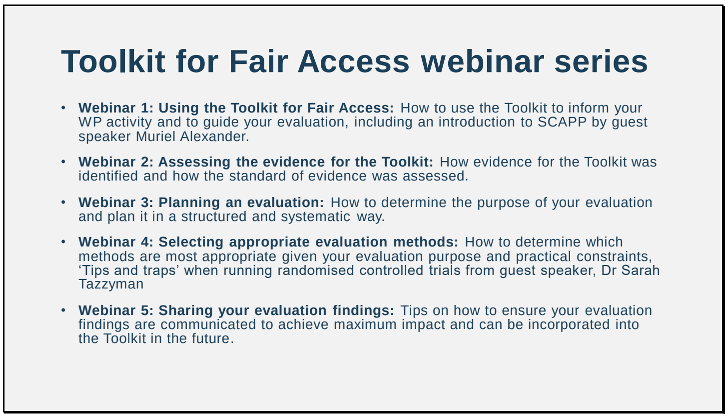
Hello and welcome to the third in a series of webinars designed to help widening participation practitioners, managers and researchers to get the most out of the Toolkit for Fair Access.

This series has been designed by CFE Research, the independent agency that led the development of the Toolkit on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council. My name's Lindsey Bowes and I'm delivering this webinar with my colleague Rachel Moreton.



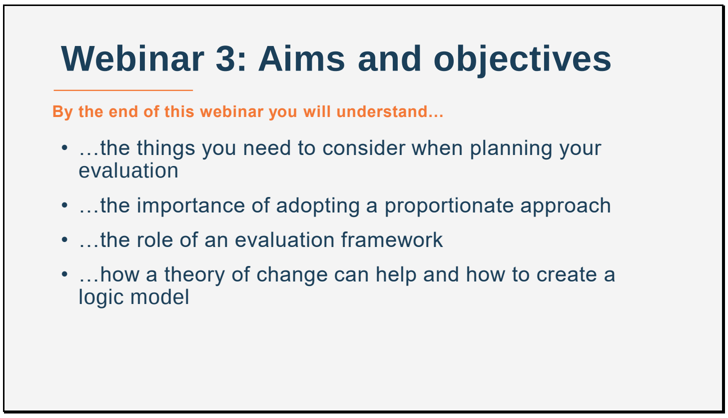
Five webinars will be delivered over the coming weeks which will be available to download from the Framework for Fair Access website: fairaccess.scot. Our goal by the end of the series is to ensure you understand how to use the Toolkit to inform the planning and delivery of your activities, as well as how you can use it to strengthen your evaluation practice and demonstrate the impact of your work.

The first two webinars are already available for you listen to. The first explains the background to the Toolkit and takes you on a tour of the website. We're also joined by Muriel Alexander who provides an overview of SCAPP - Scotland's Community of Access and Participation Practitioners.

In Webinar 2 Rachel and our colleague Dr Jo Welford, outline how we gathered the evidence for the Toolkit and how the standard of that evidence was assessed to ensure the most effective practice was included.

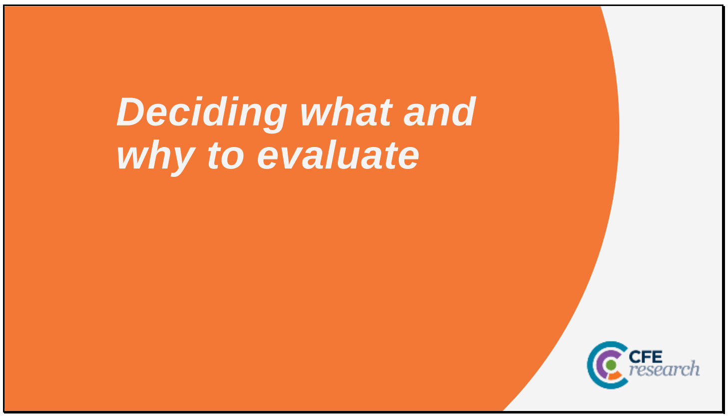
The aim of this third webinar is to help you to determine the purpose of your evaluation and how to plan it in a structured and systematic way.

For the fourth webinar, I will be joined by our colleague Dr Sarah Tazzyman. During this session we will provide advice on selecting the most appropriate evaluation methods, taking account of practical as well as methodological constraints. We'll draw on our experience of running randomised controlled trials in a widening participation context in order to share some ‘tips and traps’ for those of you who maybe considering adopting this approach for your own evaluations. In the fifth and final webinar, we’ll provide advice on writing up and communicating your findings. This will include how you can ensure your work is incorporated into the Toolkit in the future.

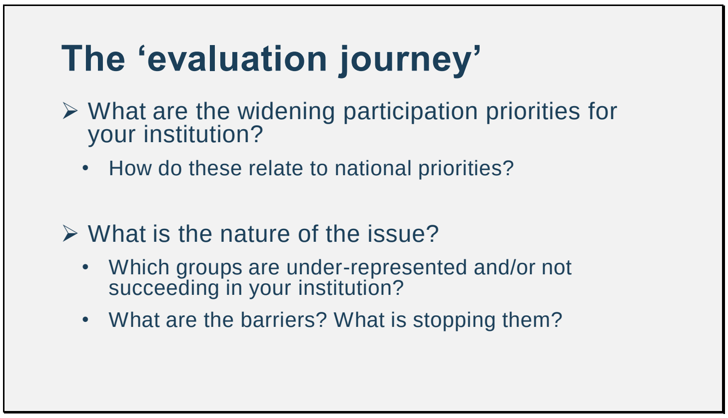


But first, back to the aims and objectives of this webinar. We hope by the end of the session you will understand:

- the questions it’s helpful to ask and the issues you’ll need to consider when planning your evaluation
- how to develop a proportionate approach and why this is important
- the role of an evaluation framework in helping to structure and guide your evaluation and finally,
- how a Theory of Change can help inform the development of your evaluation framework and how you can summarise your theory in a logic model.



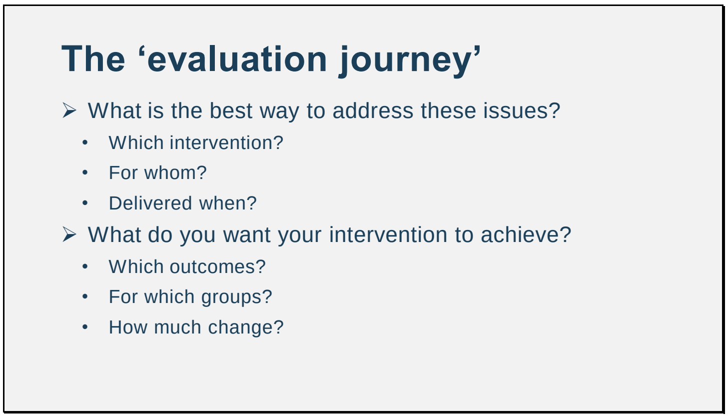
The first and most obvious step on the evaluation journey is to decide what and why to evaluate. We've identified a series of questions designed to help you to make these decisions by identifying the issues you'll need to take into account when planning your research.



We know that the challenges different types of institution face in relation to widening participation vary; for some, widening access to a more diverse range of students is a key priority, while for others, the focus is on the retention and achievement of students from under-represented groups. When you start out on your evaluation journey, it's therefore important to be clear about the specific widening participation objectives at your institution and how these relate to national priorities.

In order to begin to unpick your institution's objectives, you'll need to explore the characteristics of the groups that are disadvantaged or under-represented and the reasons why that might be the case. What appear to be the barriers to access and retention for these groups at your institution and what seems to be stopping them from progressing and achieving at the same rate as their more advantaged peers?

Understanding this will help you to frame the research questions for your evaluation and ensure the evidence you produce demonstrates the contribution an activity makes to your institutional priorities, as well as national goals.



Once you understand the issues your institution is facing, you can begin to think about how best to address them through your choice of interventions. This is where the Toolkit can help by identifying interventions that have been shown to be effective with particular groups at different stages in the student lifecycle, and/or to have a positive impact on particular outcomes.

Identifying the outcomes and the extent of the change you expect to achieve through a widening participation intervention at this stage is critical because this will determine what your evaluation will need to measure and the type of evaluation approach required.

The ‘evaluation journey’

- Do I need to evaluate?
  - Is there existing evidence that the intervention works?
  - How large is the investment?
  - Is the intervention strategically important?

An important question to ask yourself at this stage is whether you actually need to evaluate. Once again, this is where the Toolkit can help, by identifying existing evidence on the impact of an intervention, which groups it works for, and in what context. If there is a substantial volume of robust evidence that an intervention is effective and results in the impacts you are expecting to achieve for your target group, further evaluation may not be necessary or an effective use of your resources.

However, there may be some circumstances where it is appropriate to evaluate, even if there is existing evidence of impact, for example, where a significant financial investment is involved. In this instance, further evaluation can provide reassurance that the intervention is delivering the desired impacts in the most effective way possible. Similarly, it may be appropriate to prioritise resources to evaluate an intervention that is perceived to be particularly strategically-important, even if it is relatively low cost.

The ‘evaluation journey’

- What questions do you want your evaluation to be able to answer?
  - Who will use the results?
  - For what purpose - process vs. impact evaluation?
- What resources are available for the evaluation?
  - Staff time and expertise
  - Funding

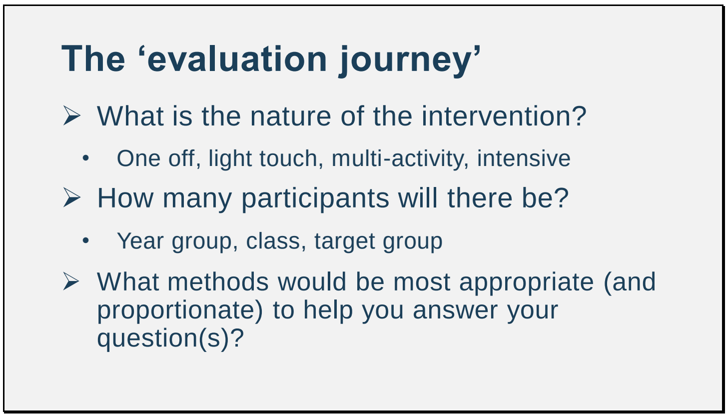
Once you have established that evaluation is required, you need to consider the research questions you want to address. Asking yourself who will use the results of the evaluation and for what purpose will help you to formulate these questions.

For example, if your audience is practitioners or operational managers who want to use the results to improve the delivery of an intervention, your research questions should focus on the strengths and limitations of the systems in place to support delivery including participants’ views of their experience. This is known as process evaluation.

If the audience for your evaluation is funders or strategic managers who what to use the results to understand the impact of an intervention on learners in order to measure progress against strategic targets or to inform decisions about whether to continue to resource an activity, your research questions should be focussed on measuring the outcomes achieved by those who engage in the activity and understanding the extent to which any change can be attributed to that engagement. This is known as impact evaluation.

The distinction between process, impact and other types of evaluation is explored in further detail in webinar 2.

Once you are clear about the type of evaluation you want, it’s essential to consider the resources needed to undertake it. Evaluation, and impact evaluation in particular, can be very resource intensive and often requires a high level of expertise to successfully plan, implement, analyse and interpret. It’s therefore important not to under-estimate the level of resource required and to draw on the expertise within your institution where possible to support the design and the delivery. We explore the challenges of designing and implementing robust impact evaluation methods, including randomised control trials, in webinar 4.



The final step is to think about an appropriate approach for your evaluation that will enable you to answer your key research questions. As I previously mentioned, evaluation can be resource intensive and the resources available are often limited. When designing your methodology, it’s important to ensure the scale of your approach is proportionate to the scale of the intervention you are evaluating, measured in terms of the level of investment, level of intensity, timescale / duration and number of participants. As a general rule, evaluations of one off, light touch activities and/or those delivered to small groups typically require a relatively simple approach; on the other hand more intensive, high cost activities delivered over multiple sessions and/or to larger groups require more a sophisticated approach, particularly if they are designed to have a sustained and significant impact on behaviour and outcomes in the longer term.

A proportionate approach

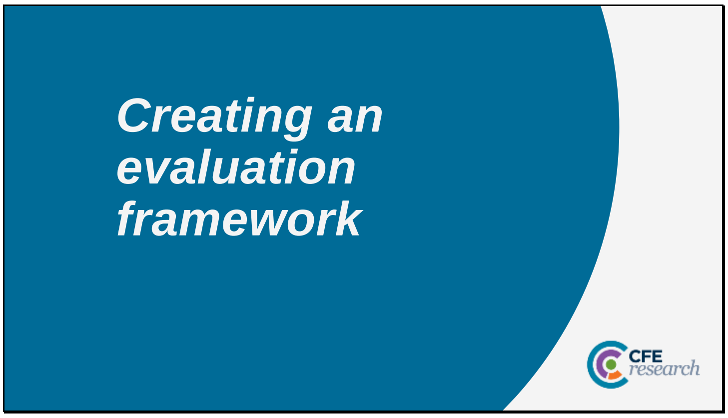
Activities	Outcomes	Methods
Talks, presentations, campus tours, HE Fairs, conferences	Awareness of HE	Post-event feedback Postcards
Tasters days Transferable skills sessions	Awareness of HE Skills and knowledge Progression to HE	Pre- and post-activity surveys Longitudinal tracking
Sustained engagement programme Summer schools	Awareness of HE Skills and knowledge Attainment Progression to HE Retention and success in HE	Longitudinal tracking Focus groups and interviews Pre- and post-activity surveys, including six-month follow-up Quasi-experimental method Randomised control trial

Here we provide some examples of what might constitute a proportionate approach to the evaluation of different types of intervention.

The impact of light touch, one-off activities such as talks, presentations and campus tours on short term outcomes such as awareness of higher education can be effectively understood by capturing participants’ views on what they have learned on a post-event feedback form or postcard.

Pre/post activity surveys are an effective way to understand the impact of moderately intensive activities such as taster days or skills sessions, particularly if validated measures are used to assess participants’ knowledge and skills before and after the intervention to measure change. To understand whether the changes are sustained in the medium-term, the pre/post survey data can be usefully supplemented with longitudinal tracking data. This can be captured using a follow-up survey or analysis of administrative data.

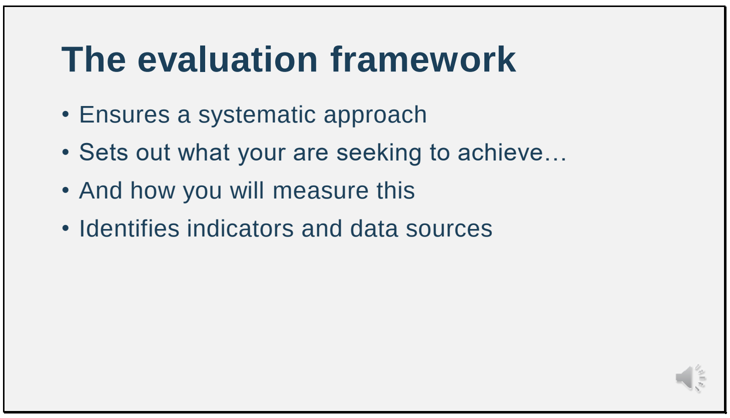
The most intensive activities, such as summer schools, that seek to achieve sustained changes in knowledge and behaviour and influence outcomes, such as progression to HE, in the longer term, present opportunities to implement more sophisticated, robust evaluation methods. These can include quasi experimental approaches and randomised control trials which compare the outcomes achieved by those who take part in an activity with those of a similar group who do not. These methods can be usefully implemented in combination with qualitative methods which help you to move beyond what has been achieved to understand why.



So, once you have decided what to evaluate, for what purpose and how, it’s useful to summarise your approach in an evaluation framework. I’m going to handover to Rachel now who will explain more.

Thanks Lindsey.

In the second half of the webinar I’m going to talk about evaluation frameworks – what they are, why they are useful and why creating a theory of change is, we suggest, a good foundation for an evaluation framework.



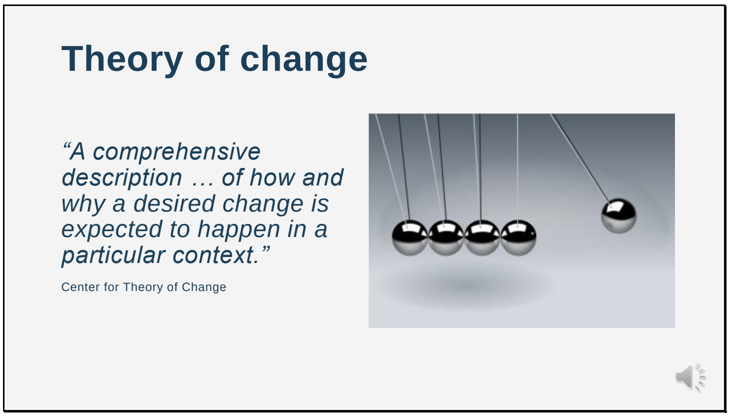
An evaluation framework is a document that helps to guide the design and delivery of your evaluation. It ensures that you approach the evaluation in a systematic way. Like the rest of the evaluation, it should be proportionate to the project being evaluated. The evaluation framework may form part of a wider plan that includes the answers to some of the questions Lindsey's has just run through, as well as project timings, resourcing, risks and any ethical considerations.

Your evaluation framework should include an articulation of what the project is seeking to achieve. A key question for an impact evaluation is whether your intervention has worked. So it's important to think about what success looks like in advance – how will you know if your intervention has been effective? What are the main changes you hope to see?

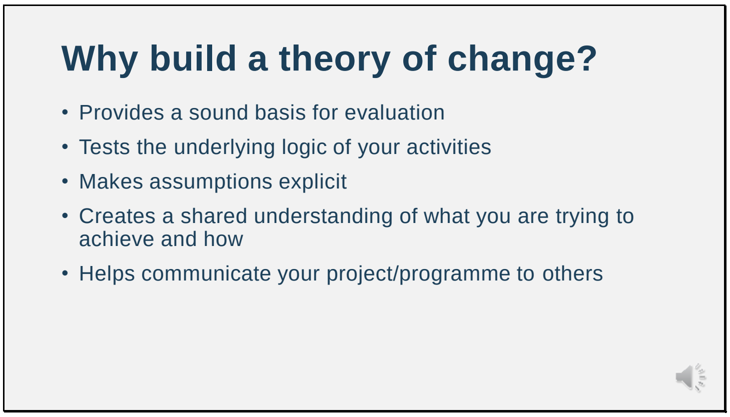
Once you are clear about what you are looking to achieve, the evaluation framework should also set out how you will measure this. This might include indicators of progress and success, where the data will come from, who will collect it and how often and so forth.

This aspect of the evaluation framework helps you to identify what data you need to collect in order to answer your key evaluation questions. It's important that you do this at the start so you don't get part way through your project and then realise you are not gathering information on something important. It also helps to ensure you are not collecting unnecessary data too. Something that is particularly important in light of GDPR.

One of the ways to approach an evaluation framework, that we have found most helpful, is to create a theory of change.



A theory of change is essentially a description of how and why a particular change is expected to happen. It sets out not just what your starting point is and where you want to end up, but how you think you will get there, mapping out all the steps along the way. A theory of change should make explicit the mechanisms that will create change and the assumptions behind each step in the process.



So, why bother with a theory of change? There are lots of ways creating a theory of change can help you – and not just with evaluation.

Certainly a theory of change provides a sound framework for your evaluation. It helps identify key elements of what needs to happen at each stage so you can monitor these to show progress and test whether your assumptions about how your project should work are correct.

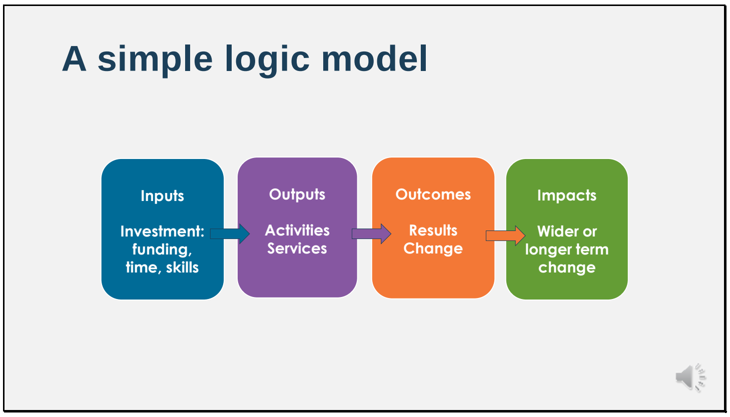
A theory of change can also help to test the underlying logic of your intervention – you should be able to see how by doing x you should create y. Evaluation evidence will help confirm whether your theory is correct, but if at the planning stage there is a disconnect between planned activity and the outcomes you are hoping to achieve, then a rethink may be required.

Setting out clearly what you are trying to achieve and how can provide a useful shared understanding across a team or organisation.

A theory of change, particularly if represented visually, can help communicate your vision, what you are doing and why to others. For example, we helped an outreach team to develop their own theory of change to inform their evaluation. Their feedback was that it had also been a useful tool for explaining their work to senior managers and stakeholders and how it would contribute to wider university goals.

This will probably make more sense if we take a look at some examples of theories of change and explore how to put one together.

Theories of change can be presented in a variety of forms – they can be simple narratives, or complex outcome models.



We tend to favour a logic model.

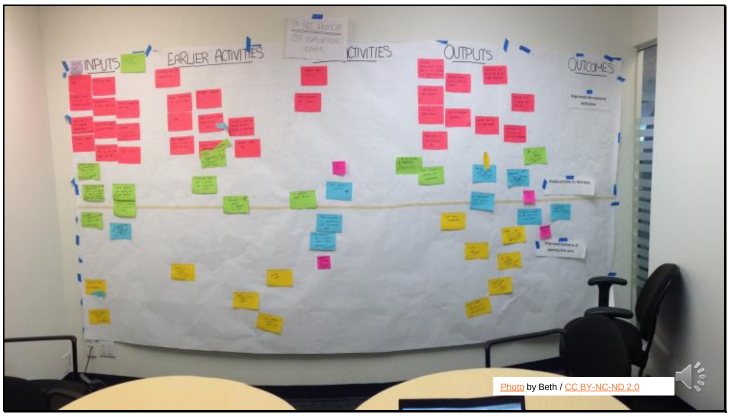
In its simplest form a logic model comprises the inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts of a project. There are likely to be multiples of each element.

Inputs are the resources that go into your project – the funds, staff time and skills needed to deliver something. The outputs are what you create – activities, services and so on. Measuring these is useful to monitoring and ensuring accountability, but it doesn't tell you if the project has made a difference.

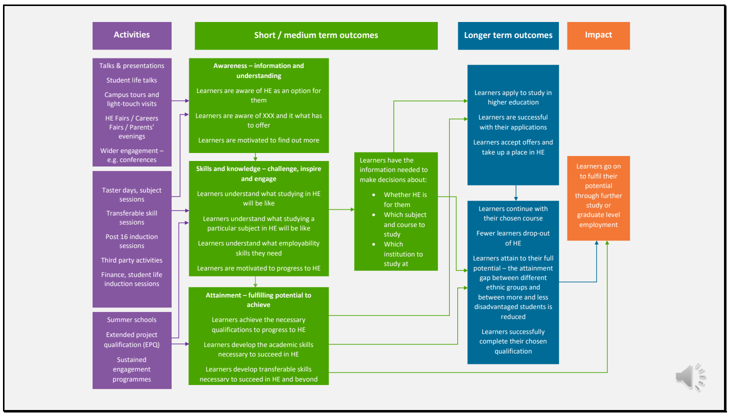
Outcomes are the changes achieved as a result of the activities. When writing outcomes, try and make sure you are describing a change – an increase, improvement or reduction.

Impacts are similar changes but taking place over a longer time period or with a broader scope.

This is a very simple model, but it can be made more complicated depending on the nature of your project. It can be a useful exercise to develop your theory of change in collaboration with key stakeholders. You might end up with something that looks more like this…

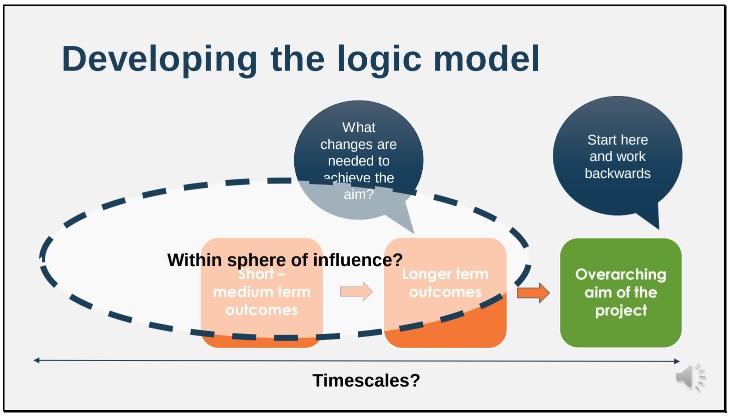


…with multiple activities and outputs leading to key outcomes. Or something like this…



This is an anonymised logic model that we helped an outreach team to create, showing how their full range of activities was expected to lead to short, medium and longer term outcomes and contribute to overarching goals.

You can create a model for your organisation, team or a specific project, depending on how you want to use it and the level of focus for your evaluation.



Let's look in more detail at creating a logic model.

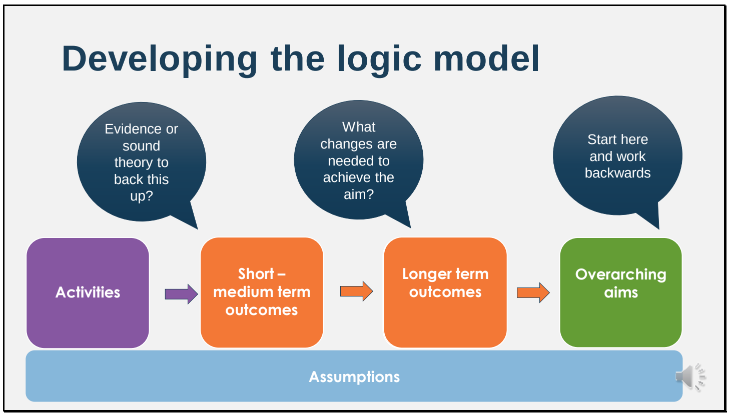
While you read the logic model from left to right, always start to create it from the right and work backwards. This ensures you focus on the overarching aims. And these should be related to the problem trying to fix. So, this could be increasing the proportion of students from under-represented groups at your university or college, for example.

Then from there, consider what needs to change in order to achieve those aims. These are your outcomes. So, in our example, this could be an increase in successful applications to your university from under-represented groups.

At this stage it's worth considering the timescales over which you are likely to see these changes. Some will take longer than others to achieve, so it's important to include shorter more proximal changes that need to happen first. In this way you can measure change in the short or medium term and get an idea of whether you are on course to achieve longer-term outcomes. This helps to better identify the specific contribution that your activities make longer-term outcomes that are likely to be affected by other factors.

You can have as many steps in the middle of your model here as you think are needed. In our example, this could include all those steps that need to happen before a successful university application – such as improved academic grades, ability to complete a good application, greater awareness of the opportunities of higher education generally and your university specifically. It's worth taking time to draw on research and other sources of insight to understand what the barriers are for target student and thus what needs to change.

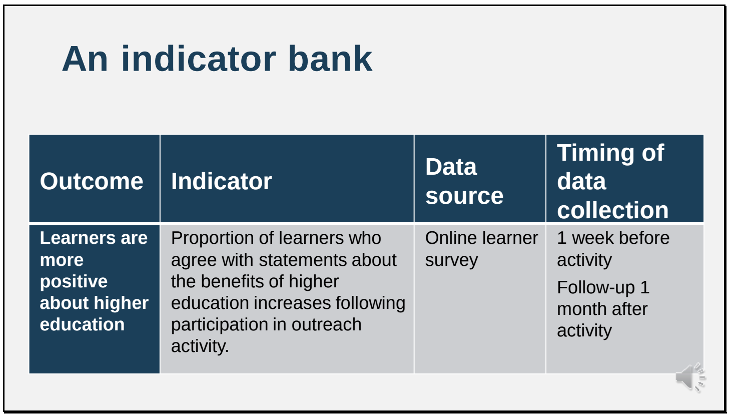
It's also important to consider the extent to which these changes are within your sphere of influence. Ask yourself whether your project can make a difference to these things. If not, are they the right outcomes for your project? Do you want to measure success based on things that it is difficult for you to influence directly? It may be worth making clear in your model what other factors could affect (negatively or positively) what you are doing – such as government policy, population trends, funding, the economy, fashion and so on.



Finally, you can add in your project activities. Here it's important to check whether the logic stacks up. Does it seem reasonable, logical that activities will lead to the outcomes we want? For each step in the chain, can you plausibly say "if we do x then y will follow"? Is there evidence to suggest that this is the case? If not, is there at least sound theory to back up what you are proposing.

Other key information to add to your model are the assumptions that underpin your theory. Then if you track these too, and things don’t turn out as you hoped, you can check whether your assumptions were correct.

We’ve developed a very simple template for a theory of change to accompany this webinar. You might like to use this to start working on your own theory.



An indicator bank

Outcome	Indicator	Data source	Timing of data collection
Learners are more positive about higher education	Proportion of learners who agree with statements about the benefits of higher education increases following participation in outreach activity.	Online learner survey	1 week before activity Follow-up 1 month after activity

Once you are happy with your theory of change, you can then begin to work on how you will measure all the key steps in the model – the activities or outputs (this is usually relatively easy to do) and the outcomes or changes at each stage in the journey.

We usually set these out in an indicator bank – basically a table showing, for each outcome, how we will know it has been achieved, where the data will come from, how it will be collected, by whom and how often.

Here’s an example of an entry in an indicator bank. The outcome is that learners have more positive views about higher education. This will be measured by a survey question about the benefits of higher education and the extent to which this changes following an activity.

We’ll talk more about how you might go about collecting data and measuring outcomes in the next webinar.

That’s all for this webinar. Thank you for joining us. We hope you found this webinar useful.

Join Lindsey again in the next webinar on selecting appropriate evaluation methods, where she’ll be joined by another colleague, Dr Sarah Tazzyman.