

<b>Serial number</b>	0161
<b>Title</b>	Building capacity and partnerships for evaluations of widening participation activities
<b>Submitter</b>	Dr. Nadine Zacharias, Mr. Graeme Atherton

### **SRHE round table: Building capacity and partnerships for evaluations of widening participation activities**

The evaluation of outreach activities and those directed at the retention and success of under-represented students in higher education is an important aspect of widening participation work in England and Australia.

In Australia, the evaluation of the Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP) in 2016 by ACIL Allen Consulting has put a spotlight on the lack of, and urgent need for, a national evaluation framework (ACIL Allen Consulting, 2017). In response to the report, the federal Department of Education and Training has commissioned the development of a national HEPPP evaluation framework that will operate in a limited-reporting environment to structure and guide three levels of evaluation:

1. quality-improvement (formative) evaluations of university HEPPP-funded activities
2. (impact) evaluations of the effectiveness of university HEPPP-funded activities, and
3. overall program evaluation of the HEPPP (Department of Education and Training, 2017).

The expectation is that universities will carry out these evaluations within principles and guidelines provided by the department and that multiple evaluations will be undertaken concurrently in any given year. Little consideration has been given to date to the level of evaluation skills and expertise required on the part of practitioners as well as the resourcing required by universities to carry out these evaluations.

By contrast, conversations about and evaluations of program effectiveness and best practice in research design and implementation have been a long-standing part of widening participation efforts in England. Studies to systematically evaluate Aimhigher partnerships became the catalyst for these conversations (Passy, Morris & Waldman, 2009; Passy & Morris, 2010). Support for practitioners to effectively evaluate activities and programs covered by Access Agreements have been continued by the Office for Fair Access (OFFA, 2017). Proposed standards of evaluation practice and associated guidance to practitioners on the evaluation of the impact of outreach activities has recently been released by OFFA (Crawford, Dytham & Naylor, 2017).

However, issues of capability and resourcing of practitioners to undertake program evaluations were highlighted in research commissioned by HEFCE (2015a and 2015b) and OFFA (Crawford et al., 2017). These challenges continue in the context of individual HEI access work and that via state funded initiatives such as the recent National Collaborative Outreach Project (NCOP). As the focus moves increasingly to outcomes of higher education for widening access students, the engagement of more diverse stakeholders in access evaluation becomes ever more relevant.

Widening participation practitioners are at the heart of the evaluation challenge as agents who collect, analyse and report on data as well as expert informants in assessments of program effectiveness. However, not all practitioners come to their roles with training and/or expertise in program evaluation and need to acquire these skills on the job and/or partner with academic colleagues to effectively carry out these program evaluations. This round table discussion will bring together academics who are interested, or already involved in, the evaluation of WP activities and practitioners who are, or want to be, involved in the analysis of program effectiveness to chart possible ways forward and explore the enablers of successful evaluation partnerships.

### **Questions**

1. What are the skills and expertise required for widening participation program evaluations?
2. How can practitioner and academic researchers most constructively collaborate to achieve high-quality evaluation outcomes?
3. What are examples of good practice? Why did they work so well? How can successful models be systematically applied to improve practice across diverse sectors?

## Reference list

ACIL Allen Consulting (2017). *Evaluation of the Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP)*. Accessed on 20 June 2017 at [https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/final\\_heppp\\_evaluation\\_report\\_2017.03.16\\_0.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/final_heppp_evaluation_report_2017.03.16_0.pdf)

Crawford, C., Dytham, S. & Naylor, R. (2017). *The evaluation of the impact of outreach: proposed standards of evaluation practice and associated guidance*. Accessed on 22 June 2017 at <https://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Standards-of-Evaluation-Practice-and-Associated-Guidance-FINAL.pdf>

Department of Education and Training (2017). *Developing an evaluation framework for the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program. Briefing 20 June 2017*. Australian Government, Canberra.

HEFCE (2015a). *Student Opportunity outcomes framework research: in-depth study. Report to HEFCE by CFE Research July 2015*. Accessed on 20 June 2017 at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2015/sodepth/>

HEFCE (2015b). *Student Opportunity outcomes framework research programme: data return project. Report to HEFCE by CFE Research July 2015*. Accessed on 20 June 2017 at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2015/sodataret/>

Passy, R., Morris, M. & Waldman, J. (2010). *Evaluation of Aimhigher and widening participation outreach programmes on learner attainment and progression: interim report*. Accessed on 20 June 2017 at <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/AIM01>

Passy, R. & Morris, M. (2009). *Evaluation of the impact of Aimhigher: learner attainment and progression*. Accessed on 20 June 2017 at [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/pubs/2010/rd1510/rd15\\_10.pdf](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/pubs/2010/rd1510/rd15_10.pdf)

OFFA (2017). *Evaluating your access activities and expenditure*. Accessed on 20 June 2017 at <https://www.offa.org.uk/universities-and-colleges/guidance/evaluating-your-access-activities/>