

Approaching evaluation and evidence

Office for
Students



January 2019

Overview



Evidence and Impact Strategy



Evidence and evaluation is used effectively by OfS and higher education providers to drive improvements in access and participation

The Strategy and HERA 2017

- The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 and Ministerial Guidance gives the OfS responsibilities and powers to make sure that **evidence and evaluation are utilised effectively to drive improvements** in access and participation
- Regulatory framework enables us to **shape debate and focus**
- Through our influencing power, we can **promote innovation** and encourage dissemination about what works
- The OfS Strategy commits the OfS to being an **intelligent regulator**
- The OfS Business Plan states that “**All access and participation activity is underpinned by evidence and ‘what works’**”
- Access and participation strategic funding and regulation sets expectations and enables providers to **invest and raise ambition**



Why this matters

- We want to **eliminate inequalities** across the whole student lifecycle
- We want to **work with providers** and their partnerships so that investments have the **greatest and most positive impact** possible
- Evidence and evaluation can facilitate **co-creation** and **engagement** which is essential for **sustaining transformational change**
- We know that providers can, and have committed, to applying evidence and evaluation effectively to **drive improvements**. **We need to see more of this in action**
- Systematic **evaluation is essential** to knowing what is working and what is not working, and where **efficiencies** must be made
- Everything we do is an opportunity to **learn more about how to improve** the impact of access and participation

We aim to ensure that...



every student,
whatever their
background,

has a fulfilling
experience of
higher education

that enriches
their lives and
careers.

Participation

Objective 1

All students, from all backgrounds, with the ability and desire to undertake higher education, are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from higher education.

Experience

Objective 2

All students, from all backgrounds, receive a high quality academic experience, and their interests are protected while they study or in the event of provider, campus or course closure.

Outcomes

Objective 3

All students, from all backgrounds, are able to progress into employment, further study, and fulfilling lives, and their qualifications hold their value over time.

Value for money

Objective 4

All students, from all backgrounds, receive value for money.

Evidence outcomes

We have outlined a set of mirrored outcomes for providers and the OfS.

The change we need to see in providers is a change we need to see in ourselves as an intelligent regulator.

Commit to evidence-informed strategy, improvement and collaboration

Use research and evidence to inform investments

Use evaluation and evidence to understand impact and improve outcomes

Detailed provider outcomes – *working words*

Question for you: how can we make sure our language inspires and engages?

Providers value and use evidence and evaluation to improve the impact of access and participation

Provider to evidence-informed strategy and programme design and evaluation

Evidence is valued as a strategic priority and used to drive innovation and improvement

Appropriate resource and skills are dedicated to: staffing, budgets, co-creation and engagement, understanding and skills, knowledge exchange and publication

Provider uses research and evidence to inform design of their programmes

Provider understands the gaps in performance and makes evidenced decisions about how to close those gaps

Programmes, policies and investments are informed by research and evidence of what works

Provider uses evaluation to understand impact and improve

Provider chooses appropriate and meaningful outcomes for their programmes, with a credible theory of change about how to get there

Provider designs and runs robust evaluations appropriate to their investment and activities

Provider interprets evaluation findings to improve the design of strategies, policies and programmes

How we will work

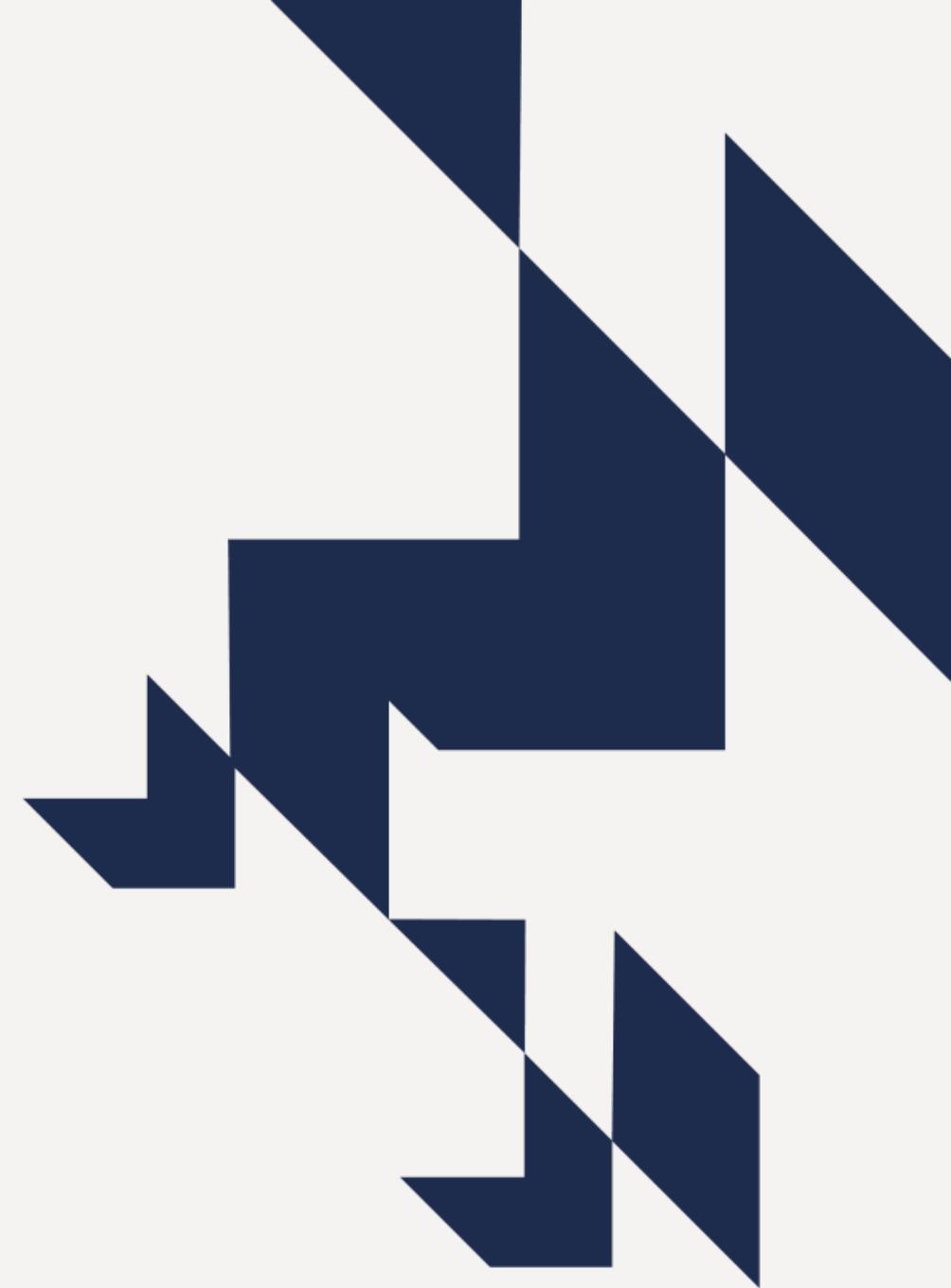


- **Intelligent regulation** to set expectations for providers
- **Engage and support stakeholders** to meet these expectations and embed change
- **Strategic funding** to drive innovation and partnership
- **Improvement within OfS** to embed change across the organisation

Intelligent regulation

- The relationship between regulation, evidence and improvement can be characterised by:
 - Use of evidence to understand and challenge the **credibility** of A&P plans
 - **Monitoring** of plans to intervene where credibility of evidence and evaluation is weak or high risk
 - **Compliance** with adoption and use of compelling approaches and tools
 - **Transparency** requirements on strength of use of evidence and evaluation
 - **Share** good practice relating to evidence and evaluation
- As part of the transformational change to access and participation regulation we will be:
 - Setting **higher expectations** for providers to develop and embed evaluation strategies within access and participation plans
 - Enable providers to carry out **self-assessment** of their own evidence and evaluation landscape so that strategies can be focused and meaningful
 - Giving **guidance and resources** to enable providers to demonstrate how the use of evidence and evaluation is improving understanding and impact through the regulatory process
 - Funding the **Evidence and Impact Exchange** to facilitate systematic knowledge exchange, engagement and collective learning
 - Carrying out efficient and effective **monitoring and responding** to evaluation and research findings

Regulating to eliminate inequalities across the lifecycle



The future of access and participation

- We are committed to achieving **ambitious transformational change**
- Our ambitions are realistic if providers **make equality a priority** and **take the actions**
- We will ensure our access and participation regulation and funding are **outcome-based, risk-based, underpinned by evidence and joined up** with other OfS regulatory activities
- Our vision is to eliminate the gaps in:
 - entry rates at the most selective universities between the most and least represented groups
 - drop-out rates between the most and least represented groups
 - degree outcomes between white and black students
 - degree outcomes between disabled and non-disabled students.

What we will do

- **Challenge providers** by focusing on the level of **ambition** they set, the **credibility** of their plans and the **outcomes** they achieve
- We will be **risk based** and **led by evidence** - those at risk of making insufficient progress will be under greater scrutiny
- There will be **tougher requirements on evaluation** and **targeted support** for this through the commissioning of the EIX
- Publish an access and participation **dataset** which will show the make-up of student bodies across the sector as a whole and at each individual provider
- We will **fund partnerships** to ensure that work is joined up and targeted to meet local needs

Relation to evaluation and evidence

- Using evidence and producing a **compelling evaluation strategy** will be essential to the creation of **credible access and participation plans**
- Our expectations and guidance will be **shaped by evidence**
- We will be providing **tools and resources, developed in partnership with the sector**. This includes the resources focusing on pre-16 outreach, financial support and evidence from funded programmes
- The access and participation **dataset will be published** so that we can all see a picture of current performance
- We are **expecting providers to reflect** on where they are now and where improvements must be made
- ***Evaluation self-assessment tool*** – this multi-dimensional framework covers evaluation design, implementation, learning and strategic context. It forms the basis for our guidance and expectations relating to evidence and evaluation
- **We want to see more collective learning and skills sharing to identify, grow and share expertise across the diversity of the sector**

Reflective Questions

- To eliminate inequalities in higher education we must all reflect upon *how* we are working to make this vision a reality
- This is why the evidence we commission and publish often includes reflective questioning – whole institution approach framework, adult learner outreach, pre-16 outreach, financial support evaluation
- What do we need to ask ourselves to make sure that we are committing to, developing and using evidence and evaluation to make change and improve?
 - *What evidence do we have that there is a need to do something?*
 - *How will we know that what we are doing will address this need ?*
 - *What will have changed, and for whom, as a result?*
 - *Who are we listening to? Who are we not listening to or silencing in our decision making?*
 - *How are we utilising and nurturing expertise and skills?*
 - *What are we doing to make sure we learn from evaluation – and how are we enabling others to learn?*
 - *If we take our vision for eliminating inequality across the lifecycle seriously, how willing are we to challenge ourselves and each other about different forms of privilege and oppressive practice?*

[Questions adapted from those produced by Professor Chantal Davies and Professor Jacqueline Stevenson MBE for research undertaken by *The Runnymede Trust, Sheffield Hallam University and AdvanceHE – to be published 2019* and bell hooks *Teaching Critical Thinking?: practical wisdom*]

Thank you

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