

THE THIRD AGE OF WIDENING ACCESS: EVALUATING OUTREACH EFFECTIVENESS AND THE ROLE OF THIRD SECTOR ORGANISATIONS

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Why is there variable engagement with WP outreach?

- National Evaluation of Aimhigher (2006 report for HEFCE) found variation by type of activities and by level of evaluative activity carried out by different types of HE institution
- Content and discourse analyses of access agreements
 - Variations in the way WP is portrayed, rationalised and discussed by HEI type
 - Emergence of a 'fair access' variant of WP among research-intensive HEIs
- Emergence of Third Sector Organisations involved in delivery of outreach activities - associated with FA?

This presentation: OFFA/OfS research into evaluation of Pre-16 outreach(2017-18)

- Focus on which types of organisation evaluate more effectively
- Generally we found a low level of evaluative practice among HE providers

Confounding factors: logistical

- **Time available** - finding time to collect data, especially from young people
- **Collaboration with schools** - issues with accessing data held by schools, particularly with respect to young people's attainment or attendance records
- **Data management and ethics** - risk-aversion in context of GDPR
- **Capacity and capability** - insufficient resources

Confounding factors: epistemological

- **Use of self-report data** - how reliable and robust is this? how to avoid biases in data collected
- **Pre- and post assessment** - rarely enough time for sufficient long term impact to be measured
- **Analysis sensitivity** - very difficult to measure gains in learning or attainment
- **Complexity and disentanglement** - isolating the effects
- **Younger and/or vulnerable children** - difficulties in collecting data from primary age

Evaluation practice in third sector organisations

Understanding the evaluation of
access and participation outreach
interventions for under 16 year olds

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The research

11 organisations – 9 delivery organisations,
2 umbrella/representative bodies

Varied in terms of income, permanent staff
and delivery models

All delivered pre-16, all except 1 also
delivered post-16 activity

Telephone interviews and workshop

Experiences of evaluation

Opportunities

- Dedicated specialist staff
- Pressure to prove impact quickly
- Established charity sector practices
- Smaller portfolio of activity that needs to 'sell'
- Close relationships that support sharing data

Challenges

- Access to data and research
- Lack of resource, short-term funding
- Balancing intensity of activity with intensity of evaluation
- Difficulty proving long-term impact

Pragmatics vs Highly-developed

Highly developed (4 orgs):

- Small-steps approach
- Embedded approach to evaluation
- Links between evaluation and delivery/development

Dedicated staff resource, shorter-term but connected activities, leadership interested in evaluation.

Pragmatics (7 orgs):

- Varied evaluation practices, working within constraints
- Tendency to rely on self-reported or assessment data
- High level objectives.

More limited staff resource, less pressure from funders AND/OR longer term relationships with participants.

Highly developed approaches



THEORY OF
CHANGE OR
FRAMEWORK



EVALUATION
USED IN DECISION
MAKING



PILOTED
INTERVENTIONS



USING
PRACTITIONER
EXPERTISE



USING
ESTABLISHED
MEASURES



UNDERSTANDING
THEIR 'USP'



REGULAR REVIEW



FUTURE
ASPIRATIONS

Implications for partnership?

 Evaluation fatigue

 Mixing methods

 Critical friends and competition

 University only/School only/FE Only/TSO Only spaces

 Different priorities, different inputs

 One size does not fit all

MY RESEARCH

In what ways are TSOs influencing WP policy and practice?

What has changed and is changing?

Thanks for listening!

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References/further reading

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