

Why Evaluate? Lunchtime Conference Programme: Widening Participation, Evaluation and COVID 19

Lunchtime sessions Wednesday 13 May – Tuesday 2 June 2020

Session Abstracts

<p>Wednesday 13 May 12.00 - 1.00</p>	<p>Keynote: Broadening approaches to impact evaluation Professor Chris Fox</p> <p>In this session Chris discusses different approaches to impact evaluation. Traditionally Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) have been seen as the 'gold standard' for impact evaluation. However, they have their limitations, practical and theoretical and Chris will highlight some of these, briefly survey ways in which RCT designs are changing before moving on to alternative approaches to impact evaluation that do not rely on large samples and counterfactuals.</p>
<p>Friday 15 May 12.00 - 1.00</p>	<p>Panel Discussion: The Implications of COVID 19 on Outreach Evaluation Sir Les Ebdon, Rich Shiner, Anna Mountford-Zimdars, Joanne Moore, Professor Colin McCaig</p> <p>In this session, chaired by Sir Les Ebdon, key WP evaluators are joined by Rich Shiner from the Office for Students to discuss what implications the current COVID 19 pandemic might have on the delivery and development of outreach evaluation approaches and how the sector might change as a result.</p>
<p>Monday 18 May 12.00 – 1.00</p>	<p>Everything's Broken - COVID 19, Learning from Failure, and the Importance of Reflexive Practice Chris Bayes, Gino Graziano, Julian Crockford</p> <p>COVID 19, and the subsequent social distancing regime, has broken many of the 'taken for granted' ways we used to do outreach and evaluate its impact. But things breaking or failing can also be productive and can and should encourage a process of reflection, and a determination to make things work better next time. This session will consist of three case studies of how things go wrong, but also how failure leads to learning and improvement. The presentation concludes with a suggestion that the kind of deep reflexive practice that breakage and failure can generate could help us to think our way to more effective and improved outreach and evaluation practices when we return to whatever normal is.</p>
<p>Tuesday 19 May 12.00 – 1.00</p>	<p>Panel Discussion: Practical and Ethical Responses to COVID 19 for Outreach Evaluation Beth Issac, Annette Hayton, Greg Brown, TBC</p> <p>In this session, experienced evaluation practitioners and academic researchers discuss practical solutions and suggestions for delivering WP outreach in the current pandemic, which makes usual approaches ineffective or impractical. The panel will also discuss some of the ethical implications of adapting evaluation to the current context.</p>
<p>Wednesday 20 May 12.00 – 1.00</p>	<p>Data Driven Practice: Making Data Meaningful Matt Short</p> <p>During this this 25-minute talk Matt will outline how the quantity of data that is being collected across national and regional evaluation and monitoring for the</p>

	<p>NCOP is, at times, at odds with the issues of access and transparency that stakeholders encounter when trying to obtain such data (SUN Phase 1 review and planning document - https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JwKoHr4CcKDKPdxl1MJBXvqGFbZDKgD6/view).</p> <p>These barriers, together with concerns from practitioners about data collection, create an aura of mystery and mistrust surrounding data and its use in Widening Participation (WP). These concerns range from confidence in the processes and techniques, to the resultant uses of data to potentially measure practitioners and performance manage them. I will then move on to discuss how, the Southern Universities Network (SUN) are using data dashboards to positively facilitate activity and funding through data visualisation. These dashboards are designed to translate WP work into teacher-accessible language via the digitalisation of our progression framework (www.tinyurl.com/sunevaluation). The dashboard links SUN learning objectives, to Gastby Benchmarks and other school support requirements. This supports the SUN strategy to move away from deficit WP discourse, towards a development discourse via a 'small steps' approach to measurement (Harrison & Waller, 2017). These dashboards, identified as an example of best practice, support our work in two other critical ways. They have reduced data-phobia across stakeholders and practitioners who have previously been concerned with 'getting it right'. The dashboards enable exploration with their school's data in an easy and accessible format to discover at their own pace. The final major advantage of these dashboards is the speed and ease with which we can share real-time impact data to practitioners, teachers, local authorities and regulators. Our method is fast in a sector that is used to relying on out of date data (POLAR etc.) to understand 'what works' (McCaig and Harrison, 2015). It is also specific. WP area-based measures and other indicators provide aggregated data, which ignore small but significant measures of disadvantage. The SUN dashboards are a secure method for direct identification of specific learner needs and offer suggested activity that can best support learners progress to higher education.</p>
<p>Thursday 21 May 12.00 – 1.00</p>	<p>Using qualitative visual methods to evaluate and evidence the impact of Widening Participation (WP) initiatives Dr Jon Rainford and Dr Samantha Child</p> <p>In a recent evaluation toolkit commissioned by the OfS (2019), the authors stressed the importance of qualitative evaluation in providing rich insights into the why and the value of adopting a mixed methods approach. Whilst this toolkit calls for the use of essays, interviews and focus groups, less is known about how and why evaluation practitioners should consider using more creative visual methods (e.g. drawing, Lego, photo voice) to generate in-depth insights into the impact of WP initiatives. Literature has shown that using more creative methods can help make ideas and issues that are familiar to participants strange and to enable them to better explore their opinions about things they often take for granted (Mannay 2010). In order to be able to do this effectively, practitioners and evaluators need opportunities to explore a range of methods and build their confidence in using them. Led by two specialists in creative methods, in this workshop we firstly provide insight into the theory behind creative qualitative methods, the practical and ethical challenges they present especially in terms of creative confidence (Rainford 2019) and rationale for combining these methods with more traditional approaches to evaluating access initiatives. Attendees will then be given the opportunity to try out different creative methods. The workshop will close with discussion about the strengths</p>

	and limitations of combining creative qualitative methods with more traditional methods to WP initiatives.
Friday 22 May 12.00 – 1.00	<p>Coming Out the Other Side: Reflections on a mixed Methods WP Evaluation Dr Rachel Spacey and Rebecca Sanderson</p> <p>In this presentation we share our reflections as university Access and Participation Plan evaluators on a recent report presented to the University of Lincoln 2018/19 - Understanding the Impact of the Access Covenant. The Access Covenant (AC) was first detailed in the university’s Access Agreement 2017/18 where it detailed a number of interventions to support students who identify with characteristics of under representation and disadvantage, including adults from Lincolnshire which was identified as a social mobility cold spot in recent years. The AC funded a number of posts across some of the professional services at the university (Library, Student Wellbeing, Student Support Centre and Careers and Employability) and financial support in the form of a number of assistance funds with comprehensive eligibility criteria. To help understand the changes the AC was anticipated to bring about, data collection included interviews with staff delivering AC services, a survey of university students who accessed AC support, and biographical life-grid interviews with students who had at least one characteristic of disadvantage. In the spirit of honest reflection, we consider some of the challenges we experienced in relation to the evaluation including the retrospective application of an evaluation framework to better align the evaluation to the guidance issued by the Office for Students and the lack of quantitative data available on the demographic characteristics of the service users and the ways in which they were using the AC services which limited the ability of the evaluators to assess the reach of each service. We also explore the achievements of the evaluation including the use of life-grid interviews with students which provided an opportunity for the evaluators to explore students’ lived experiences and their complexities and how the evaluation helped pave the way for setting up a Community of Practice to increase opportunities for collaboration across services and create new communication channels improving provision.</p>
Tuesday 26 May 12.00 – 1.00	<p>Realistic practice and robust evidence in WP: quasi-experimental designs Dr Sonia Ille</p> <p>This session offers an opportunity to explore the place of quasi-experimental evaluation designs and their ability to bridge between the need for robust evidence in widening participation, and the realities of day-to-day practice. It outlines the logic of light-touch quasi-experimental designs and their practical application to widening participation/fair access/outreach programmes. It finally provides current examples of small-scale evaluations using these designs and an opportunity to discuss applicability and other analytical considerations.</p>
Thursday 29 May 12.00 – 1.00	<p>Confidence and Cooperation - Putting Possible selves to work Catherine Brentnall and Jakob Werdelin</p> <p>Possible Selves is highlighted as a promising approach in Widening Participation (Harrison, 2018; Clague & Williamson, 2019), and offers a concrete alternative to potentially unhelpful aspiration-raising discourses (Harrison & Waller, 2018). But how do practitioners go about applying the theory in practice? We are two practitioners from <i>outside</i> WP (an enterprise educator, and a cooperative learning expert), and will share our experience of starting to work with Possible Selves <i>in practice</i> whilst developing a set of resources for a WP partnership. Iterative</p>

	<p>evaluation conducted within this partnership identified confidence and resilience as important for WP students to develop (Clague, 2019). Pursuing confidence and resilience outcomes has the potential to contribute to complementary agendas such as careers and enterprise, and support time pressed schools by multiplying impact across programmes (Tazzyman et al, 2018).</p> <p>In addition to the practical benefits of servicing different agendas, re-considering confidence and resilience building from a WP perspective has wider potential. For example, in enterprise education, it is assumed that confidence, resilience and other skills will be developed <i>through</i> competitive and challenge based activities (Hanson et al, 2018). But teachers have said that such activities are <i>less effective</i> for disadvantaged students (Mann, Dawkins & McKeown, 2017), and researchers have found they can <i>decrease</i> the skills, knowledge and self-efficacy of lower socio-economic students (Heilbrunn & Almor, 2014). We suggest it may be possible to counteract this unhelpful possibility by specifically utilising <i>cooperative learning</i> techniques to facilitate the involvement of all pupils in work on Possible Selves, therefore building confidence and resilience through participation. Cooperative learning is a strategy which trains collaborative approaches to knowledge production and has been shown to be particularly beneficial to disadvantaged students (Ross, 1997; Brooks, 2006; Sutton Trust/EEF, 2018).</p> <p>Developing a cooperative approach has the potential of responding to critique about Possible Selves, where, it has been argued, the construction of the 'hyper-individual' encourages the belief that one is entirely determined by internal capacities (Bunn & Lumb, 2019). As opposed to personhood being developed via the capacity to out-perform others (Skeggs, 2011), we suggest that <i>collective</i> development and <i>cooperation</i> is a valid, timely and less exclusionary, alternative when thinking about how to pursue outcomes such as confidence and resilience.</p>
<p>Tuesday 2 June 12.00 – 1.00</p>	<p>Mixed methods response to OfS new requirement for Access and Participation Plans Jo Astley, Dan West, Anna Davey</p> <p>In response to the Office for Students (OfS) requirements through Access and Participation Plans (APP) and the publication of standards of evidence guidance (OfS 2019), the University of Derby has embarked on a process of reflection, redesign and research in regard to the mixed methods evaluation framework utilised within our programmes, and the methodologies which underpin them. Our goal is to achieve a consistently high level of evaluation and evidence-based practice across the whole student lifecycle. This practice will equip the University with the tools and data required to address institutional 'gaps,' provide evidence of the impact of the strategic measures outlined in our APP, and benefit our student body as a whole.</p> <p>This endeavour is taking place in collaboration with the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Collaborative Outreach Programme (DANCOP), and will be informed by Theory of Change, and the most current and compelling research and evidence provided through our own findings, and those of the sector. The University has also developed a range of datasets which scrutinise our academic provision, activities and services. The findings from those datasets will be utilised to secure cross-institutional ownership, and collaboration regarding institutional discrepancies in continuation, outcomes and progression.</p> <p>This workshop will share how the University of Derby and DANCOP are working together to achieve our strategic ambitions through Theory of Change, and also share the data mechanisms we have developed to secure ownership and accountability. It will share our progress to date and plans for next steps.</p>