Evaluation is really challenging [...] I think when you are doing stuff on the ground you don't really understand the importance of evaluation but really if you can't prove what you are doing works then you're never going to get any more funding and you're never going to convince the higher ups that what we are doing actually has any impact

**Mel Post 1992**

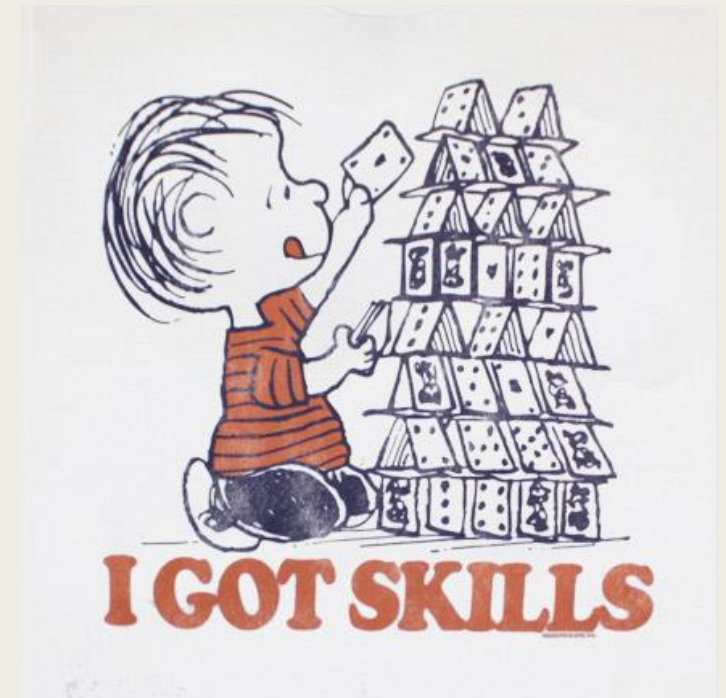
Part of my role within the department is to identify what we are doing well, identify good case studies. [...] OFFA are very much about statistics and figures. Have you hit the targets, which is great but I think, you know, from a widening participation background as in terms of communicating with people like parents and schools, it's not just about numbers it's about real students with real stories that have had real impact.

**Beverley Pre 1992**



# Are we using staff skillsets to develop evaluation capacity?

- Who evaluates work currently?
- Is there a strategy?
- Are any academics involved?
- Is there an evaluation skills gap with practitioners?
- Is there institutional capacity to develop these staff?





# Challenges of Evaluation

I think the problem that we've got is that we're quite a small team working quite busily [...] evaluation is still the tack on and it's seen as an inconvenience by the team who run the event because they just want to run the event.

**David Post 1992**

it's hard to evaluate something like that which is an experience but we always try to have that evaluation component, questionnaire and get feedback from students.

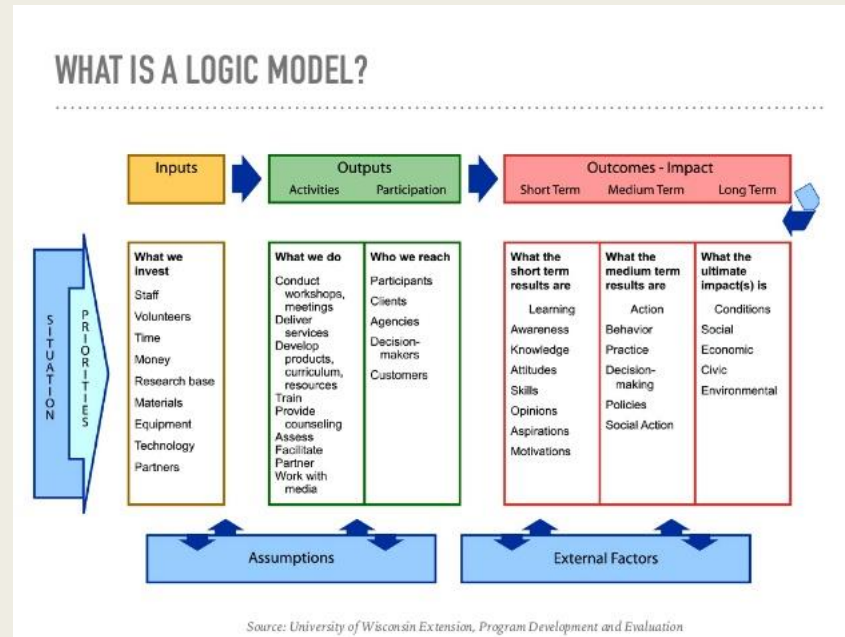
**Lucy Pre 1992**

# Compatibility of Evaluation and Scale

For many many years I was always a bit kind of, I was a bit of a renegade in the sense that a lot of my work in my old job was largely just me and it was quite difficult to evaluate because over October for instance I would deliver black history month assemblies to over 6,000 young people in maybe thirty different places or forty different places but after going I and doing twenty minute assembly, do I ask everyone to fill in a form or to you know put their hand up and take a photo? It was very difficult to kind of get some sort of solid evaluation.

**Rob Post 1992**

# Do we know what we are actually trying to evaluate?



# Evaluation or Monitoring

So some evaluation, I guess it's more like monitoring and then evaluation. So for some things it's more how many kids came, did they come from a WP background looking at their postcode, does their postcode map onto a disadvantaged quintile. So there's that which I guess is more monitoring or evaluation that we've met our targeting aims and then the evaluation is more, did these students enjoy it, what did they get from it.

**Emily Pre 1992**

# Are we creating the space to reflect?

- What are the expectations of evaluation?
- What is currently done with the findings?
- Are staff encouraged to reflect on the evaluation?
- Do staff understand the value of reflective practice?



# Space to reflect

I take feedback from my visit days, I ask children you know other questions about what they've enjoyed, after having spent a day, is there a subject that they think- would they like to go to university and if so is there a particular subject they would like? I don't think that information is really put anywhere, it's more for me to reflect on and to see what impact I feel that you know it's had on the children.

**Andrea Pre 1992**

the summer should be the time for reflecting but inevitably the summer is getting shorter and before you know it you are being asked to put a programme together for next year without time to even look. Very often before you've even delivered stuff for this year. It's something that we know we have to do more of but it does make it very difficult to actually reflect properly.

**David Post 1992**

How do we do rigorous evaluation and keep practitioners at the centre?



# Changing evaluation practices

think we've stopped doing a lot of that sort of surveying for the sake of surveying but I think we could reflect more umm on what we do.

**Karen Pre 1992**

I think we have an evaluation role within our team at the moment. She's extremely good and extremely kind of wanting to push us away from just evaluating things in questionnaires and bringing to the fore things like focus groups and stuff, which I quite like the idea of before events. So over this summer period I'd like to run focus groups in maybe September with teachers to kind of find out what they want from us, not just kind of force a programme on them

**Rebecca Post 1992**



My question to you...

How do we imagine it  
differently?

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