SCAPP WP Evaluation Matters Community of Practice, Final Report

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Introduction

In November of 2022, SCAPP (the Scottish Community of Access and Participation Practitioners) issued a call for participants to take part in their "(Widening Participation) Evaluation Matters Community of Practice". The invitation requested notes of interest from individuals or small (3-4 people) project teams from across the Scottish Widening Access sector who were already undertaking or planning an evaluation of some of their work.

Following a launch event hosted at the University of Stirling on the 5th of December 2022, the group met (mainly remotely via Microsoft Teams but sometimes in person) for a series of workshops, information sessions, and training events. A list of the session topics, dates and mode of delivery is available in Appendix 2: CoP Session Dates and Topics. Participants used the SCAPP WP Evaluation Guide as a framework to guide their discussions and evaluation projects. The Community of Practice (CoP) was facilitated by two volunteers (Alison Browitt, University of Glasgow; and Jennie Younger, LEAPS) and one member of SCAPP staff (Laura Kwiatkowski).

Members agreed that the outputs of the CoP would take the form of this collaborative final report, plus case studies on each evaluation project being conducted by CoP members.

How to Approach This Report

This report has been structured to reflect the order of the evaluation stages outlined in the SCAPP WP Evaluation Guide. Each chapter focusses on a different one of the six distinct evaluation stages and has been authored by one of the project teams, using their own CoP evaluation project as a frame of reference.

This report can either be read in order from start to finish; or, if there is a particular stage of the evaluation cycle you are interested in, you can locate the relevant section using the contents page and go straight there. To provide further context on the individual projects referenced, case studies on each of these – authored by the evaluating teams – are available via hyperlinks in Appendix 1: CoP Members and Case Studies, which also includes details of all institutions and colleagues involved in the CoP.

Evaluation Cycle: Overview

This report references the six stages of the Evaluation Cycle as described in the SCAPP WP Evaluation Guide, which was developed by Dr Karen Campbell (Consultant Researcher, Glasgow Caledonian University) and Alison Browitt (Research & Evaluation Officer, University of Glasgow):

[1]

[1] Diagram reproduced from the SCAPP WP Evaluation Guide, "The Evaluation Cycle" section. Accessed 26/02/2024.

Stage 1: Focus

Deciding Your Evaluation Focus and Approach

University of Edinburgh, The YourEd+ Programme

Author: Will Hall

Keywords: Secondary School

Undertaking a Theory of Change (ToC) workshop for the evaluation of our Widening Participation programme “YourEd+” proved a useful and effective method in our evaluation cycle. This piece addresses some of the challenges faced, some of the easier aspects, collaborative efforts, and some recommendations for this stage of the evaluation.

A challenging aspect of this stage was finding a dedicated time for the comprehensive Theory of Change workshop. However, once we found a suitable time to bring core stakeholders together the process became more straightforward, benefiting from the collective knowledge of the team.

Ensuring that a ToC reflects the diverse perspectives of stakeholders can be challenging as different groups may have varying views on a programme's priorities and goals. Including these varied insights strengthened the ToC and ensures we are aligned.

Communicating the complexity of the ToC in a clear and simple manner can be challenging. We spent time drafting our ideas in the workshop, then developed these while typing up the ToC. We also ensured that the final product is accessible to a broad audience, including those without in-depth knowledge of the programme.

A final challenge was defining measurable indicators for each step of the ToC, particularly the outcomes, which can be difficult if the necessary data is not readily available. For example, one of our outcomes was ‘*learners experiencing a significant boost in confidence and knowledge about Higher Education*’. This is something which we have been able to measure at different stages of the programme. However, some of our other goals were more difficult to quantify.

Once the ToC workshop was underway, the familiarity of the team with the WP programme made the process more straightforward than anticipated. Knowing the details of the 'what,' 'how,' and 'why' of the programme facilitated productive discussions, allowing us to move efficiently through the stages of ToC development. These ideas were written down on flipchart paper then typed up, allowing us to reflect and add further detail to the final piece.

Collaboration was a key factor in building a ToC. Expertise from colleagues who had experience in creating ToCs for similar Widening Participation programmes was invaluable. While no external references were used, the collaborative discussions during the ToC workshop allowed for the integration of diverse perspectives and insights, which gave us all that we needed to create a comprehensive ToC.

Additionally, facilitators of the SCAPP Evaluation Matters CoP shared templates that provided a structured foundation for our ToC.

For individuals with no evaluation experience we recommend starting by seeking guidance from colleagues or experts who have experience in creating ToCs, particularly for similar programmes. Utilising available templates, such as those shared by evaluation networks, can provide a structured starting point. Planning dedicated workshops or sessions with key stakeholders to discuss aims, objectives, and outcomes is crucial. This collaborative approach ensures that various perspectives are considered, making the ToC more robust.

We would also recommend allocating at least half a day for the Theory of Change workshop. Undertaking our workshop felt slightly rushed, emphasising the need for sufficient time which allows for a thorough and collaborative discussion among stakeholders.

The ‘Focus’ stage proved to be immensely useful in several ways. Firstly, it provided a tangible roadmap for the evaluation process By identifying inputs, outputs, outcomes, stakeholders, and mechanisms, it served not only as a guide for evaluating the programme but also as a communication tool. The ToC is now a resource for effectively communicating the programme to future stakeholders and will help others understand and engage with the programme. This stage provided a structured framework to assess the impact and effectiveness of our programme.

Stage 2: Design

Designing Your Evaluation

Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Fair Access Evaluation Framework

Authors: Carole Williams, Jo Kalinowska
Keywords: NERUPI Framework

The design stage of an evaluation is easier to do once you have determined the focus of your project. It's only once this focus – the aim or goal – is understood, that the best approach and tools can be selected. Through our participation in the CoP our initial intention of developing our skills and experience through exacting specific evaluations was switched for a strategic design project.

We joined several workshops and talks but were both very struck by the sessions of Theory of Change and the NERUPI Evaluation Framework, and immediately saw the potential for the latter to be implemented on a structural level within our team. Network for Evaluating and Researching University Participation Interventions (NERUPI) is a community of practice for those seeking to reduce inequalities in higher education access, participation and progression. The framework used by members was developed by Annette Hayton, University of Bath and Dr Andrew Bengry, Bath Spa University. It addresses the limitations of data and the potential for manipulation by combining: clear aims and appreciation of context; comparability without uniformity in delivery; and rigour without prescription of research or evaluation methods.

The NERUPI model was developed with the intention of being adjusted to the specifics of any Widening Participation (WP) team. We were able to adapt it into a useable framework for our context over a series of sessions, some of which included management and our full team. In these sessions we were forced to map out and reflect on all the work we do as a team and place this alongside our core aims and objectives. This process of mapping out our activity was incredibly useful in understanding how we work and how to improve in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. It was also a useful experience in understanding our individual and team's work. Through the course of these sessions, we were able to design an adaptation of the NERUPI framework for our own use.

The NERUPI framework is based on five main aims - Know, Choose, Become, Practise, Understand - and seven levels from Level 0 to Level 6. The levels relate to age groups, with Level 0 generally suitable for children around the age of 11 or younger; and Level 6 for those graduating from higher education. In our adaptation of the framework, the five aims (columns) have become: Explore; Habitus; Become; Practice; Understand. The levels were not appropriate to our context, and so the levels (rows) list key questions:

- Aims.
- What will tell us if we have achieved this aim.

- Who delivers this.
- When is it delivered.
- What activities are designed to deliver this.
- How could we evaluate this.
- Who is the evaluation audience.
- Agreed upon evaluation activity.

The columns do not precisely track the timeline of a student's journey with us as our Fair Access team has two programmes which recruit, meaning there is no singular pathway.However, it does follow the basics of a timeline. The first column - Explore - aims to provide access and the opportunity to explore the benefits of studying at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS), working in the performing and production arts industries, and the role of Fair Access. This column is largely related to our Widening Access to the Creative Industries (WACI) programme. The fourth column – Practice – has the aim of developing skills and capacity of the student to be audition ready and to progress into the RCS. Although WACI provides audition practice for participants, this column is predominantly for our Transitions cohort who we support through subject specific and tailored programmes.

Using this framework, we can design evaluation questions that reference priorities and find tools which work best for our chosen activity. For example, In the 'Explore' column, we can see that participation is a key identifier of success; whereas in the 'Practice' column, we can see that autonomy and 'readiness' are key indicators or having achieved our aims. These key indicators will then shape the format and approach of any intervention. The framework also allows us to tailor an evaluation's design by considering resources (e.g., staffing, time), the audience of an evaluation, and urgency.

While the framework is still being piloted, it has already produced a more cohesive approach to evaluations amongst the team. It has also allowed us to think more strategically not only about the projects we run, but the evaluations we conduct, which has already resulted in a more effective use of our time and work. The practice of this work has been extremely useful for instigating a conversation on evaluations within the entire team. It has offered us the opportunity to already begin sharing knowledge and best practice.

Stage 3: Gather

Gathering Your Evidence

Glasgow Caledonian University, GCU Connect: Using Validated Scales to Measure WP Impact

Author: Dr Emily Flaherty

Keywords: Secondary School; Senior Phase; UCAS; Options and Choices; Validated Scales

The first step in deciding on how to gather data to evaluate the pilot programme was deciding on the purpose and goals of the evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation was to generate reliable, robust, measurable evidence, rather than face-valid or student satisfaction data. To identify which questions we wanted the evaluation to answer we developed a Theory of Change for the project to ascertain immediate, intermediate, and long-term outcomes the project aimed to generate. We also considered what data was already available to us – 'big data' we could access nationally and regionally on HE progression, attainment, and other leaver destinations. This enabled us to focus on collecting new data on the pre- and post- changes we expected to see in aspiration, confidence, expectations for self and intentions for university study, which led us to use of validated scales.

To identify the right validated scales for the project, which would allow us to gather sufficient data to run statistical testing on any measurable change of each scale item, we undertook a mapping exercise of the outcomes we wanted to assess and the currently available validated scales within published studies. We shortlisted five scales with relevant coverage and mapped them against our intended outcomes, methodologies, and resources. We also consulted with Professor John McKendrick[2] to ensure our design would lead to data capture that was informative and practically useful as well as robust and reliable. We decided collectively on two scales used in one online tool – TASO's (Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education) Access and Success Questionnaire and Students' Intentions Towards University (SITU). As part of this process, we also sought ethical approval from Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) to ensure use of the scales was appropriate for the age group of participants and purpose of the research, and also sought permission from TASO on use of the scale before it was publicly available.

When considering data gathering, this initial stage also included discussing and ultimately adding additional capture mechanisms on demographic information, which would allow us to disaggregate key groups, as well as analyse the impact on groups beyond just SIMD (the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) quintiles and deciles. This included questions in the pre- and post- surveys on first in family to attend HE (with follow up questions on family networks and engagement with HE) and

[2] Co-director of the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit at Glasgow Caledonian University; and also Scotland's Commissioner for Fair Access (as of January 2023).

entitlement to free school meals (with follow up questions to ensure those not in receipt but eligible were included). A key discussion area was the balance between capturing enough data to provide the opportunity for in-depth analysis but not being burdensome to the participant or the delivery teams out in schools managing whole-cohort workshops in time-limited situations, and not detrimental to the amount of engagement that could be delivered. These additional elements to our planned data capture allowed us to take a mixed methods approach, with both quantitative and qualitative data for a breadth of understanding on the impact of the programme, which would include statistical change and the context and reactions of the participants and stakeholders.

After designing our evaluation and planning what data was required, the next stage was focused on how we would capture data. To decrease the administrative burden we decided to use an online platform that would host our survey, in which we could generate a QR code for participants to scan and complete. There are several online tools available, such as Survey Monkey and Microsoft Forms, but as we are undertaking an evaluation with significant amounts of statistical testing we wanted to use a powerful research tool which would allow us the opportunity for advanced analytics and direct import of coded data to SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to streamline data processing. JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) Online Surveys provides all these research tools and also allowed us to structure the questionnaire as one single survey but with four distinct sections (again, to streamline the process of gathering data): demographics; TASO scale; SITU scale; and our summary qualitative questions.

Despite the tool used to gather data, the practicalities of gathering data for the evaluation was still a challenge due to the nature of in-school, whole-cohort delivery. We discussed with practitioners of the project the challenges prior to and during rollout. Two approaches were utilised to gather data dependent on the time allocated by the school for delivery of the project. Our first approach was to build in ten extra minutes to allow pupils to access the online version of the survey prior to the session, and paper copies of the questionnaire were also available for pupils without access to the relevant device and/or Wi-Fi in school, although these were not utilised in this evaluation cycle. This approach generated a participation rate of 49%. Our second approach was deployed when schools could not accommodate a longer session (primarily down to timetabled periods), so the online survey was sent to the school for distribution ahead of the session or, in the case of the post survey, after the final engagement of the S6 project. This second approach resulted in a far lower participation rate, which was an inevitable result as data capture was not done immediately after the final session – as part of next steps, we will assess this impact on the number of paired samples available for statistical testing. This second approach resulted in a 25% participation rate. The busy nature of whole-cohort sessions and large-scale workshops which are time constrained by the structure of a school timetable will continue to be a challenge when attempting an evaluation that requires two sets of data capture pre- and post- study, and in which we cannot shorten by removing scale items so as not to invalidate results.

When considering the challenges and limitations of the evaluation design for GCU Connect, it is important to discuss from the outset that ethical approval was sought and granted once the shortlisting and final decision on which validated scales were to be used for the research was taken. Ethical approval was required for the pre- and post- study as the aims of the evaluation were not just focused on student satisfaction or implementation of the project as a service to our partner schools, but an evaluation on the short term and intermediate educational outcomes of the project designed to increase expectations of self, confidence, and aspiration to progress to HE, and the awareness and familiarity of pupils with GCU programmes and student services. Therefore, ethical approval was sought to ensure that the validated tools were appropriate to use with school pupils in the age range of S5 and S6 pupils and that the items contained within the scales had been validated to measure the changes the intervention was designed to address.

Another note on limitations pertains to TASO's Access and Success Questionnaire. At the time the evaluation was launched TASO's scale was a draft in the final processes of validation, with the sector encouraged to pilot the questionnaire in its entirety or the applicable sub-scales for the intervention in question. In order to collect data to finalise validation, TASO required prior permission to use the scale. This process included agreement to use the scales as designed and present each item as intended, as well as agreement that TASO could be in contact to discuss the data collected. TASO has now launched its final version of the Access and Success Questionnaire, (the version used in the S5 longitudinal study), which can be accessed without prior permission. There are a number of validated scales that require the authors permission before use, such as Reynolds Self Concept Scale (1988).

As the GCU Connect programme is still being piloted and rolled out in its entirety across our new and existing partner schools, the evaluation design was focused on generating empirical evidence (type 2) rather than causal evidence (type 3). This design decision was taken due to the ethical considerations and implications of establishing a control group. A control group would not have received the interventions and the nature of the programme is time sensitive (i.e., working with senior phase learners during the UCAS cycle and key educational transition stages) which would mean practitioners could not revisit the control group to deliver the programme in the appropriate and applicable timeframe. Not establishing a control group was also discussed due to the potential damaging impact it could have on our school partner relationships – an essential aspect of WP and Outreach work – as it could alienate school partners who did not consent to a group of their pupils being randomly (Randomised Control Trial) or even selectively (quasi-experimental design) excluded from the programme that could provide benefit to their educational progression and outcomes. However, the absence of a control group for comparison does limit the extent to which we can draw conclusions from the evaluation results and analysis, as results are paired samples and will demonstrate only if there is a statistically significant change in the pre- and post- results for the participant group representative of the cohort. The availability of 'big data' on a national and regional level will allow broad comparisons on leaver destinations and HE progression.

A final limitation of the evaluation approach using validated scales is the inflexibility to amend or change any of the scale items. As the scales have been through a multi-stage process of testing and validation to ensure each respective sub-scale and item highlights the strength of evidence in terms of their association with HE access and success as an educational intervention, the wording and coverage of each item cannot be altered as this could skew any results from the study. This factored into the shortlisting process of potential scales during the evaluation design to ensure the scales used would be applicable to the expected immediate and intermediate outcomes of the programme. We also considered what specific outcomes resulting from the GCU Connect Theory of Change were not covered by the items in the validated scale and designed face valid open-ended questions to include at the end of the questionnaire yet separate from the validated scales. This resulted in one online questionnaire made up of an alias to pair the samples, demographic information for disaggregation of the results, followed by the two validated scales presented as separate tools, and two open-end questions designed to capture student satisfaction and implementation data.

University of Glasgow: Access to Higher Education – Skills, Support and Progression Programme

Authors: Amy McDermott (Access and Student Support Coordinator) and Jennifer Weightman (Widening Participation Development Officer)
Keywords: Adult Learners; Mature Students; Progression; Transition

Before commencing the 'Gather stage', the team engaged in a Theory of Change workshop facilitated by our Research & Evaluation Officer. The ToC workshop allowed reflection on the Access Programme in previous years, discussion of aims for the programme moving forward, and planning what data we wanted to gather, how we were going to do this and what we would do with the data. This activity proved invaluable throughout the 'Gather' stage, as it provided us with a framework upon which to base all evaluation activity and question design. Consistently coming back to our ToC pro-forma ensured that our evaluation activity was in line with our research aims and the objectives of the programme.

We used a mixed methods approach to gather our data. A mixed methods approach is research/evaluation which integrates both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Quantitative analysis is often characterised by data analysis across the "population", often resulting in large numbers and the ability to look at trends across the population as a whole. Qualitative research methods are more centred on the individual's views, opinions and experiences and allows for a more holistic view of how trends or assumptions made about the population as a whole are experienced at the individual level.

Evaluation was carried out with University of Glasgow Access Programme students through a Mentimeter, a World Café and a survey. We also gathered numerical data throughout the Access academic year on areas we felt were important to capture, such as engagement on the programme, progression onto university, demographic information etc.

A challenge for gathering data was ensuring a high amount of student participation throughout the different evaluation activities. As Access is an online and part time programme, guaranteeing a significant number of responses and looking at times which would be most engaging for students was difficult. It was decided to conduct the evaluation sessions as part of the Skills, Support and Progression sessions and within the on-campus days. However, students signed up to these on a voluntary basis and this was not a mandatory part of the Access Programme. This meant that there was not a consistent number of students participating in each activity. Although students completed sign up forms in advance, we were unable to guarantee the exact amount on the day. This led to at times having small groups which can reduce anonymity and restrict the amount of data gathered.

When thinking about questions we wanted to include in our surveys, we wanted to ensure that the questions that we used were applicable to our Access programme and included a question to which we could ask repeatedly throughout their time on course to support future evaluation. Additionally, we did not want to fatigue the students with too many questions resulting in them not completing the survey. We had limited data from the previous years that the programme ran, so had no surveys to adapt, edit and help inform our data. Time was spent creating the surveys from scratch and liaising with our colleagues to ensure that the questions were fit for purpose.

Although we had a small number contributing to our evaluation sessions, due to the type of students we were working with (adult returners) we found that the responses that were given were in depth and detailed, especially during the World Café. Questions were structured to allow students to lead on their responses and provided valuable feedback for the team to work with. We expected conversations to stray into general chatter, however, we were surprised to find that conversations in general were on topic to what was being asked and that students were keen to engage in them. Generally, we found students were keen to support the development of the Access Programme.

We would recommend someone with little evaluation experience to approach this stage with an open mind. It is difficult to know how the gathering of your data is going to go until you have completed it. We would also recommend having a colleague who can look over any questions you are using and help ensure that you are using the correct data gathering method to collect new and useful data. We were fortunate to have our colleague, who has huge experience in evaluation, looking over our work prior to conducting and gathering our data. We also ensured that we went back to the SCAPP WP Evaluation Guide and our ToC documentation, as we found these incredibly useful when thinking about the different ways to gather our data and ensure the data we gathered would be sufficient in achieving our objectives. The guide in general helped give us a step-by-step understanding of the different stages of evaluation and the importance of each stage.

We found this stage of the evaluation cycle particularly useful to think about what and why we were conducting evaluation activities and gathering the data. We wanted to ensure that we were distributing surveys and conducting World Cafés with questions that we could really take on board the students' feedback and further develop our Access Programme. We agreed that there was no point in sending out surveys that we were not going to do anything with but did not want to end up with large amounts of data that was unmanageable to analyse. Having this distinct section of the evaluation cycle meant that we were able to focus our priorities.

Overall, we enjoyed this stage of the cycle and have benefitted from having a better understanding of the evaluation cycle. We ensured that we have connected the dots from each section and by the end of our project have a solid evaluation data that we could use for continued development of the programme. We have also been able to use the lessons learned and evaluate our Transition Programme, a new programme the Adult Learner Team piloted this year.

Stage 4: Analyse

Analysing Your Data

University of Aberdeen, REACH: Law

Author: Niamh Stolvoort

Keywords: Law; Senior Phase

This project focused on an evaluation of an existing programme. All events on the programme are evaluated immediately post event and contribute to a national evaluation. However, the purpose of this project was to evaluate one strand in a more in-depth manner to understand students' opinions and feelings of the impact taking part had on their interest in university.

It was determined that the most appropriate method of achieving our aim was to utilise qualitative analysis. Qualitative analysis gave us the best framework to ascertain the breadth of student opinions. These opinions would then be analysed and allow us to see where our programme is doing well, and what could be improved upon.

The evaluation was carried out online using a Gecko form. The link was sent out to students multiple times with a completion deadline. As an incentive, there was also a chance to win a gift voucher. All possible opinions of events and supports could not be predicted but options were given to make analysis easier, as well as an 'other' option to allow any answers that weren't provided as an option. Students were led down a path based on what they answered to the previous question. If they had attended an event, they were asked if they enjoyed it and why or why not. If they had not attended an event, they were asked why not. This questioning journey allowed us to not only understand what was working with events people had attended, but also what wasn't working if people were unable to attend. We could then identify in the analysis stage supports which people found greatly helpful, or those where we needed to do a better job of marketing.

The biggest challenge was the lack of responses to the questions. A larger number of answers would, we believe, have given a better output from analysis than the lower number of answers that were able to be analysed.

Timing was also a massive issue. This whole project was undertaken as CPD by one member of the team. Therefore, the project was not part of the team member's workload model and there were many other pieces of work that needed to be prioritised over this evaluation, and therefore the evaluation would be put to the side for periods of time. The nature of this type of work means that it requires undivided attention when analysing to be able to make any conclusions correctly and see any patterns that emerge. The heavy workload and lack of time really put pressure on this stage, and it was therefore difficult to push through at times.

The actual process of analysis was much easier than expected. Once there was uninterrupted time to analyse the data, it was reasonably easy to draw conclusions. Even though this was qualitative analysis, due to using set options of answers, it was much easier to collate and analyse opinions than if there had been individual opinions that needed to be manually sorted. The analysis was carried out using Excel, using algorithms to count the number of times students gave a certain opinion showing clear conclusions on a variety of events. It was also then simple to collate the more substantive answers from people who had used the ‘other’ box as there was only single digit numbers of answers to read through and sort into groupings.

Doing research into other people’s analysis stages is definitely helpful. I found that by using no reference point, I was often at a loss for what I should be doing or looking for. To then read over examples from other projects within my institutions or project evaluations published online, it was easier to see what should be getting looked at and where I should be going.

Analysing the data and answers that had been collected was of great value. There were conclusions that could be drawn as soon as calculations had been completed showing the questions asked were useful to our understanding of the project’s impact thus far. It then also meant that it was easy to see where the project was supporting students and where there were gaps. One major conclusion is that awareness of the range of programme offerings was low, and we were unaware this information was not reaching participants but that is a massive barrier to impact.

Analysing the various aspects of the programme as well as the programme as a whole also allowed us to see more nuanced conclusions that may not have been visible should we have just asked if students felt the programme overall was helpful. It could be argued that this is one of the most important parts of the evaluation cycle as it will inform the future of the REACH project. This stage allows us to really see the opinions and feelings of the students as well as demonstrate its impact in a clear way.

University of Strathclyde, Young Strathclyder P6 & P7 Programme Pilot

Authors: Iain Mitchell, Lauren White, Al Blackshaw, Amanda Baldwin

Keywords: Primary School; Campus; Faculties

A mixed methods approach, with evaluation carried out with a range of stakeholders, gave us a, hopefully, good chance of producing balanced and reasonable conclusions about our Young Strathclyder programme. Our methods of analysis worked in conjunction with our evaluation design which was based, to a large degree, on sample sizes and which particular stakeholder was the focus of evaluation. The majority of quantitative analysis came from pupil responses as we had large sample sizes, and pupils' age was considered something of a barrier to producing rich qualitative data. Analysis of evaluations from teachers, parent/guardians and student mentors generally focussed on the qualitative. When collecting data, it was generally considered that the most effective way to maximise the number of responses to the questionnaires for different stakeholders was to oversee in person the completion of paper copies. In order for this to be analysed, both quantitatively and qualitatively, data from surveys was input into Excel.

Data was entered into tables in Excel spread sheets. We decided to use PowerBI as a data visualisation tool due to its responsive design and user-friendly interface. We created three dashboards – one for P6 pupil evaluations; one for P7; one for teachers – visualising the data in a variety of ways over multiple pages to allow us to really drill down into the data. We then packaged the three dashboards together into a PowerBI App, to allow our evaluators to easily switch between the different outputs when writing up results. Only data from pupils who had completed both surveys was used in comparative analysis of pre- and post- results. No statistical analysis was used to determine the significance of quantitative findings.

Teacher, parent/guardian and student mentor evaluations, and to a lesser extent pupil evaluations, featured a large number of open-ended questions. The data from these was coded through an inductive thematic analysis.

By asking different stakeholders to complete in-person paper versions of evaluations, we generated a lot of data which would have taken a significant amount of time to analyse thoroughly. We therefore had to consider which data to prioritise in our analysis. This largely depended on the audience to whom we were reporting.There were time-pressured deadlines for reporting impact to funders and other significant stakeholders; there were elements of service evaluation which were important to analyse in order to make changes before the programme started again in the new academic year; and there were 'deeper' research themes which we want to investigate in more detail but were not as time-pressured. To some extent, the choice of what to analyse also depended on which data would be particularly revealing – it became clear early on in analysis that some questions were not providing the level of information required and were therefore not worth analysing in depth.

The amount of data gathered required a large amount of time and resource for it to be logged. Fortunately we had this, but we are aware that not everyone would be in a similar situation with regard to resource. It was useful to ensure that a 'master' Excel copy of all the data logged was kept and separate versions were created for different purposes, e.g., a version of data from pupils for whom we had both pre- and post- responses, in order that no data was lost.

PowerBI was a relatively new software for the team and we found that there were some issues with exporting graphs for the purposes of reports and sometimes it was easier to use Excel for the purpose of creating graphs that were transferable to different programmes.

In general, we were pleased with the amount of data that we could gather and analyse from quite a wide range of stakeholders. Our findings were consistent from analysis across all our sources of data, with similar, clear themes emerging from qualitative analysis of data from different stakeholders, allowing us to draw confident conclusions about programme impact.

Based on our experience we would recommend that you have clear processes for the organisation and storage of data, both electronic and hard copies, of which all staff that are involved with gathering, input and analysis of data are aware. This is particularly important for programmes that are gathering data from several sources, from many projects, over a significant length of time. Also make sure that everyone is trained in and comfortable with any software used for evaluation.

Hopefully this has already influenced the design process, but it is useful to be clear on which data you want to prioritise in analysis and for what purpose.

This stage is interesting and enjoyable. It does not necessarily have to be daunting and overly complex. While it may appear that you have lots of data, if your evaluation design is robust hopefully clear themes will emerge without too much difficulty.

It may become clear early on that the data gathered from certain questions is not particularly helpful and can therefore be disregarded quickly in order to save time.

We would also recommend making sure your sample sizes are appropriate for quantitative analysis.

It is a beneficial process to balance positive analysis of programme impact, that you may feel is necessary for funder and stakeholder reports, with an honest reflection of issues that arose, lessons learned and what you would do differently next time. Keep limitations in design and data collection in mind when drawing conclusions.

This stage is clearly crucial and not just in determining the overall impact of the programme. It gave us an immediate understanding of the strength of our evaluation design, in a way that we could not have realised through trialling surveys in advance, and allowed us to make immediate changes, to both programme and evaluation design, for the new academic year.

Analysis also produced some unexpected additional findings that opened up new routes of investigation, particularly with regard to the post-Covid impact on student wellbeing of mentoring on the programme, which we are keen to pursue further in the future.

Stage 5: Report

Reporting and Disseminating Your Findings

LEAPS Transitions Course & LEAPS Pre-UCAS Interviews

Author: Fiona Das, Jennie Younger, Jenny Edwards

Keywords: School; Transitions; Preparation

One of the challenging aspects of the ‘Report’ stage is the need to have first completed your analysis. Written down this sounds incredibly obvious, but prioritising time to analyse your data can be challenging when delivery of WP activities often takes priority. However, if you do not take time to do this then you cannot complete your report. Do you need to make some tough decisions and only analyse certain data gathered? Or do you need to revisit the ‘Focus’ and ‘Design’ stages of the evaluation cycle to ensure you are definitely gathering only relevant data in the first place?

Furthermore, knowing how much focus to give to each section of the evaluation report can be challenging.

A further challenge is having to qualify any reporting when the data gathered may not be as robust as expected. Though the majority of audiences for reports will not be looking to disparage any findings, it may undermine results if they have to be frequently defended due to a lack of data or analysis. How confident are you in your analysis, especially if your findings are from a small cohort of participants? And is it okay to say if you are not?

Another challenge is knowing what to report to different audiences. Not all audiences are interested in the same findings, and having one big report covering everything can be off-putting to readers, so it is clear that taking the time to tailor reports to different audiences is really important – particularly if there are sensitivities around some of the data you are sharing - but again, finding the time to create tailored reports is challenging. Would easily adaptable templates help to streamline this?

Identifying different audiences to report to was very easy at this stage, largely because we had a clear idea of who these were from the outset of our evaluation design. We have a number of regular reporting requirements and opportunities, both internally and externally, and have these in mind when considering audiences for our evaluation findings.

We drew upon existing sector expertise to aid us in this stage. The first resource we used was the SCAPP WP Evaluation Guide. There is a section dedicated to the ‘Report’ stage of the Evaluation Cycle which we consulted.

In addition, we took up training opportunities where available to help us with reporting. For example, we participated in a ‘Data Analysis in Excel’ training session run by a fellow CoP participant which helped us learn how to better present data through charts to ensure we were making use of visual tools when sharing our findings. We also attended a session on ‘Publishing your Evaluation’, where we were able to learn more about writing up our findings to a publishable standard, which were also skills we were able to apply to report writing in general.

If someone with no evaluation experience was approaching the ‘Report’ stage of the evaluation cycle, we would suggest that they first read a brief overview of the stage (as can be found in the SCAPP WP Evaluation Guide) and that they then read a range of evaluation reports so that they can learn about structure, content and presentation and how these might look different depending on the format of report – then give it a go themselves. We can always learn and improve, but we have to start somewhere. It is okay for a first attempt not to be perfect.

There were several things that were useful about the ‘Report’ stage of the evaluation cycle. The main one was that it was really helpful in showing us where we had any gaps in our evaluation design and identifying what we could do differently next time. For example, if data was proving difficult to analyse or present would we be better off collecting it in a different way in future?

It also helped us to consider how best to bring together and present our findings. What do we need to explain to our audience? What is obvious to us as an internal project team, but not to them as someone not closely involved in delivery of the project? What might need further clarification? Going through this process helps you to better communicate about your project and its impact.

Reporting also allowed us to implement and demonstrate immediate change to some of our projects when required, as well as disseminating positive feedback – which is a great morale booster for colleagues.

Stage 6: Act

Implementing Change and Future Action

LIFT OFF Data Project, University of Abertay

Authors: Mel Rookes, Cerys Ferguson

Keywords: Schools; Data Tracking; School Leaver Destination Return (SLDR)

There were measurable and tangible outcomes from this project that we have used to implement programme changes, both in our data gathering/reporting capacity and in our deliverables. The first of which is a continuation of the student data placement whereby we are aiming to overcome some of the identified limitations and obstacles outlined in our report. Secondly this has influenced the point of the programme at which we collect certain data points that will be used for inclusion in reporting cycles, resulting in an overhaul of our data systems and exploration of a new pupil database that incorporates more detailed individual intervention engagement.

Perhaps the biggest challenge of this stage for us is that whilst this has provided a promising preliminary framework of what could be done to enhance our impact reporting capabilities, there is the issue of external time constraints with when this information needs to be collated and submitted. We are bound by the expected reporting timeframes imposed by our funding body, and as such will not always have the capability to have full access to the data and the time available to analyse it to the extent we would like. Whilst a framework of how to approach this impact reporting now exists, a cost-benefit analysis of whether committing substantial programme resource to a project that falls outside of the expected timeframes applied by the funding body needs to be undertaken.

Another initial challenge of this stage for us was managing the expectations of what we thought the changes might look like prior to reaching this part of the evaluation cycle. Robust evaluation requires you to move through each of the stages to be able to implement changes based in evidence but there is likely to be some element of expectation of what these might look like in advance of completing the full cycle. It is important not to let any preconceived notions you had at the beginning of your project influence the changes you intend to implement.

When exploring the ways in which the outcomes of this data project could be implemented into our reporting cycles, it highlighted that some of the changes we wanted to implement were already being done in another capacity or were less challenging to implement than previously thought. For example, we identified that for future reporting capabilities it would be beneficial to include more detailed breakdowns of the individual engagements that the pupils had participated in. This is information that we already collect, and this process can be easily adapted to fit into the framework for this reporting proposal.

Our primary source was the SCAPP WP Evaluation Guide which was used internally and by the student placement/supervisor from our host HEI (Higher Education

Institution). We also chose to look at organisations that fall outwith the WA/WP landscape which we have chosen to expand upon below.

Firstly, we would recommend someone with no evaluation experience approach this stage by familiarising themselves with the evaluation cycle as a whole and ensuring that they have completed all of the necessary steps prior to implementing changes. The ‘Act’ stage of the evaluation cycle is perceived as the ‘end goal’ and often there is the temptation to rush to this stage of the cycle without the necessary groundwork, particularly when the expected changes are falling within a predetermined timeframe set by those outwith your organisation. It is also important to recognise that this is an ongoing process and that with the implementation of change must come another cycle and a move back to the ‘Focus’ stage to evaluate the newly implemented adaptations.

Secondly, there is a wealth of information in this WA/WP landscape of complete evaluation cycles and how others have completed this process and have implemented evidence-based change. Whilst it is hugely important to view this work in a WA/WP context, this sometimes has the potential to influence the direction in which you think your evaluation is going to move in and could have the potential to steer your biases when reviewing the results. We found that looking outwith education and WA/WP landscapes to see how other industries and organisations act on their findings has been really beneficial for providing more context to this stage, we specifically used the NHS (National Health Service) and their evaluation toolkit with reference to patient outcomes.

The most useful and beneficial aspect of this stage of the evaluation cycle is that we now have the ability to implement change based upon evidence. This not only gives you confidence in implementing more drastic changes that could face enhanced critique but also gives you opportunity to use as leverage when there are funding ties to these changes.

Appendix 1: CoP Members and Case Studies

The below table summaries colleagues and institutions which participated in the CoP, with links to individual case studies of projects where available.

Institution or Organisation	Colleague Name/s	Project Title	Case Studies (where available)
Glasgow Caledonian University	Dr Emily Flaherty	GCU Connect: Using Validated Scales to Measure WP Impact	GCU Case Study
LEAPS (Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools)	Jenny Edwards & Alison Train	LEAPS Pre-UCAS Interviews Evaluation	LEAPS Pre-UCAS Interviews Case Study
LEAPS	Fiona Das & Jennie Younger	LEAPS Transitions Course Evaluation	LEAPS Transitions Course Case Study
LIFT OFF	Mel Rookes & Cerys Ferguson	LIFT OFF Data Project	LIFT OFF Case Study
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	Carole Williams & Jo Kalinowska	RCS Fair Access Evaluation Framework	RCS Case Study
University of Aberdeen	Niamh Stolvoort	Reach Aberdeen - Law	University of Aberdeen Case Study
University of Edinburgh	Pat Reid & Will Hall	The YourEd+ Programme	
University of Glasgow	Amy McDermott & Jennifer Weightman	Access to Higher Education – Skills, Support and Progression Evaluation	University of Glasgow Case Study
University of St Andrews	Gareth Richardson-Peat & Lauren Henderson	First Chances Fife	
University of Strathclyde	Iain Mitchell, Lauren White, Amanda Baldwin & Al Blackshaw	Young Strathclyder P6 & P7 Programme Pilot	University of Strathclyde Case Study

Appendix 2: CoP Session Dates and Topics

The below table summarises the formal gatherings of the CoP. Some sessions were focussed on a specific element of training. In such cases, the 'speaker' column denotes who led on this session. For regular CoP meetings to discuss progress, this column is marked "N/A".

Date	Location	Topic	Session Lead
05/12/2022	University of Stirling	CoP Launch Event	CoP Facilitators
23/01/2023	Online	General CoP Meeting	CoP Facilitators
06/03/2023	Online	General CoP Meeting	CoP Facilitators
13/03/2023	Online	Theory of Change	Alison Browitt (Research & Evaluation Officer, University of Glasgow)
29/03/2023	University of Strathclyde	An Introduction to Data Analysis in Excel	Al Blackshaw (Widening Access Manager, University of Strathclyde)
19/04/2023	Online	NERUPI Framework Webinar	Annette Hayton (Convenor of NERUPI)
16/05/2023	Carnegie Conference Centre, Fife College	SCAPP Conference (facilitator-led session titled "WP Evaluation Matters: Building a Community of Practice to Support Practitioners")	Alison Browitt (Research & Evaluation Officer, University of Glasgow); Jennie Younger (Communications & Information Officer, LEAPS); Mel Rookes (Programme Manager, LIFT OFF); Al Blackshaw (Widening Access Manager, University of Strathclyde); Fiona Das (Development Officer, LEAPS)
01/06/2023	Online	General CoP Meeting	CoP Facilitators
05/06/2023	Online	Descriptive & Inferential Statistics	Greg Brown (Planning Officer, University of Glasgow)
24/08/2023	Online	General CoP Meeting	CoP Facilitators
20/09/2023	University of St Andrews	Presenting Data to Different Audiences	Dr Laurence Lasselle (Senior Lecturer, University of St Andrews)

Date	Location	Topic	Session Lead
09/10/2023	Online	Using Creative Qualitative Methods in Evaluation Work	Prof Stella Devitt-Jones (Professor of Critical Pedagogy, Staffordshire University); Prof Liz Austen (Head of Evaluation and Research, Sheffield Hallam)
17/11/2023	Online	CoP Writing Retreat	Alison Browitt (Research & Evaluation Officer, University of Glasgow)
23/11/2023	Online	General CoP Meeting	CoP Facilitators
27/11/2023	Online	Publishing Your Evaluation	Dr Laurence Lasselle (Senior Lecturer, University of St Andrews) and Dr Cathy Stone (Conjoint Associate Professor, University of Newcastle, Australia)
05/12/2023	Online	CoP Writing Retreat	Alison Browitt (Research & Evaluation Officer, University of Glasgow)
09/01/2024	Online	CoP Writing Retreat	Alison Browitt (Research & Evaluation Officer, University of Glasgow)
13/03/2024	University of Stirling	CoP Dissemination Event	CoP Facilitators & Members

Appendix 3: Expansions of Acronyms

The following table contains a list of the acronyms used throughout this paper.

Acronym	Expansion
CoP	Community of Practice
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee
NERUPI	Network for Evaluating and Researching University Participation Interventions
SCAPP	The Scottish Community of Access and Participation Practitioners
SIMD	The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
SITU	Students' Intentions Towards University
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TASO	Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
WA	Widening Access
WP	Widening Participation