FINAL REPORT OF THE EVALUATION OF THE SCAPP WP EVALUATION MATTERS COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

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PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This report describes the findings of the evaluation of Scotland's Community of Access and Participation Practitioners (SCAPP) Widening Participation (WP) Evaluation Matters Community of Practice (CoP) for SCAPP and interested parties.

The evaluation research project was designed by the facilitators of the Community of Practice and ethical approval was given by the University of Glasgow College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee. The substantive qualitative research element was supported by SCAPP through employing Dr Karen Campbell as independent research consultant to carry out this work and to support the team.

BIOGRAPHIES OF THE AUTHORS

Alison Browitt is the WP Research and Evaluation Officer at the University of Glasgow and was co-facilitator of the SCAPP WP Evaluation Matters Community of Practice. Alison has an interest in supporting WP evaluation and many years of experience of carrying out mixed methods evaluation research as well as delivering and evaluating pilot widening participation projects and activities to support student success and transition into university.

Dr Karen Campbell is a research and evaluation consultant with expertise and a PhD in widening participation in Higher Education (HE) in the Scottish context. Karen leads evidence-based research on the impact of widening participation initiatives for organisations across the HE sector UK-wide.

Jennie Younger is the Communication & Information Manager at LEAPS, a widening participation partnership programme supporting students across South East Scotland and the Forth Valley. In addition to leading on communications strategy and reporting requirements, she has an interest in evaluation and in supporting WP practitioners to evaluate WP initiatives. Jennie was co-facilitator of the SCAPP WP Evaluation Matters Community of Practice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our special thanks go to Laura Kwiatkowski for her invaluable support to the CoP facilitators with the coordination of the CoP on behalf of the SCAPP core team.

Huge thanks to the SCAPP WP Evaluation Matters CoP participants for their enthusiasm and openness in sharing their WP evaluation experiences with colleagues throughout the year and with the CoP evaluation research team for the evaluation and this report.

Thanks also to the many individuals who gave their time in kind to support the CoP including providing training and development opportunities, and stakeholder perspective in the evaluation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Scotland's Community of Access and Participation Practitioners (SCAPP) has a remit to support practitioners across the Scottish sector and one of four core objectives brings a focus on evaluation: to develop the capacity of practitioners working in the field of widening access and participation to utilise evaluation and research to help establish what works to support better outcomes for students. The SCAPP Evaluation & Research Working Group set up the Community of Practice (CoP) to support WP practitioners to learn and develop evaluation knowledge and skills through social participatory learning.

The SCAPP WP Evaluation Matters Community of Practice is a group who share an interest in WP evaluation, who are undertaking their own evaluation project over the timescale of the CoP, and, together, learn how to do WP evaluation better and develop a collaborative output for the sector.

There was an unexpectedly high initial interest in the CoP from 23 individuals representing 11 Higher Education institutions or WP organisations, and this continued throughout the 16 months with a well-attended launch event in December 2022 and continued engagement in meetings (mainly online) and with training opportunities. 10 project teams engaged with the CoP through to the end and contributed to the final outputs. In just these terms, the CoP has evidently filled a gap in support of WP practitioners carrying out evaluation and the first pilot year can be considered a success.

Detailed evaluation of process and impact of the CoP underpins this conclusion with evidence of what worked to make it successful, and why. To address the primary evaluation question: *Has the SCAPP WP Evaluation Matters Community of Practice been successful in the aims of building evaluation knowledge and capacity in participants and the sector?* a mixed methods approach was taken, with ethical approval from the University of Glasgow College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee, including a substantive piece of qualitative research engaging with 18 CoP members or stakeholders through semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis identified research themes, and all data from monitoring, surveys and interviews were examined to show that intermediate outcome indicators in the evaluation framework from the Theory of Change were met.

Key findings include:

- The benefits and impact of the community of practice were highlighted through themes of:
  - A community for sharing practice – that was more than simply expanding professional networks, although network and connections were also appreciated. Benefits included being supported to discuss, share and learn about evaluation in an environment that was designed to be inclusive and proactively collaborative from the outset.
  - Training and development – the level, amount, and depth of the continuing professional development on offer within the community of practice was above the expectations of many CoP members. Variously described as, 'excellent'; 'professional'; 'targeted'; 'relevant; 'well-pitched'; 'varied'; 'practical' and 'insightful'.
  - Evaluation learning gains and impact on practice - knowledge and skills developed through training opportunities were most frequently mentioned as the main gains from participating

in the CoP. Moreover, participants report changes to their practice and the sense of becoming advocates of evaluation while sharing of good practice with their teams.
  - Confidence – in evaluation and use of evaluation resources increased while reassurances were important within the 'safe space' to share, discuss, learn and develop as evaluators
- The biggest challenge was time – for busy WP practitioners to find time to participate in the CoP and to carry out WP evaluation
- CoP participants agreed that the CoP should be repeated and suggestions for improvements that could be made for future iterations were collected (and summarised in Table 3)
- A number of factors outwith the CoP that would support WP evaluation in Scotland were identified (and summarised in Table 4)
- The majority of intermediate outcomes identified in the Theory of Change were met, indicating that the CoP was meeting the main aims of building evaluation knowledge and capacity in participants and the sector (see Table 5)

Tables 1-4 summarise the key findings by research theme.

Recommendations

1) Evaluation of the SCAPP WP Evaluation Matters Community of Practice showed this model is a successful method to support WP practitioners in Scotland and the organisations they work for to evaluate their practice, and it should be repeated

2) In future iterations of the WP Evaluation Matters Community of Practice, SCAPP should take into consideration the suggestions from the evaluation of the pilot:
- There should be sufficient funding and resource for facilitation, activities and training
- There should be more in person activities
- Group sizes and activities should promote more collaboration and sharing of issues and solutions throughout the year
- Opportunities for participant reflection throughout the year should be built in

3) To support the work of SCAPP with WP practitioners, the appropriate stakeholders should address the wider context of WP evaluation in the Scottish sector including:
- Clarification of where responsibility for WP evaluation should lie
- More clarity and guidance from funders on their expectations of WP evaluation
- Making WP evaluation a priority, with appropriate resource and time given to it
- Better access to and sharing of data, such as development of a national learner tracking tool

Summary of findings by research theme	
Research theme	Participant Opinion of the Community of Practice
Benefits and gains of CoP membership	• The CoP is inclusive and supportive • Culture of support; sense of community; a safe space to discuss, share and learn about evaluation

	• The culture of the CoP was set and facilitated from the point of its in-person launch • No evaluation expertise is required to become involved • CoP members have similar levels of evaluation experience and knowledge • Sense of togetherness in level of experience and confidence in evaluation • Shared values about learners adds to sense of belonging in the CoP • Being 'forced' to carve out time for evaluation • Having the time and 'space' to think about evaluation • Insight into how other WP teams and institutions are evaluating their work • Strengthened relationships within own team and with practitioners across the sector • Opportunity to share practical expertise from own organisation • The level, amount, and depth of the continuing professional development on offer • Opportunity to expand networks Scotland-wide • Facilitators also gained learning and the positive experience of working with a network of colleagues
Challenges	• Time to attend CoP meetings/training sessions • Day-to-day work (delivery) takes priority over evaluation • Workloads are already stretched • Time to collaborate outwith planned sessions
Unexpected Outcome - The CoP as a 'safe space'	• Level of anxiety about evaluation skills, knowledge and experience before joining the community of practice • The CoP as a 'safe space' to share, discuss and learn, which mitigates this anxiety to an extent

Table 1. Summary of findings by research theme: Participant Opinion of the Community of Practice

Summary of findings by research theme:	
Research theme	Impact of the Community of Practice on Participants
Collaboration and engagement	• Collaboration was built into the design of the CoP and encouraged from the outset • The CoP provides a 'safe space' to collaborate • Collaboration is facilitated through regular meetings, having a space to collaborate within the training sessions, and in shared tasks • Working on a shared output for the sector promotes collaboration • The Teams channel has been useful for resource sharing but is underutilised due to technical barriers regarding access, and lack of time

	• Collaboration outwith the formal sessions has been limited mostly due to time and priorities on delivery, although some questioned whether such collaboration was expected • The priority given to delivering day-to-day WP activities was the reason given for having missed CoP training sessions and meetings
Evaluation skills and knowledge	Knowledge and skills acquisition: • Underlined the need for robust evaluation • Underlined the need to focus on planning stages of evaluation • Improved evaluation knowledge • Learning from good practice • Wider teams have been upskilled in evaluation • Facilitators gained knowledge from co-facilitators and externals • WP Evaluation Guide is widely used and viewed as central to the work of the community • The Evaluation Cycle is a useful planning tool Knowledge sharing: • Sharing resources with team members outwith the CoP • Sharing resources within the CoP • Developing mechanisms to share evaluation practice • The CoP provides impetus and a focus for evaluation meetings and discussions within teams
Training and development opportunities	• Described as: excellent; professional; targeted; relevant; well-pitched; varied; practical; insightful; and useful • Provide a further opportunity to meet new colleagues, share, and network • Provide access to evaluation experts (who have given their time in-kind to deliver training) • Especially useful for those (almost all) participants who do not have access within their teams to a specialist evaluator
Confidence in evaluation	• Confident using the Evaluation Guide • Confident using the Evaluation Cycle to plan evaluation • More confident experimenting with different evaluation approaches, methodologies, and tools • More confident in seeking support in evaluation • Enhanced relationships make asking for support easier • Confidence in evaluating evaluations • More confident undertaking future WP evaluation • Facilitators more confident about facilitating a community of practice
Impact on Evaluation Practice	• Sharing and using the resources provided to plan and carry out evaluation and to articulate their evaluation planning to the wider team and organisation outwith the CoP • Evaluation has taken on a new focus for the wider WP team • Considering developing a community of practice within their institution

Table 2. Summary of findings by research theme: Impact of the Community of Practice on Participants

Summary of findings by research theme:	
Research theme	Suggestions for the Community of Practice Moving Forward
Format of Meetings and Training Sessions	• Strong preference for more in-person sessions • A mid-way (mid-year) catch-up session would be useful • Stream subgroups for more manageable numbers for working together and sharing
Reflection	• More time for sharing and reflection on own work within CoP meetings and training sessions • A reflection log was considered and could be a useful tool for learning and evaluation
Training and Resources	• Training could be offered more broadly to all SCAPP members • The level depth and breadth of the training on offer through CoP membership should be highlighted
Sustainability	• The CoP needs to be suitably resourced; in-kind support from facilitators and trainers cannot and should not be sustained • Consider whether a new CoP with new members is required but also opportunities for the first CoP to continue to work together

Table 3. Summary of findings by research theme: Suggestions for the Community of Practice Moving Forward

Summary of findings by research theme:	
Research theme	Views on the future of WP evaluation in Scotland
If not a CoP, then what?	• More clarity and guidance from funders on expectations of evaluation and measures of success • More focus and value placed on evaluation • Making evaluation a priority and carving out time for it • More proactive approach to evaluation • Support from line managers and organisations • Time and support for individuals to build skills and knowledge through accessing Continuing Professional Development • Dedicated evaluators within WP teams • Better access to and sharing of data • Build skills and understanding of statistics and data • Valuing qualitative data • Evaluation templates and examples • A learner tracking tool • Funding for WP evaluation e.g. the community of practice • Determination of where the responsibility for WP evaluation lies (SCAPP may have a role to play but not fully responsible)

Table 4. Summary of findings by research theme: Views on the future of WP evaluation in Scotland

INTRODUCTION

There is a need for an increase in both quantity and quality of evaluation of widening participation and widening access to provide evidence of impact of interventions. This need has long been identified, including in the final report of the Commission on Widening Access (The Scottish Government, 2016) and highlighted again by the Commissioner for Fair Access in his report: Renewing the Alliance for Fair Access (The Scottish Government, 2024).

Scotland's Community of Access and Participation Practitioners (SCAPP) has a remit to support practitioners across the Scottish sector and one of four core objectives brings a focus on evaluation: to develop the capacity of practitioners working in the field of widening access and participation to utilise evaluation and research to help establish what works to support better outcomes for students.

The idea for the SCAPP WP Evaluation Matters Community of Practice (CoP) came from the SCAPP Evaluation and Research Working Group, to follow on from the working group activities of producing an online WP Evaluation Guide and a Directory of Practice and Expertise to link practitioners and researchers.

Communities of Practice are an established format for staff development and were first described by Lave & Wenger (1991). Wenger (1998) went on to develop the concept as a form of social learning and it has become commonly used in organisations to bring together individuals to learn through social participation. It has been used successfully in many educational settings, sometimes in the form of a faculty learning community (e.g. MacKenzie *et al*, 2011; Bailey *et al*, 2022). The SCAPP CoP however aimed to bring together SCAPP members from across Scotland, representing different institutions and organisations, to work together remotely and to meet in person where possible.

The aim was to promote capacity building in the sector by creating and supporting an active Community of Practice, following Wenger's template: a group of people who share an interest in WP evaluation, who are undertaking their own evaluation project over the timescale of the CoP, and together, learn how to do WP evaluation better and develop a collaborative output for the sector.

OVERVIEW OF THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

A call was put out in the SCAPP newsletter in November 2022 to invite members of the SCAPP community to apply to join the SCAPP WP Evaluation Matters Community of Practice:

> The Community of Practice will comprise individuals or small project teams (of max. 3-4 individuals) from across the Scottish WP sector who are carrying out WP evaluation and want to work together to learn how to do it better. The group will commit to sharing experiences and good practice, whilst supporting each other to use the SCAPP WP Evaluation Guide and to progress their own evaluation projects.

The group will meet approximately once a month throughout 2023, mainly online, and will be facilitated by Alison Browitt (University of Glasgow) and Jennie Younger (LEAPS), with further support provided by SCAPP including addressing training needs identified by the group as they work through their own evaluations (e.g. through a series of webinars with experts). The group will agree a final output from the Community of Practice, such as a report or case studies, which will be of use to the participants and the sector more broadly.

The call resulted in applications from 13 distinct projects from 11 HEIs or organisations and 23 individuals interested in joining the CoP, with 12 projects taking part (see Appendix 1).

The CoP launched in person in December 2022 at the University of Stirling, with the majority of participants able to attend and then met online in January 2023. Participants were asked what they hoped to get out of participation in the CoP and were asked about training and development needs in order that a series of CoP meetings and optional training and development opportunities could be scheduled.

CoP online meetings were scheduled approximately every 6 weeks throughout the year, with a break over the summer. They included updates from project teams and meeting topics centred around the Evaluation Cycle with discussion and sharing of practice, including consideration of resources such as validated survey tools, that covered all stages of the Evaluation Cycle (see SCAPP WP Evaluation Guide). Additional optional training opportunities were delivered throughout the year through a series of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities delivered in-kind by colleagues and evaluation experts. Full details of the programme of activities are available in Appendix 2.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods approach was taken to address the Primary Evaluation Question – *Has the SCAPP WP Evaluation Matters Community of Practice been successful in the aims of building evaluation knowledge and capacity in participants and the sector?*

While the primary evaluation question set out to understand if the CoP was having the desired impact, the secondary evaluation questions were to understand the experience of the community and to gather feedback on the process of delivering and participating in CoP activities in this first pilot year.

Ethical approval for the evaluation study has been secured from The University of Glasgow, College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee. CoP facilitators carried out the data collection and evaluation with the support of Dr Karen Campbell, an independent evaluator. Dr Karen Campbell carried out the substantive piece of qualitative research that is the foundation of the mixed methods evaluation: semi-structured interviews, with CoP participants, facilitators and stakeholders, a focus group and qualitative data analysis. All research participants were provided with a participant information sheet and completed a consent form before taking part in surveys, interviews or a focus group.

Theory of Change

A Theory of Change was developed to map the expected short-term and intermediate outcomes that would lead to the overall aims and outcomes of the CoP. This provided a framework for the evaluation of the CoP and identified a number of measures to be evaluated to gather feedback on the process of organising and supporting an active CoP as well as demonstrating any impact on WP evaluation capacity across the Scottish sector. The full Theory of Change is provided in Appendix 3, and it can be summarised as follows:

> **If** the SCAPP WP Evaluation Matters CoP provides a platform for practitioners to meet, share practice and support each other, with training opportunities in aspects of evaluation **then** participants will develop their knowledge and skills in evaluation, increase their confidence in undertaking evaluation, and resources for the sector will be produced **leading to** individuals and teams delivering better evaluations of WP activities to show impact/what works and increased capacity for evaluation in the Scottish WP sector.

Data gathering and analysis

Monitoring data, such as session attendance, was gathered throughout the year and quantitative survey data is combined with qualitative analysis of data gathered from surveys, semi-structured interviews and a focus group at the start, during and end of the CoP. The final outputs were reflective pieces from the CoP participants and were also reviewed and analysed.

Monitoring data

Data collected throughout the year is included in the quantitative evaluation to demonstrate level of success in terms of the delivery of the CoP. This includes reach and retention of participants and project teams, engagement in meetings and optional training opportunities, engagement on the CoP MS Team platform used to keep in touch between meetings.

Online surveys

Online surveys for CoP participants were created using MS Forms in May 2023 and January 2024.

The May 2023 online survey received 14 responses (61% response). The survey gathered feedback and opinion on:

- Expectations
- Usefulness of each session
- Gains and learning
- Challenges and suggestions for improvements
- Confidence in evaluation and use of evaluation resources

Survey items in Appendix 4

A presentation of initial findings was delivered by the CoP facilitators at the SCAPP conference in May 2023. Suggestions for improvement were acted upon by the CoP facilitators and this was fed back to the group in a 'You Said, We Did' segment in the June CoP meeting.

The January 2024 online survey received 7 responses (35% response). Many of the same questions were asked as the first survey to measure changes over time and it gave the CoP participants an opportunity to give any final thoughts on their experiences. The reduced response rate is likely due to many having already taken part in an interview and/or focus group by that point.

Data from questions using Likert scales were analysed quantitatively in MS Excel while open comments were analysed qualitatively for evidence towards the qualitative research themes and the evaluation measures identified in the Theory of Change.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted online on MS Teams by Dr Karen Campbell; an independent evaluation consultant providing the neutral perspective for the evaluation project team. Meetings were recorded with consent of the interviewees and automatic transcripts were generated to complement the notes taken by the interviewer.

Interviews were carried out throughout October and November 2023 with:

- 6 CoP participants (who volunteered to take part after a call to all CoP members)
- 2 former CoP participants (who had to withdraw mid-way through the year)
- 3 CoP facilitators

These 11 research participants represent 48% of the CoP members. In addition, 8 CoP stakeholders representing SCAPP, Scottish Funding Council (SFC), CoP training providers were interviewed to provide external views of the CoP in the context of what is needed to support WP evaluation in Scotland.

Interview schedules were varied for the roles of participant/former participant, facilitator or stakeholder to maintain relevance for each group. See Appendix 5 for interview questions.

Interview topics covered:

- Opinions of the Community of Practice
- Impact of the Community of Practice
- Future of the Community of Practice
- Future of WP evaluation in Scotland

Interviews were recorded and transcribed and a 6-phase thematic analysis was undertaken to identify key themes across the dataset that related to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

This involved: familiarisation with the data set; generating initial codes to identify a feature of the data and collating the data by code; searching for themes; reviewing and refining themes; defining and naming themes, counting the number of participants who mentioned and provided evidence for each theme and writing up the analysis by theme regarding the research questions. Specifically, an inductive or 'bottom-up' analytic approach to thematic analysis was used whereby analysis was guided

by the themes that emerged from the data, rather than by prior theoretical accounts. The project lead provided thematic analysis by a second researcher.

Focus group

A focus group was conducted by the interviewer with CoP participants who attended the November online CoP meeting. This lasted 30 minutes and was used to explore emerging themes from the semi-structured interviews with CoP participants who had been part of the interview sample and those who had not been interviewed, providing an opportunity for as many participants as possible to contribute to the evaluation.

Data from the focus group was incorporated into the qualitative analysis.

Final outputs of CoP

CoP project teams agreed to produce a case study reflecting upon their evaluation processes and learning through the year on a template format that was produced and agreed by the CoP. In addition, project teams would contribute to a collaborative report structured around the Evaluation Cycle with each team reflecting on one stage of the cycle: Focus, Design, Gather, Analyse, Report or Act.

8 contributions were submitted for the collaborative report and 8 case studies were generated. These reflective documents were analysed with respect to the evaluation measures identified in the Theory of Change to provide further evidence of any impact of the CoP on participants.

Limitations of evaluation methodology

The following limitations of the evaluation of the CoP are acknowledged:

- Self-selection of CoP participants interviewed may bias the sample of participant views and may not be wholly representative of the group
- No WP managers or line-managers of the CoP participants were interviewed as part of the stakeholder group due to time constraints and lack of availability to participate. This is a key stakeholder group who may have been able to provide insight into the impact of the CoP on their staff and team, in a way that the stakeholders who were interviewed were not able to
- CoP facilitators were research participants as well as researchers on the evaluation project team. They were interviewed by the independent researcher however their closeness to the project must be acknowledged as a potential bias in analysis and interpretation of findings

EVALUATION FINDINGS

To address the primary evaluation question: *Has the SCAPP WP Evaluation Matters Community of Practice been successful in the aims of building evaluation knowledge and capacity in participants and the sector?* analysis was carried out with respect to the measurable outcome indicators

identified in the Theory of Change evaluation framework (Appendix 3) and through inductive thematic analysis to identify themes from the qualitative research.

Benefits of WP Evaluation Matters CoP membership

The CoP attracted high interest from WP practitioners across Scotland, with 23 individuals from 11 organisations signing up. Monitoring data showed that that outcome indicators '*Interest in the CoP and attendance at regular meetings is high'* and *'Attendance at optional training sessions is high'* were achieved as interest remained high since the launch meeting. Good numbers attended each meeting and optional training session and the majority of participants continued to participate until the end, and contributed to the final outputs:

- Average participation at CoP meetings = 12 participants
- Average participation at optional training = 10 participants
- Participants at the end of the CoP = 17 participants from 9 organisations

Research participants reported multiple benefits of engaging with the CoP including network building, working with and learning from others, sharing good practice, strengthened relationships, confidence building, a sense of togetherness/belonging, having to carve out time for evaluation, having the 'space' and time to focus on evaluation. All those CoP members interviewed cited having the opportunity to engage in external CPD as a major benefit of CoP membership. When asked to sum up the CoP in one word, the majority of interviewees expressed positive sentiments.

The CoP summed up in one word (8 practitioners and 2 facilitators)	Positive; learning; useful; mixed; energising; supported (x 2); rewarding; grateful; therapy

Figure 1: One word summary of the Community of Practice

A community for sharing practice

When asked to comment on the best things about the CoP, meeting peers, building networks and sharing practice were mentioned by 71% of respondents (May and final surveys).

"The best thing for me has been knowing there is a network of people equally invested in this work and ready and willing to work together to improve and learn more." [Final survey]

"It provided a community of welcoming and insightful people to regularly meet and share knowledge and experience. The training sessions which were offered were great, particularity the Presenting Data Workshop" [Final survey]

The Presenting Data workshop was delivered in person, and in interviews, CoP members expressed a strong preference for more in-person sessions to encourage networking, collaboration, and the sharing of ideas and resources. There was an appreciation that more in-person sessions would have practical and potentially resource implications for organisers. Nonetheless, participants enjoyed the in-person sessions most and felt that in-person sessions encourage engagement, and help to build relationships:

"More in-person sessions, that way you are out of the office. I think if invited to an online session you have more of an excuse to find something else to attend to and maybe more chance of not attending as a result. The in-person session forces you into a decision to take part." [P7]

All those CoP participants who took part in the research said that they found Evaluation Matters to be a supportive community. The supportive culture of the CoP was set and facilitated from the point of its in-person launch and factors contributing to feeling supported within the community included, shared values and aims in terms of having the learner at the forefront of widening access and participation evaluation work and the willingness of the group, facilitators and training experts to share practice:

"Community, what's been good about the CoP is what's been good about SCAPP. People understand they are part of something." [P1]

"CoP Participants sharing of experiences and being really transparent and honest. It's a very open network and sharing has been good." [P4]

"The opportunity to discuss, sense check and test approaches. I like the iterative engagement aspect of the CoP." [P7]

"I've gained loads of practical things and just the space to think about evaluation and to be inspired by other people. It's a very open and sharing environment; no [self-]protection exists. It's been such a creative space to be involved and being able to be open about where we are" [P6]

Gaining reassurance was frequently mentioned:

"The biggest thing is probably the relationship with other people in same boat as us, to see that we're not the only ones struggling with aspects of evaluation" [P2]

"It's hugely reassuring to me that others experience the same issues in WP – time; knowledge; resources; knowing you're not alone is important" [P9]

This evidence supports the outcome indicators from the Theory of Change: '*Practitioners feel supported by their peers in the CoP'* and *'The CoP promotes collaboration with a network of peers'*, although collaboration outwith scheduled meetings and directed tasks was hampered by time constraints:

"Not much [collaboration] really. People are already busy and stretched. It takes a lot for folk to go the extra mile and collaborate outwith scheduled meetings unless there's a specific area you might contact someone about but I'm as guilty as everyone else here." [P5]

Quantitative data from the final survey responses to questions about collaboration, professional networks and support from peers shows a high level of agreement and aligns with the research findings (figure 2).

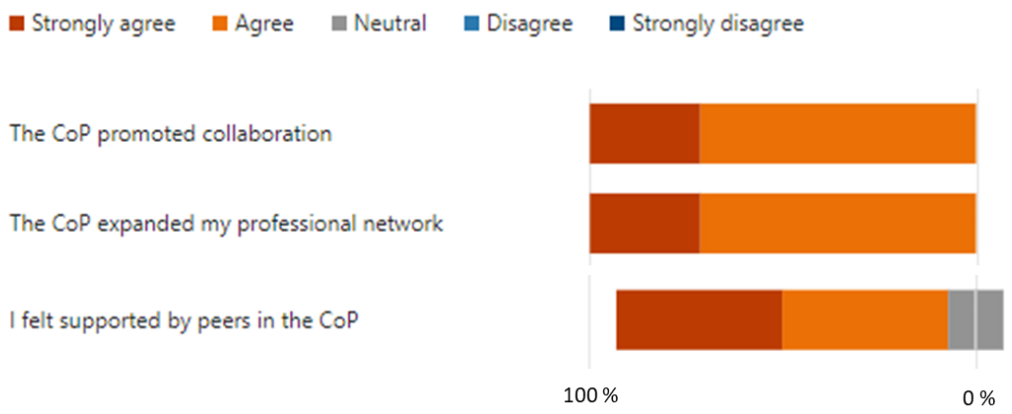

Figure 2: Final survey responses to questions about collaboration, professional networks and support from peers

Training and development

One of the aims was that *'Skills and knowledge in aspects of WP evaluation are gained through training opportunities in areas identified by the CoP',* however, the quantity and quality of training opportunities exceeded expectations of participants and became an even larger aspect of the CoP than facilitators had expected at the start:

"I had assumed a CoP would be more of a network but for me it's almost more of a training course. So, it exceeded my expectations. I knew there would be information sessions but there is much more CPD than I had expected" [P3]

The training and learning opportunities offered via the CoP were described by participants as professional; targeted; relevant; well-pitched; varied; practical; insightful; and useful. Highlights, in terms of CoP training and CPD opportunities, include sessions on the Theory of Change for evaluation, the data analysis with Excel (both sessions delivered by CoP members) and the NERUPI model. Commenting on the training on offer within the CoP, participants described this as:

"Excellent, well-pitched, varied, practical, related to my work and of benefit in future work." [P3]

"Excellent. For those for whom research and evaluation is not their day-to-day work, it's pitched correctly" [P4]

It was originally conceived that training needs identified by the CoP could inform a series of SCAPP webinars that would be open to the broader SCAPP community. In practice, those approached to deliver the additional training opportunities expressed a preference to work with the closed CoP group rather than deliver an open-to-all webinar. This format was employed once in April 2023 with a SCAPP webinar followed by a closed CoP group discussion. This was the least popular training opportunity in the May online survey and therefore was not repeated. However, more open-to-all training opportunities was one of the suggestions for the CoP moving forward.

Evaluation learning gains and impact on practice

Knowledge and skills developed through training opportunities were most frequently mentioned in survey responses as the main gains from participating in the CoP. The key insight for the current evaluation project was the importance of planning (79% of respondents to the May survey).

All interview participants reported that their knowledge of evaluation had improved as a result of participating in the CoP. Typical examples include:

"It's strengthened my understanding for robust evaluation." [P10]

"My evaluation knowledge has increased tenfold. Whatever I thought I needed beforehand has been massively enhanced." [P9]

"I've learned a lot of specific good practice e.g. doing pre- and post-evaluation – I'd do this now … I've been recording data more thoroughly and trying to make sure my reporting is clear and appropriate for the audience." [P10]

Interview participants commented on their use of resources to inform the planning and design of evaluation work, and the SCAPP WP Evaluation Guide and Evaluation Cycle in particular:

"I'd now refer to the Evaluation Guide in my planning of evaluation and being able to apply the principles within the guide." [P1]

"We've used the Evaluation Cycle in our Team over the summer to plan our evaluation work. It helped us to decide where are we, and look at what are we doing next." [P2]

"Where to find resources for different stages in the evaluation cycle. Better understanding of data analysis. How to make evaluation more robust." [Final survey]

Interview participants reported on what they have learned and where they are using it to make a positive impact on their practice:

"I think things through more fully especially the process of having to articulate what you're doing to others in the CoP. It forces you to be clear about what you're doing." [P1]

"The CoP inspired a radical rethink of how we approach evaluation in our programme; it inspired a new approach to impact and formative evaluation to enhance our delivery." [P4]

"Use of the NERUPI model, it's enabling us to evaluate less, make more considered decisions about why and how to evaluate. We should be selecting what to evaluate and why – I've learned." [P6]

These provide evidence for outcome indicators: *'Skills and knowledge in aspects of WP evaluation are gained through training opportunities in areas identified by the CoP',* 'and *CoP participants demonstrate expertise in WP evaluation across the stages of the Evaluation Cycle'*

100% of final survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the CoP enhanced knowledge and skills and introduced new evaluation resources (figure 3).

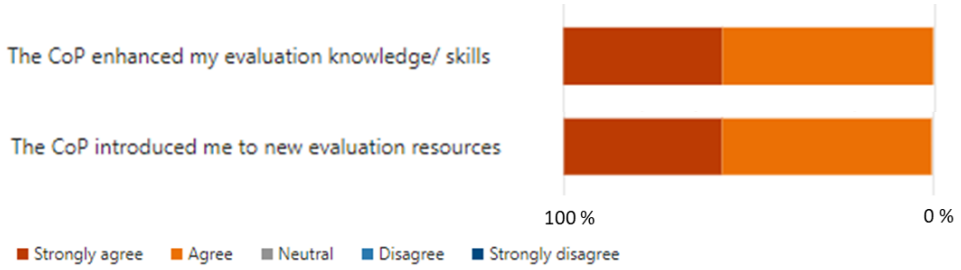

Figure 3: Final survey responses to questions about knowledge, skills and resources

Confidence

When asked in the final survey what the main gains from participating in the CoP were, confidence and reassurance were mentioned most frequently (after gains in knowledge and skills). Comments from the May and final surveys included:

"More confidence in my approach, more skills in evaluation" [May survey]

"Assurances in methods and approaches of evaluation." [May survey]

"It has helped diminish my feeling of Imposter Syndrome a bit!" [Final survey]

"Skills and confidence in carrying out evaluation. A greater understanding of where to look for resources to support this. A heightened commitment to evaluation and pushing for this to be a priority in workload planning." [Final survey]

All participants in interviews reported that their knowledge of evaluation has increased since engaging with the CoP, as the following quotes highlight:

"My confidence has increased. For example, I'd be happy now providing an overview of my work and how plan to evaluate it." [P2]

"I'm more confident – Theory of Change has been a game changer. Also, just knowing other people are having the same struggles so it's not some deficit within my practice." [P5]

Participants reported being more confident in experimenting with different evaluation approaches, methodologies, and tools. They reported increased confidence in using the Evaluation Guide and the Evaluation Cycle to plan evaluation, being more confident in undertaking future WP evaluations and increased confidence in evaluating evaluations:

"My confidence in evaluation has definitely increased as a result of the CoP. I'm really excited about the idea of evaluating my evaluation and trying new techniques and that absolutely has come from being inspired in the CoP." [P3]

"The Guide is really quite accessible. This is really important. Imposter Syndrome is rife in WP circles so this matters for confidence… Accessible language encourages people to learn." [P5]

Furthermore, some participants felt that they were more confident seeking support in evaluation than they had been before engaging in the CoP:

"I now know where my own limits are now so I can seek support… It has developed relationships internally, so I now reach out to colleagues internally in other departments." [P4]

Together, these provide evidence for the outcome indicators from the Theory of Change: *'Practitioners have confidence in their evaluation abilities'*, *'Confidence to undertake evaluations are increased'*, *'Practitioners feel confident in using resources such as the WP Evaluation Guide'* and *'Practitioners feel confident in using resources such as the Evaluation Cycle'*

Further evidence for the outcome indicators was provided by the results of the two online surveys.

In May, respondents were asked 'How confident do you feel' in these 5 aspects of evaluation, and the results were overall positive (figure 4).

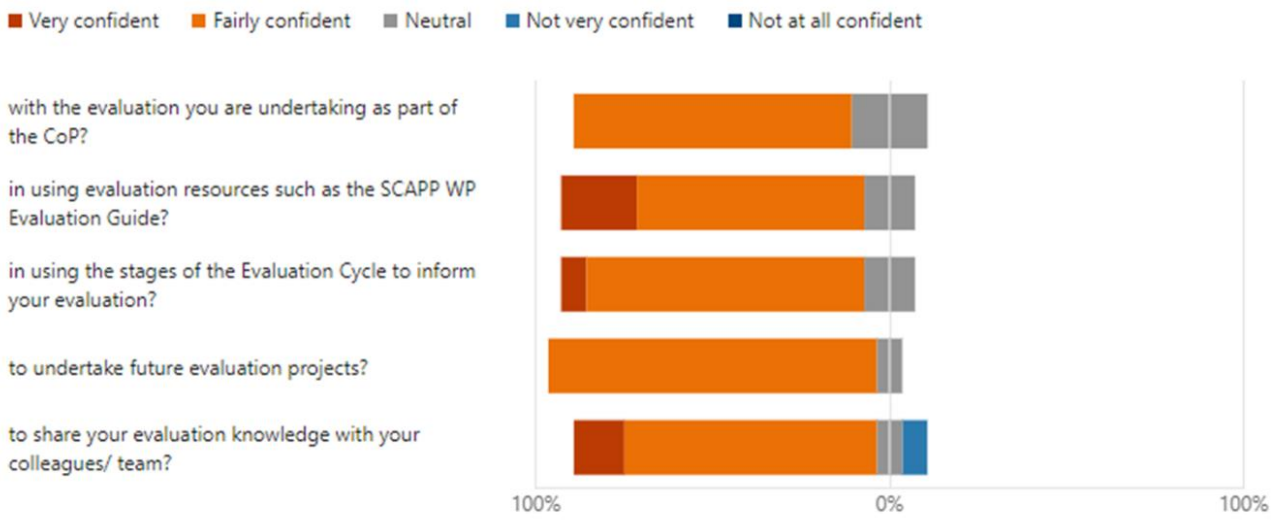

Figure 4: May survey responses to 'How confident do you feel' about 5 aspects of evaluation

Research findings indicated that participants reported increases in confidence over the year, and by the final survey in January 2024 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their confidence had increased (figure 5).

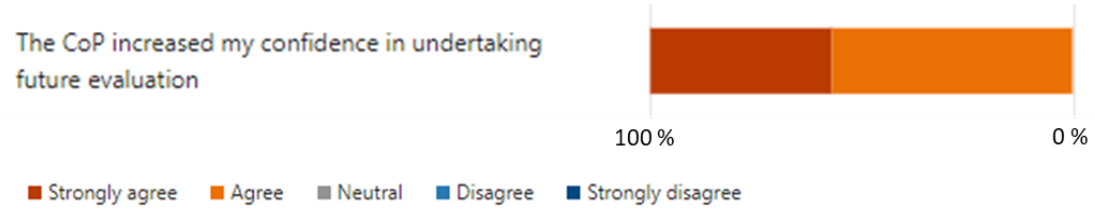

Figure 5: Final survey responses to a question about confidence in evaluation

Time

Time to participate in the CoP and to focus on evaluation is the biggest challenge highlighted consistently in surveys (64% of respondents to the May survey and 86% in the final survey) and interview participants were unanimous in their opinion of the greatest challenge facing them in terms of being a member of the CoP – time. Despite this challenge, monitoring data showed attendance at CoP meetings and optional training across the year was high.

On the one hand, interview participants agreed the CoP had created time and focus for evaluation:

"The CoP has been incredibly useful and an 'excuse' to carve out the time rather than seeing evaluation as a bolt on." [P4]

"I've gained loads of practical things and just space to think about evaluation and to be inspired by other people." [P6]

"Time commitment [is a challenge]. Reflecting on things after the meeting and trying things out was limited. Really pleased there were scheduled meetings as that really encouraged me to put time aside to attend." [Final survey]

On the other hand, they noted a lack of time both to engage with the CoP and to do evaluation:

"I said to my (CoP) team member, if you and I can't even find the time to meet about evaluation, how am I supposed to find the time to do any evaluation?" [P2]

"Evaluation is not always prioritised due to doing the work on the ground which is the priority." [P1]

"Time is a challenge; it's definitely on top of my existing job role; something I actively have to create the time to do. I have a supportive manager but that doesn't mean my other work stops. So, I need to balance the two." [P9]

"The main challenge has just been limited time to dedicate to this group." [Final survey]

One interview participant noted that, while the CoP provided the necessary skills and resources to allow relatively inexperienced participants to engage in evaluation, what the CoP could not do was to influence how much time is devoted to evaluation outwith the sessions themselves:

"The CoP can't give people time. As we move to more impact-driven and metric-driven [practice] we need time to gather the information and analyse it. In England, it can be someone's whole job. The CoP is doing its best to upskill and support but can't give time to carry out the evaluation work itself." [P7]

The measurable outcome indicator from the Theory of Change was '*Participation in the CoP creates the time and focus to work on WP evaluation'*. We can conclude that this outcome was somewhat met.

Building capacity in the sector through local advocates for WP evaluation

Most participants reported that their participation in the WP Evaluation Matters CoP has impacted positively on the knowledge and practice of their broader team. Indeed, some participants said that such knowledge exchange had been a motivation to become involved in the CoP.

Participants report becoming advocates of evaluation and sharing of good practice; sharing resources with team members within their organisations or going one step further and developing collaboration mechanisms that had hitherto not existed such as a Teams channel to discuss evaluation or sharing evaluation work as part of regular team meetings:

"we're passing things on and building in a team meeting where we're going to get anyone in our team who has done an evaluation a chance to share it with the wider team." [P6]

"I will be constantly sharing resources to my team at key points in our practice to ensure we're doing as much as we can to enhance our programme through evaluation... I'm sharing with colleagues in my team who are not part of the CoP but also those who are." [P9]

"I ran a Theory of Change on some of our projects as a result of a training session in the CoP." [P5]

In addition, there was some evidence from respondents to the final survey in January 2024 that the impact of the CoP was felt beyond the participants (figure 6).

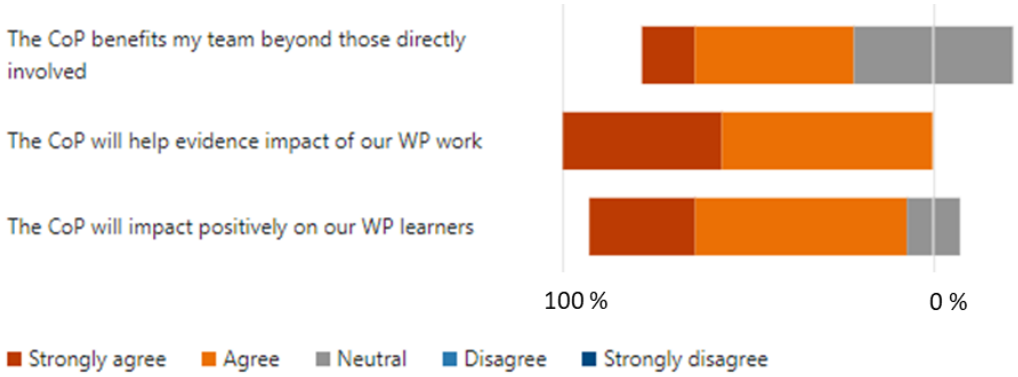

Figure 6: Final survey responses to questions about benefits beyond CoP participants

These provide evidence for outcome indicator '*CoP participants become local advocates for good WP evaluation.'*

Safe space

The research interviews with CoP members revealed an unexpected outcome. That is, many participants' level of anxiety about evaluation before joining the community of practice, which was compounded by a certain reticence to discuss their evaluation work for fear of exposing either themselves or their organisation. Adjectives used about tackling evaluation before joining the CoP included, 'scary', 'terrifying', and 'imposter syndrome'. Indeed, when asked to sum up the community of practice in one word, one participant described their experience as 'therapy'. Being able to engage with others who were similarly inexperienced in evaluation was deemed helpful, however:

"Therapy – hearing that other people are having the same challenges, that it's not just me and that I'm not going crazy!" [P5]

"It's like a safe space for people to learn and develop together." [P9]

The CoP provides a 'safe space' to collaborate; a space where transparency and honesty about evaluation experience and knowledge are deemed to facilitate the sharing of ideas and where shared values facilitate a sense of belonging in the community. The final survey in January 2024 provided the opportunity to follow up on the unexpected outcome of the importance of the CoP as a 'safe space': 43% of respondents strongly agreed that 'The CoP provided a safe space to share concerns' with a further 29% agreeing with the statement (71.5% total positive responses) and 29% neutral response.

Final outputs from the Community of Practice

'*Produce final output from CoP for the sector*' was a measurable outcome indicator for success of the CoP in itself. With 10 teams contributing to the final outputs of a collaborative report and/or producing one of 8 case studies, this outcome was successfully achieved. In addition, the final outputs demonstrated '*The CoP promotes collaboration with a network of peers*' and *'CoP participants demonstrate expertise in WP evaluation across the stages of the Evaluation Cycle'* through the production of the collaborative report framed around reflections across the 6 stages of the Evaluation Cycle, and peer review support for producing case studies.

These reflective final output documents were analysed with respect to the full set of evaluation indicators from the Theory of Change to provide further evidence of any impact of the CoP on participants. They clearly articulate the learning from the CoP, the impact on developing evaluation practices and the benefit of the collaborative approach, and were found to provide evidence for: '*Practitioners feel confident in using resources such as the WP Evaluation Guide*', '*Participation in the CoP creates the time and focus to work on WP evaluation*', '*Skills and knowledge in aspects of WP evaluation are gained through training opportunities in areas identified by the CoP*' and '*CoP participants become local advocates for good WP evaluation'.*

Summary of findings by research theme

Tables 1 (page 4) and Table 2 (page 5) summarise findings by the research themes – Participant Opinion of the Community of Practice and Impact of the Community of Practice on Participants, respectively.

Suggestions for the Community of Practice Moving Forward

Research participants were asked about what is needed for the CoP, moving forward. The most detailed suggestions came from the participants, former participants and facilitators who had direct experience of the CoP. The other stakeholders interviewed all expressed the opinion that the CoP sounded like a good platform for supporting WP practitioners with evaluation and that, if the pilot was shown to be successful, it should be properly resourced to continue. The suggestions from the CoP members are summarised in Table 3 (page 7).

Views on the future of WP evaluation in Scotland

CoP members and stakeholders were asked their opinions on what else, outwith the CoP, was needed to support the future of WP evaluation in Scotland. These perspectives are important comments on the context in which another CoP should operate as well as an indication of what should be in place if the CoP were not to continue. The research findings are summarised in Table 4 (page 7).

DISCUSSION

Findings from the mixed methods evaluation to address the primary evaluation question: *Has the SCAPP WP Evaluation Matters Community of Practice been successful in the aims of building evaluation knowledge and capacity in participants and the sector?* were reported thematically and where findings provided evidence for the intermediate outcomes identified from the evaluation framework provided by the Theory of Change, these were highlighted. The table below summarises the measurable outcomes from the Theory of Change.

Measurable outcome from ToC	Data collection method or data source	Evidence that outcome was achieved or progressed
Interest in the CoP and attendance at regular meetings is high	Monitoring data	Yes
Practitioners feel supported by their peers in the CoP	Surveys/ interviews	Yes – overall the reassurance provided by peers was highlighted
Practitioners feel confident in using resources such as the WP Evaluation Guide	Surveys/ interviews/ Final output from CoP	Yes – participants reported increased confidence
Practitioners feel confident in using resources such as the Evaluation Cycle	Surveys/ interviews/ Final output from CoP	Yes – participants reported increased confidence
Participation in the CoP creates the time and focus to work on WP evaluation	Surveys/ interviews	Somewhat – some evidence and yet time was the biggest challenge
Attendance at optional training sessions is high	Monitoring data	Yes
Skills and knowledge in aspects of WP evaluation are gained through training opportunities in areas identified by the CoP	Surveys/ interviews/ Final output from CoP	Yes – evidence is strong for learning gain
Confidence to undertake evaluations are increased	Surveys/ interviews	Yes – participants reported increased confidence

CoP participants become local advocates for good WP evaluation	Surveys/ interviews/ Final output from CoP	Somewhat – there is some evidence for sharing of learning from the CoP
CoP participants demonstrate expertise in WP evaluation across the stages of the Evaluation Cycle	Final output from CoP	Yes – the collaborative report was structured around the Evaluation Cycle
The CoP promotes collaboration with a network of peers	Surveys/ interviews/ Final output from CoP	Somewhat – the final output demonstrates collaboration but less throughout year (time issue)
Practitioners have confidence in their evaluation abilities	Surveys/ interviews	Yes – participants reported increased confidence
Produce final output from CoP (format tbc) for the sector	Final output from CoP	Yes – strong final output with reflective case studies and collaborative report
Practitioners produce robust evaluations of their programmes		Beyond the scope and timeframe of the CoP
Evaluation capacity in the sector is enhanced		Beyond the scope and timeframe of the CoP

Table 5: Measurable outcomes from the Theory of Change

The benefits and impact of the community of practice were highlighted through themes: a community for sharing practice, training and development, evaluation learning gains and impact on practice and confidence.

Scotland is a small country, with 19 Higher Education Institutions and 19 Colleges offering Higher National qualifications, and the Scottish Higher Education sector is well known for its collegiality. For example, 'the strong partnership approach to enhancing the quality of learning and teaching' (Scottish Funding Council, 2024: p1) demonstrated by cross-agency project work and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Scotland Enhancement Themes approach. The CoP both demonstrated and relied upon the same collegiality within the widening access and widening participation to Higher Education community. The need for collegiality in a community of practice, and a sense of belonging through a 'safe, supportive environment' were highlighted by Bailey *et al* (2022) reflecting on their faculty learning community model in one institution and these were as important, if not more so, with the WP Evaluation Matters CoP bringing together WP practitioners representing HEIs and organisations from across Scotland.

Crockford and Sherlock (2023) in the TASO Project report: Learning about evaluation with small cohorts recommend 'Higher education providers should seek opportunities for peer support, as working in isolation on complex, technical or unfamiliar evaluation methodologies brings a risk of incorrect applications, flawed conclusions and stalled projects.' The CoP provided a forum for such peer support for widening access providers, alongside the training and development opportunities to enhance evaluation skills and knowledge.

Wenger argues in his book 'Communities of Practice Learning, Meaning and Identity' that 'Because learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity. It is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming' (Wenger, 1998, p215).

The CoP was designed to do more than just provide the CPD opportunities to develop skills and knowledge. Using Wenger's idea of social participatory learning in a 'safe space' to experience, within the community, the learning needed to develop as a 'practitioner evaluator', it provided a chance to develop an 'evaluation mindset' and progress towards becoming an evaluator; a journey which can take around 3-4 years, according to our stakeholder experts interviewed for the research.

We were struck by the parallels in identity formation for WP practitioners in the CoP developing an evaluator identity and the learners they work with and support in the transition towards a new identity as a student (MacFarlane, 2018).

Time – to participate in the CoP and to spend on evaluation – was the biggest challenge highlighted by CoP participants. One research participant commented that "The CoP can't give people time." [P7] Professor Liz Austen of the Evaluation Collective, at an online event on 22 November 2023, discussed the idea that although 'we can't create more time, we can move it around'. For example, frontloading evaluation activity, through the planning stages at the start of a project, can save a lot more time at the end when trying to find data, etc. She concluded that by working together as a collective time could be saved by sharing practice, and by creating time and space to think about evaluation. The CoP created this time and space, to a certain extent, provided a platform for working together and a key learning point was the importance of planning an evaluation. We hope therefore the CoP may contribute to saving time for time-poor practitioners in the future.

Evidence was not demonstrated for the longer-term outcome indicators of '*Practitioners produce robust evaluations of their programmes*' and '*Evaluation capacity in the sector is enhanced*' as these were considered beyond the scope and timeframe of the CoP. However, evidence of achieving the intermediate outcome indicators detailed in table 5, and progress towards CoP participants becoming local advocates for WP evaluation, demonstrates capacity-building in the sector, while the findings overall demonstrate achievement of the aim of building knowledge and capacity of the WP practitioners involved in this first iteration of a SCAPP WP Evaluation Matters Community of Practice.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, WP Evaluation Matters members report benefiting from the community of practice in many more ways than simply expanding their networks across the Scottish WP sector. Benefits include being supported to discuss, share and learn about evaluation in an environment that was designed to be inclusive and proactively collaborative from the CoP's outset. The opportunity to come together with practitioners from across the sector who share similar levels of knowledge and experience in evaluation engendered a sense of togetherness around shared values for widening participation and confidence to engage in the community. Being 'forced' to carve out time for evaluation, which is often seen as a 'bolt-on' or 'afterthought' to delivery, and having the 'space' and

time to focus on evaluation allowed members to gain insight into how other WP teams and institutions are evaluating their work. Relationships were strengthened both within members' teams and with practitioners across the sector, as a result. Additionally, CoP members were able to share practical expertise from their projects and organisations.

Such sharing and relationship-building were facilitated by the collaborative culture of the community which was promoted throughout. Collaboration was facilitated through regular meetings, having a space to collaborate within the training sessions, and in shared tasks. Collaboration was, however, reported to be largely restricted to the CoP meetings and training sessions, with some interaction via the Teams channel and evidence of some limited collaboration between members outwith CoP sessions. Production of the final collaborative report and case studies demonstrated a high level of collaboration at the end of the process. In planning future iterations of the CoP, it would be judicious to consider ways in which members could be encouraged and facilitated to engage more outwith formal CoP sessions and to ensure that this aspect of membership is considered an expectation. Scheduling more in-person sessions, which is the preference of the majority of research participants, might encourage more collaboration of this kind. Facilitators too, gained benefits from their membership of the CoP by way of being reminded of good evaluation practice and working with and developing others in evaluation knowledge and expertise.

The level, amount, and depth of the continuing professional development on offer within the community of practice was above the expectations of many CoP members. Variously described as, 'excellent'; 'professional'; 'targeted'; 'relevant; 'well-pitched'; 'varied'; 'practical' and 'insightful', provided a further opportunity to meet new colleagues, share, and network and was especially useful for the majority of participants who do not have access within their teams to a specialist evaluator. Moreover, in terms of impact, members report enhanced evaluation knowledge and skills, sharing learning with wider teams, utilising new skills and resources to plan evaluation in their teams and more widely, increased confidence in evaluation and in carrying out future evaluations and increased confidence to ask for evaluation support. The CoP has encouraged members to develop mechanisms to share evaluation practice as well as provide an impetus and a focus for evaluation meetings and discussions between team members. There is evidence, therefore, that Evaluation Matters is having a positive impact on evaluation practice as members develop as evaluators and become advocates of evaluation and share good practice. Resources are being utilised in practice, particularly the Evaluation Guide, which was developed for practitioners in an accessible format and is viewed as central to their evaluation practice. Members are confident using the Evaluation Cycle to plan evaluation and are confident experimenting with different evaluation approaches, methodologies, and tools. The level depth and breadth of the training on offer should be highlighted to prospective members ahead of any further iteration of the community of practice.

The most significant challenge faced by members engaged with the CoP and the main reason given for the relative lack of collaboration outwith formal Evaluation Matters session, is the time to participate. This is despite members having been encouraged to attend by their respective line managers. While the priority for practitioners remains the day-to-day delivery of WP activities and in the context of already stretched workloads, making sure that all members can fully participate in the community of practice will be challenging, and time is also an issue for carrying out WP evaluation on top of their day-to-day responsibilities.

A notable finding of this research is the level of self-reported anxiety many members had about evaluation before joining the community of practice which was compounded by a certain reticence to discuss their evaluation work for fear of exposing either themselves or their organisation. The depth of feeling exhibited in interviews around a fear of being found out is striking and evidenced in adjectives used by research participants to describe their lack of confidence that the CoP was for them: 'scary', 'terrifying', and 'imposter syndrome'. However, members felt more confident and knowledgeable about evaluation and more likely to ask for evaluation support since engaging in the CoP - highlighting the positive impact of the community as a 'safe space' to share, discuss, learn and develop as evaluators, where such anxiety is mitigated to an extent.

In any future iteration of the community of practice, CoP organisers should consider more in-person sessions along with an opportunity for members to catch up at a mid-way (mid-year) point in the schedule of activity although the practicalities, potential resource implications, and impact of numbers attending are acknowledged. Organisers might also consider the introduction of reflection logs and structuring the meetings and sessions to allow more time for sharing and reflection on members' work. Members acknowledged and appreciated the time given in kind by their CoP facilitators and drew attention to this aspect as a risk for Evaluation Matters' sustainability. Similarly, CoP facilitators emphasised the point that reliance on time in kind from facilitators was unsustainable and that the coordination support from within the core SCAPP team was central to its success. The sustainability of the CoP should be addressed in terms of funding for facilitators and resource within the core SCAPP team to support the CoP coordination role.

Factors that would support WP evaluation in Scotland beyond the life of the Community of Practice Research, from the perspective of CoP members and stakeholders, include greater clarity and guidance from funders on expectations of WP evaluation, a greater value placed by funders on qualitative data, better access to and the sharing of data, WP-tailored evaluation templates and examples and a learner tracking tool. There is a need to determine where responsibility for WP evaluation and delivery of Continuing Professional Development sits (SCAPP may have a role to play but not full responsibility) and how WP evaluation and associated CPD for practitioners is appropriately funded and resourced. There was also a suggestion from some research participants that having dedicated evaluators within WP teams was the answer to filling the evidence gap in the sector. On a more fundamental level, participants are clear that what is required is a shift in culture to a position where evaluating WP initiatives and programmes has parity with delivering them. This would allow a proactive approach to evaluation where practitioners, supported by their organisations and line managers, would have time carved out to access CPD to gain the requisite skills and knowledge to plan and carry out WP evaluation for the benefit of the sector as a whole. This research and evaluation shows that the SCAPP WP Evaluation Matters Community of Practice is a successful model that has the potential to support practitioners and organisations in this regard as well as building capacity within the sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Evaluation of the SCAPP WP Evaluation Matters Community of Practice showed this model is a successful method to support WP practitioners in Scotland and the organisations they work for to evaluate their practice, and it should be repeated

2) In future iterations of the WP Evaluation Matters Community of Practice, SCAPP should take into consideration the suggestions from the evaluation of the pilot:

- There should be sufficient funding and resource for facilitation, activities and training
- There should be more in person activities
- Group sizes and activities should promote more collaboration and sharing of issues and solutions throughout the year
- Opportunities for participant reflection throughout the year should be built in

3) To support the work of SCAPP with WP practitioners, the appropriate stakeholders should address the wider context of WP evaluation in the Scottish sector including:

- Clarification of where responsibility for WP evaluation should lie
- More clarity and guidance from funders on their expectations of WP evaluation
- Making WP evaluation a priority, with appropriate resource and time given to it
- Better access to and sharing of data, such as development of a national learner tracking tool

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APPENDIX 1 COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE PARTICIPANTS AND PROJECTS

List of participants at the end of the SCAPP WP Evaluation Matters Community of Practice with links to project case studies, 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 (Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools)	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, Sandra Marume	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, Freya Goble, 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 COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

Date	Activity	Evaluation Cycle Stage	Session delivered by
December 2022	CoP Launch Event (in person at University of Stirling)		SCAPP core team & CoP Facilitators
January 2023	CoP Meeting (online)		CoP Facilitators
March 2023	CoP Meeting (online)	Focus / Design / Gather	CoP Facilitators
March 2023	Theory of Change Workshop (online)	Focus	Alison Browitt (WP Research & Evaluation Officer, University of Glasgow)
March 2023	Data Analysis in Excel (in person at University of Strathclyde)	Analyse	Al Blackshaw (Widening Access Manager, University of Strathclyde)
April 2023	NERUPI Framework & CoP Meeting (online)	Focus	Dr Annette Hayton (Convenor of NERUPI)
May 2023	SCAPP Conference Session (in person)		CoP Facilitators & CoP Members Mel Rookes, Al Blackshaw, Fi Das
June 2023	CoP Meeting (online)	Gather / Analyse	CoP Facilitators
June 2023	Descriptive & Inferential Statistics (online)	Analyse	Greg Brown (Planning Officer, University of Glasgow)
August 2023	CoP Meeting (online)	Design / Gather	CoP Facilitators

September 2023	Presenting Data to Different Audiences (in person at University of St Andrews)	Report	Dr Laurence Lasselle (Senior Lecturer, University of St Andrews)
October 2023	Using Creative Qualitative Methods in Evaluation Work (online)	Gather / Analyse	Prof Stella Devitt-Jones (Professor of Critical Pedagogy, Staffordshire University); Prof Liz Austen (Head of Evaluation and Research, Sheffield Hallam)
November 2023	CoP Writing Retreat (online)	Report	CoP Facilitator – Alison Browitt
November 2023	CoP Meeting (online)	Report	CoP Facilitators
November 2023	Publishing Your Evaluation (online)	Report	Dr Laurence Lasselle (Senior Lecturer University, of St Andrews) & Dr Cathy Stone (Conjoint Associate, Professor University of Newcastle, Sydney)
December 2023	CoP Writing Retreat (online)	Report	CoP Facilitator – Alison Browitt
January 2024	CoP Writing Retreat (online)	Report	CoP Facilitator – Alison Browitt
March 2024	CoP Sharing & Dissemination Event (in person)	Report / Act	SCAPP core team & CoP Facilitators & CoP Members
June 2024	EAN Conference (in person)		CoP Facilitators

APPENDIX 3 THEORY OF CHANGE

SITUATION	SCAPP has an aim to improve WP evaluation in the Scottish sector and to promote capacity building in the area of evaluation for access and participation practitioners. More robust evaluation and evidence of success has been identified by CoWA and others as an area for improvement in WP
AIMS	To promote capacity building in the sector by creating and supporting an active Community of Practice - a group of people who share an interest in WP evaluation, who are undertaking their own evaluation project over the timescale of the CoP, and together, learn how to do it better and develop an output, such as a body of knowledge or tools.
RATIONALE	Wenger's Community of Practice and Cox's Faculty Learning Community models have been shown to be effective in terms of increasing confidence and output around intended areas through peer support and collaboration
ASSUMPTIONS	The CoP will garner enough interest from practitioners; the CoP participants will be supported by their managers to allow active participation and the time away from their substantive roles to do so; the CoP will receive support from SCAPP in terms of organisation and training/development opportunities

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	SHORT OR MEDIUM TERM OUTCOMES	IMPACT/ LONG-TERM OUTCOMES
SCAPP Manager and Development Officer support	Launch event	Interest in the CoP and attendance at regular meetings is high	Confidence to undertake evaluations are increased	Produce final output from CoP (format tbc) for the sector
SCAPP facilitators (time in kind)	Regular online meetings	Practitioners feel supported by their peers in the CoP	CoP participants become local advocates for good WP evaluation	Practitioners have confidence in their evaluation abilities
Resource for launch meeting	Keep in touch via Team	Practitioners feel confident in using resources such as the WP Evaluation Guide	CoP participants demonstrate expertise in WP evaluation across the stages of the Evaluation Cycle	Practitioners produce robust evaluations of their programmes
Delivery of training opportunities	Share experiences	Practitioners feel confident in using resources such as the Evaluation Cycle	The CoP promotes collaboration with a network of peers	Evaluation capacity in the sector is enhanced
Organisation of regular CoP meetings	Share knowledge and resources	Participation in the CoP creates the time and focus to work on WP evaluation		
Host a Team	Discussion of topics, challenges, solutions	Attendance at optional training sessions is high		

WP Evaluation Guide and Evaluation Cycle	Optional training opportunities on topics identified by CoP Work together to produce final output from CoP (format tbc)	Skills and knowledge in aspects of WP evaluation are gained through training opportunities in areas identified by the CoP		

APPENDIX 4 SURVEY ITEMS

May 2023 online survey items (Microsoft Forms)

1. Consent to take part in evaluation research: A Study of the Impact of a New Community of Practice for Practitioners carrying out Evaluation of Widening Participation Interventions (I agree to take part in this research study/ I do not agree to take part in this research study)
2. Please rate your experience in the Community of Practice so far (1 to 5 stars)
3. Has the Community of Practice met your expectations so far? (Yes/ No/ Maybe)
4. Please expand on your answer to question 3
5. Please rate the sessions you have taken part in. Please choose 'Not applicable' if you did not attend that session (Very good/ Good/ Poor/ Very poor/ Not applicable)
6. Launch event (5 Dec 2022, in Stirling)
   - January CoP meeting (Intro/ Re-intros, online)
   - March CoP meeting (FOCUS/ DESIGN/ GATHER, online)
   - Theory of Change workshop (13 March, online)
   - Data Analysis in Excel workshop (29 March, at Strathclyde)
   - NERUPI Framework webinar (24 April, online)
7. What has been the best thing about the Community of Practice, so far?
8. What, if anything, have you gained from participation in the Community of Practice?
9. What challenges have you experienced in participating in the Community of Practice?
10. What could be improved, or what would you like to see more of in the Community of Practice?
11. What will you do differently in your practice after participating in the Community of Practice?
12. Thinking about your current WP evaluation project, what have been the key learning points or insights into evaluation for you?
13. How confident do you feel in the following (Very confident/ Fairly confident/ Neutral/ Not very confident/ Not confident at all)
    - with the evaluation you are undertaking as part of the CoP?
    - in using evaluation resources such as the SCAPP WP Evaluation Guide?
    - in using the stages of the Evaluation Cycle to inform your evaluation?
    - to undertake future evaluation projects?
    - to share your evaluation knowledge with your colleagues/ team?
14. What more support do you need for WP evaluation?
15. Any final comments?

January 2024 online survey items (Microsoft Forms)

1. Consent to take part in evaluation research: A Study of the Impact of a New Community of Practice for Practitioners carrying out Evaluation of Widening Participation Interventions (I agree to take part in this research study/ I do not agree to take part in this research study)
2. Please rate your experience in the Community of Practice (1 to 5 stars)
3. Did the Community of Practice meet your expectations? (Yes/ No/ Maybe)
4. Please expand on your answer to question 3
5. Please rate the sessions you have taken part in since 1 June. Please choose 'Not applicable' if you did not attend that session (Very good/ Good/ Poor/ Very poor/ Not applicable)
   - June CoP meeting (ANALYSE, online)
   - Statistics workshop (5 June, online)
   - August CoP meeting (GATHER/ survey tools, online)
   - Presenting Data workshop (20 Sept, at St. Andrews)
   - Qualitative Methods workshop (9 Oct, online)
   - November CoP meeting (final outputs, online)
   - Publishing your Evaluation workshop (27 Nov, online)
   - Writing retreats (Nov, Dec or Jan, online)
6. What has been the best thing about the Community of Practice?
7. What, if anything, have you gained from participation in the Community of Practice?
8. What challenges have you experienced in participating in the Community of Practice?
9. Please describe the main knowledge, insights or skills gained from participating in the CoP
10. What will you do differently in your practice after participating in the Community of Practice?
11. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Strongly agree/ Agree/ Neutral/ Disagree/ Strongly disagree)
    - The CoP promoted collaboration
    - The CoP expanded my professional network
    - The CoP enhanced my evaluation knowledge/ skills
    - The CoP benefits my team beyond those directly involved
    - The CoP will help evidence impact of our WP work
    - The CoP will impact positively on our WP learners
    - The CoP helped me carry out more robust evaluation this year
    - The CoP increased my confidence in undertaking future evaluation
    - The CoP introduced me to new evaluation resources
    - The CoP provided a safe space to share concerns
    - The CoP could have been better and achieved so much more
    - I felt supported by peers in the CoP
    - I felt supported by facilitators in the CoP
    - The CoP produced resources that will benefit the sector
12. If the Community of Practice was to run again, what, if anything, would you change?
13. What more support do you need for WP evaluation?
14. Any final comments?

APPENDIX 5 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW THEMES AND QUESTIONS

Participant opinion of the Community of Practice

- What led you to become involved with the Community of Practice?
- What, if anything, have you gained from Community of Practice participation?
- What has been the best thing about Community of Practice participation?
- What challenges have you experienced in participating in the Community of Practice?
- Have you found the Community of Practice community supportive?
- Has the Community of Practice promoted collaboration? If so, with whom specifically?
- How much interaction have you had with Community of Practice participants outside of scheduled sessions (beyond any interactions you would normally have in your role)?
- What is your opinion on the training and learning opportunities offered throughout the CoP?

Facilitator opinion of the Community of Practice

- What led you to agree/volunteer to facilitate the Community of Practice?
- What, if anything, have you gained from facilitating the Community of Practice?
- What has been the best thing about facilitating the Community of Practice?
- What challenges have you experienced in facilitating the Community of Practice?
- How were you supported as a facilitator?
- Have you found the Community of Practice engaged?
- Have you found the Community of Practice community collaborative?
- What factors have promoted collaboration?
- How has your knowledge of evaluation been enhanced by facilitating the Community of Practice?

Impact of the Community of Practice on Participants

- What have you changed, or will you do differently in your practice after participating in the Community of Practice?
- Is your participation in the Community of Practice having an impact on knowledge and practice in your broader team? How do you know?

- How much, if at all, are you sharing your learning and experiences with colleagues?
- How confident do you feel in using evaluation resources such as the WP Evaluation Guide, or others introduced in CoP sessions?
- How confident do you feel in using the stages of the Evaluation Cycle to inform your evaluation?
- How confident do you feel in undertaking future WP evaluation projects and has this changed over your time in the CoP?

Future of the Community of Practice

- Please comment on the format and organisation of the Community of Practice. Would you like to see it run again, in a similar or a different format?
- What could be improved?
- What would you like to see more of, or less of?
- What is your opinion of Community of Practice as an initiative to promote evaluation knowledge and capacity building?
- What might you do differently [as a facilitator]?
- Should the CoP continue, what more support and/or resources are needed to facilitate the CoP?

Future of WP Evaluation in Scotland

- What more support and/or resources are needed for practitioners carrying out WP evaluation?
- Should evaluation be part of practitioners CPD?
- What is needed to support WP evaluation in Scotland beyond the life of the Community of Practice?
- Who should drive and coordinate WP evaluation in Scotland? Regional or national level? SCAPP or another organisation?
- Who should be responsible for tracking and measuring WA/WP impact?
- What should be the priorities going forward for WP evaluation?

- Is there anything else you'd like to feed back or comment on?
- If you could sum up your experience of participating in the CoP in one word, what word would you use?