**Why Evaluate 2 Conference: Selected Questions and Comments**

Monday 15 May 2020

Panel Discussion

Chair: Sir Les Ebdon

Panelists: Richard Shiner, Joanne Moore, Professor Colin McCaig

**Evaluation in the context of COVID**

*I'd be very interested in more information on gamifying evaluation! :-)*

*So would I*

*Yes I'd be very interested in this too!*

*Me too* (x5)

*Rich - given the changing environment, particularly the expected changes in HE delivery over the next few years, how do we identify appropriate outcomes to measure our income against? we might expect to see significant changes in behaviour in response to COVID that make identifying our impact challenging.*

*Rich suggested that online evolution could, potentially, be more robust. Would he be able to elaborate.*

*Collecting survey data is not a problem and useful for online activities but its only going to tell us the instant impact. It’s going to be difficult to get the in-depth qualitative data we would have collected directly from students in focus groups etc.*

*I think one of the other key challenges is accessing - gathering qualitative insights - from those who are digitally disadvantaged.*

*Rich - notwithstanding that providers are identifying their own priorities or outcomes, what do you think the major sector-wide priorities ought to be for understanding the Covid impact (e.g. equity of access to online outreach)?*

*This is my concern too - digital access is now fundamental in outreach and evaluation. How can we gain insights from those without digital access?*

*Hi Richard, there is a concern that HEIs will use the covid-19 situation as an excuse to reduce their commitment and resources for APP and related impact evaluation. This would be a real backwards step given the increased focus on evaluation over the last 12-18 months. How are the OfS going to ensure this doesn't happen?*

*Totally agree .I ’m not sure that now is the time to relax regulatory responsibilities relating to APP, when universities will want to focus so much on recruitment to boost their lost income at the moment and may shift resource away from widening access and over to recruitment to do so*

*I think this is a real concern as staffing any new posts is put on hold by many universities/ costs are monitored closely. Thinking positively, can OfS make another push for promoting resources for non-specialists in evaluation to use? e.g. I am a WP practitioner working on evaluation, and now's a good time to 'upskill' - can a resource pack be promoted or re-promoted for people in my situation?*

*In order to support young people at the moment, do we need to be asking about their mental health? Ethically, do we need input from mental health experts when asking these questions?*

*Perhaps important to remind ourselves that we are not simply being asked to come up with ToCs and evaluations for new online activities (a huge task in and of itself), but for activities that have been forced online at short notice \*due to a global pandemic\*. The things that we commonly use to measure impact - changes to attainment, attitudes, expectations, etc - are all going to be influenced by this crisis. Do our priorities for delivery and evaluation need to adapt/refocus to how best to support young people during this highly unusual time?*

*This seems to raise the need for research (to understand ‘new’ outreach challenges) as well as evaluation.*

*We are our own best resource - there's a wealth of expertise and experience across our sector - and hopefully we can find more opportunities to draw on each other and collaborate.*

**Resource Issues**

*Working online has enabled me to offer much more provision than normal, as I'm not battling with issues of space and getting young people on-site, however I am spending significantly less on activity than I usually would, and slightly concerned about the spend gap. The institution is very firm on keeping Access spend for Access, but I think it will be difficult to hit our planned spend, given the inability to run summer schools etc.*

*This a particularly challenging time for those HEIs that have small WP/Outreach teams*

*It really is challenging across the board but yes, especially in small institutions / colleges where WP and Outreach teams may only be one, two or three people*

*Yep, small teams are the norm I think, and it's a risk to the sector - even in teams where there are more staff, many may be diverted off to support Recruitment as priority*

*I think we need to consider what are the new or different skills and knowledge that disadvantaged young people need to develop to succeed in a post covid world.*

*Agreed - this is what they young people are concerned about*

*Agree…but the impact could be lasting!*

*Are previously inaccessible organisations even more inaccessible?!*

*Schools are working hard with their Pupil Premium students so great time to support them with this*

*To Colin's point around connectivity and hardware access - this is something we're co-ordinating some action around at Bath -* [*https://www.bath.ac.uk/campaigns/digital-divide-project/*](https://www.bath.ac.uk/campaigns/digital-divide-project/)

*To address the issue of university funding - we had hoped to bid for an Evaluation role during this year's budget round - there is now a hiring freeze. I believe that unless this is very explicitly addressed by the OfS in guidance / monitoring, how are universities going to push this up the agenda when there are so many funding problems currently?*

**Evaluation Approaches**

*Agreed but not just about gamification, it's about making evaluation engaging generally I think!*

*Gaming sounds great - but we will be working with expert gamers (e.g. young people) so will be important to spend a bit of time developing quality resources*

*I think there might be more opportunities to integrate engaging (e.g. gamefied!) content WITH evaluation data collection*

*Online interviews and focus groups are still a good option, along with telephone interviews*

*Video diaries - a lot to analyse though*

*Evaluating what students generate or produce during interventions - more time-consuming than traditional pre/post questionnaires, but opens opportunities for understanding the impact of learning.*

*I'm actually concerned that collecting survey data is actually harder because students find it easier to ignore. Gameifcation may be a solution to this*

*I've been using observational evaluation too, sitting in on online workshops led by other people to see the engagement and skill development from beginning to end.*

*A benefit of online interviews is in making them more accessible and attractive for people to participate in as they don't have to travel and come onto campus*

*Especially if the focus in the past for the team has been on survey data/evaluation forms*

*The evaluator doesn't have to be the person who undertakes the interview*

*Yes, and you don’t need to use qualitative data every time for all activities - but it is important to explore new activities*

*I think we need to also consider that trying to work with those from LPNs / disengaged groups will likely be even more disengaged in the current circumstances.*

*Agree, a real risk. I don't have strong links with local youth work groups but I am aware that as lockdown eases slowly, I think they will be seeing more young people out and about - collab here may be helpful over summer hols (delivery and eval)*

*There could be considerable value in adopting some form of QLR (qualitative longitudinal research) to place in context the impact of covid!*

*I guess one of the issues we need to consider is that we're much more in the arena of unintended or unexpected outcomes - and not just the objectives we're trying to achieve.*

*I’d be interested in learning more about responsive/developmental evaluation in this context as Joanne mentioned. In terms of what the OfS are stating in terms of continuing evaluation, do they mean evaluation of programme impact? In light of what Colin has mentioned about the difficulties in evaluating impact, what do this mean in terms of how we define what “evaluation” during this time?*

*Perhaps this is a time to just move forward with interviews and focus groups with adults.*

*Absolutely Joanne- just evaluating those that do engage in a) the activities and b) the evaluation is such a small part of the picture*

*I'm not sure that using phonecalls will acquire any sort of meaningful feedback - the teenagers that I know don't take many phonecalls. We should be using technology that they already use and are comfortable with, not pushing them outside of their comfort zone.*

*Exactly*

*Villiers is leading some work on digital disadvantage in partnership with Bath uni. If you want more info get in touch!*

*We'll have to learn as we go, using these existing remote research methods in new contexts for us*

*Learners may now be able to access a variety of online resources spanning multiple locations. Would OfS consider developing a national survey (perhaps using the gaming/badges idea) to measure/evaluate this engagement and contextual challenges? Similar to NSS...*

**Safeguarding Concerns**

*Agreed. But spurs more questions/challenges in terms of safeguarding with online/telephone interviews with young people. Especially one-to-one*

*Yes hopefully evaluators and researchers are DBs checked already though!*

*But still an issue with the one-to-one's regardless. And not all evaluators/researchers are DBS checked*

*DBS checks are not much fun but most providers should have in house processes if those are up and running*

*I know as research/evaluators we see face to face as best practice for qual data collection, but I think remote options are still very valid - especially where the content is not so sensitive and rapport building might not be so critical to getting good data*

*Agreed. But always good to have an additional person in the "room" in terms of Safeguarding. Not always possible*

*If the other person in the room is a teacher I think that this would effect what the young person might talk about.*

*You can’t interview children from home!*

*We need to think about systemic solutions for safeguarding on-line and social distancing,. Not just evaluators challenged put teachers, outreach practitioners as well.*

*Also going back to DBS checks it's more about the safeguarding issues more generally with working with learners one to one. Even regardless of the DBS check in place. I think it would be definitely useful to have some guidance on this.*

*We're all having specific online safeguarding training and changing our processes to require the same of delivery partners.*

*Yes, schools are critical here*

**Useful Links**

*SRHE link - https://tinyurl.com/sk6jv5h*

*SUN Barriers to Education link - https://www.sunoutreach.org/excluded-events/research-and-evaluation-hub/*