

*with some suggestions for
potential solutions.....*



The Challenges of Evaluating Primary School Outreach

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Why Evaluate?

- To identify *what works*?
- To *understand* what works?
- To understand the *return on investment*?
- To *justify* the resources?
- To get *feedback* on and improve the intervention?
- To *test* particular aspects of the intervention?
- Because we have to?

Obligatory OFFA quotes:

“Evaluation is key to squeezing maximum impact from every pound and every hour invested in widening participation.”

Les Ebdon

“... the vital importance of institutions taking an evidence-led approach in order to maximise the impact of their work to support fair access and make further, faster progress in increasing the proportion of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.”

OFFA Guidance 2018-19 Access Agreement

Yeah. Okay. But.....

The *Particular Challenges* of Primary Age Outreach Evaluation

- Longitudinal aspects
 - Current Y1 might progress into University in 2030!
- Implications for causality
 - Plenty of other things can happen to students between now and then
 - How can you separate out the *causal* elements of your intervention?
- Young students require different evaluation approaches
 - Issues of literacy / understanding
 - Different measures
 - Ethnical issues

Key Questions.....

Who are we evaluating for...

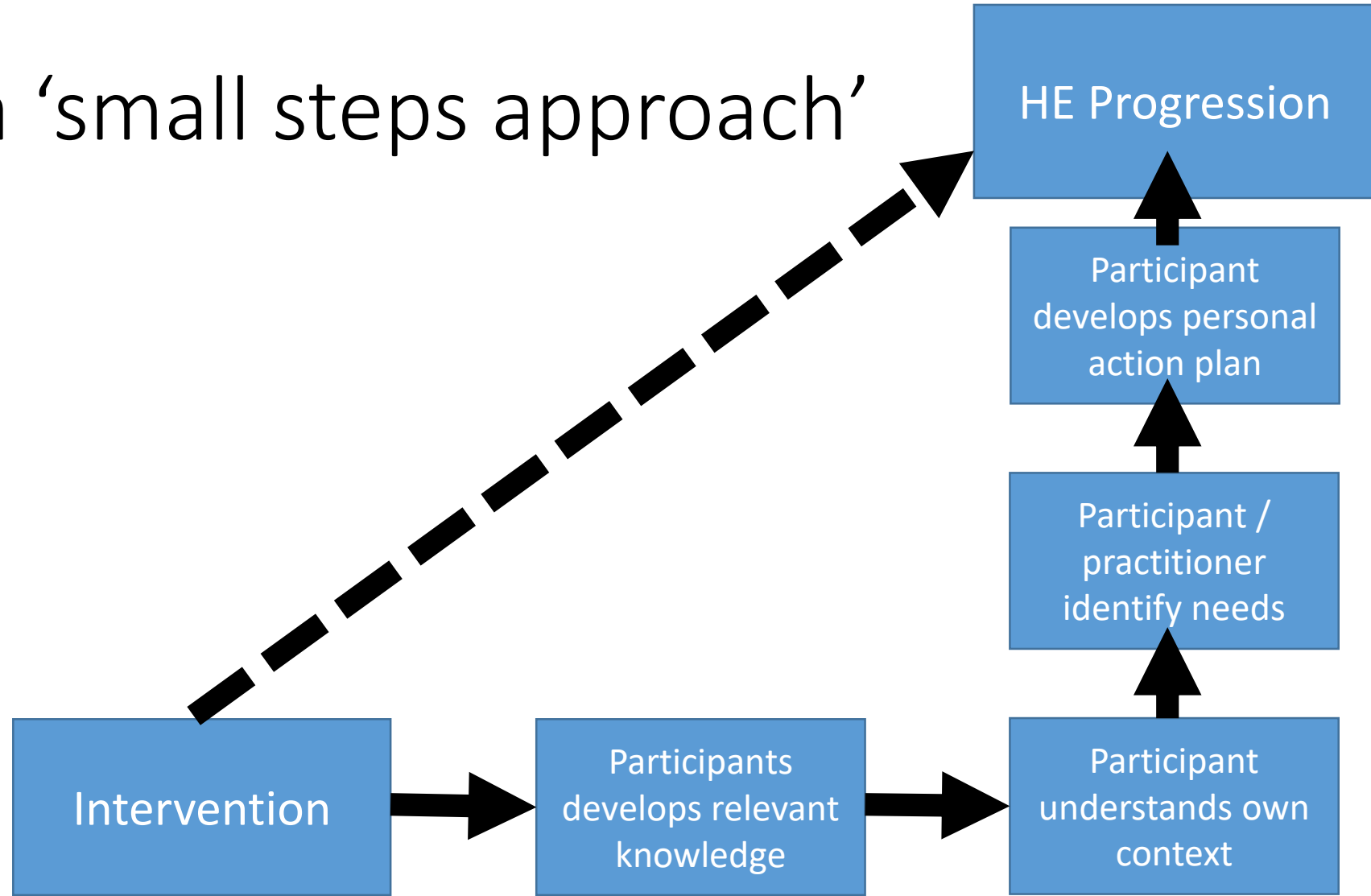
... and what do they expect?

- Practitioners – formative / summative outcomes? Feedback?
- Project Managers? – Effectiveness, resource allocation, justification?
- Senior Managers? – Spend? Institutional impact? Institutional reputation?
- Regulators? -...
- Politicians? - ...

What are we evaluating?

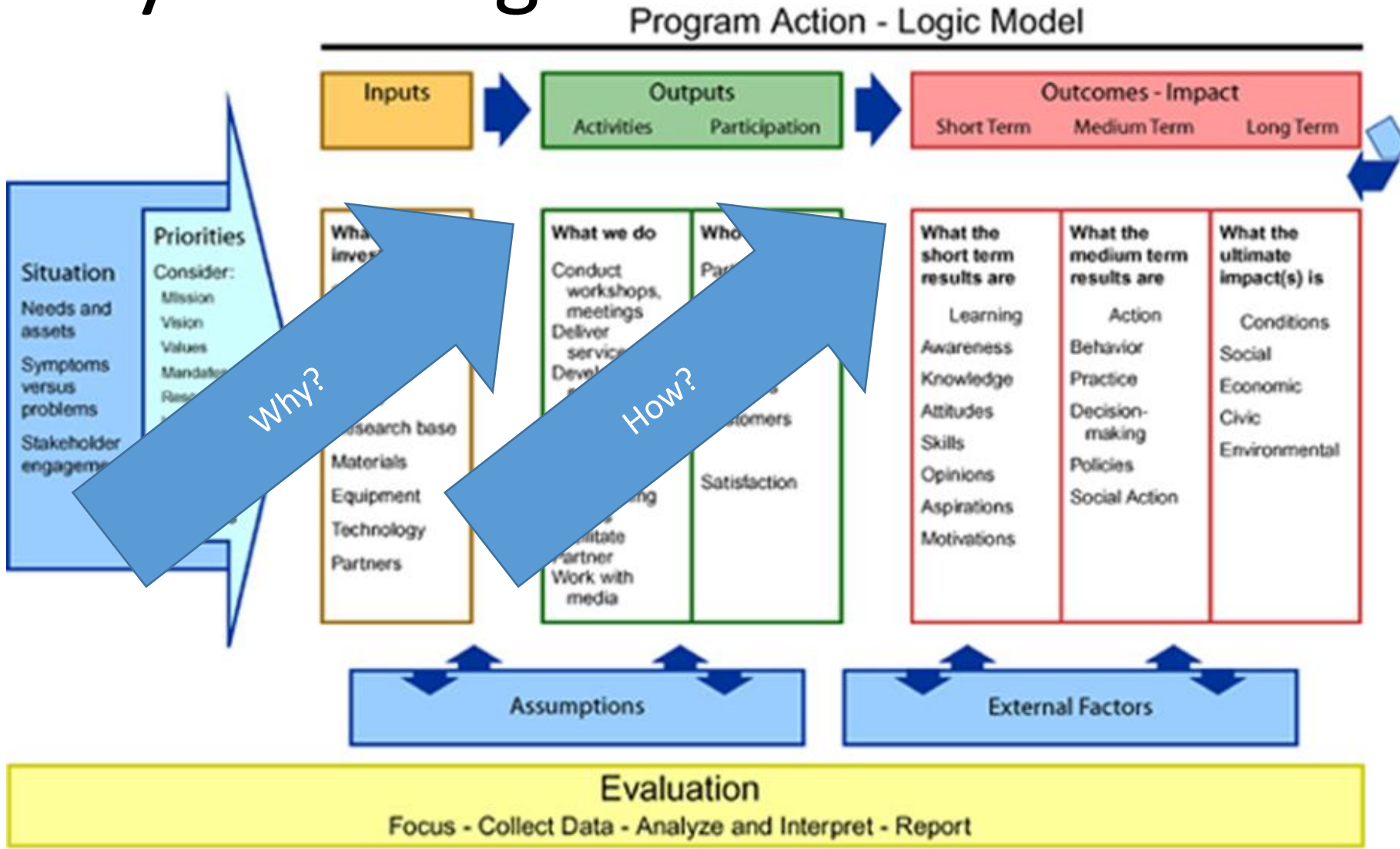
- This is a complex and multi-layered question
- Objectives of an intervention might be set at a range of levels / levels of abstraction?
 - High level (macro) – Demographic change in HE
 - Mid level (meso) – Changes within a school or cohort
 - Low level (micro) – Changes to the individual
- *Intended* / unintended consequences?

Adopt a 'small steps approach'



Neil Harrison & Richard Waller (2017) Evaluating outreach activities: overcoming challenges through a realist 'small steps' approach, *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 21:2-3, 81-87

Adopt a 'theory of change' approach



Source: University of Wisconsin
<https://fyi.uwex.edu/programdevelopment/logic-models/>

'Theory of Change' Questions

- *Why* are you/we carrying out these interventions?
- *Why* are you/we doing them in this way?
- *How* do you/we expect them to work?
- *How* does this impact on how you/we design and deliver them?
- *How* do you/we expect other factors to affect the outcomes?

Who are we evaluating?

... or, rather, *where* are we looking for impact?

- Participants? – Are you/we looking to identify change / development?
Academic development? Confidence? Knowledge?
 - Quant vs qual measures?
- Student's Peers? – Cultural change?
- Parents? – Observed changes?
- Teachers? – Observed changes?
- Practitioners? – Observations? Expectations? Understandings?

Setting appropriate evaluation measures

- Need to work backwards from:
 - Intended evaluation outcomes
 - Intended evaluation audience and requirements
 - Intended intervention outcomes
- Relationship with causality?
 - Realistic
 - Meaningful
- Scale and measurability
 - Types of data / quant vs. qual
 - What level of intervention of impact / outcomes?
- Appropriate and meaningful narrative
 - Context dependent

Comments / Questions /
Examples from Practice?