

Dissemination Method: Articles in Academic Journals

Description: Academic Journals are designed to share and advance knowledge in particular fields. They are used to report original research and analysis, plus some Journals include reviews, theoretical discussion pieces and commentary. The Journal of Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning includes innovative practice articles which report institutional interventions which have been evaluated.

Submitted articles are peer-reviewed by subject specialists before being rejected or accepted for publication. Journals might periodically put out special issues where all articles focus on a topic within the scope of the journal.

Type of evidence: Depends on the evaluation being reported

Strengths: Once you have identified your aims, gathered your evidence and drawn conclusions you will have done the bulk of the work to provide the content for an article. Publishing an article on your evaluations could have several benefits:

- Creates an enduring record
- Gives academic credibility to access and participation and equity work
- Helps you to develop our own critical thinking and understandings of your programmes and activities
- Helps you to disseminate information on your activity and knowledge of what works in access and participation to a wider audience
- Enhances your CV and personal credibility particularly in HE

Weaknesses: The main downside is the time and effort involved in preparing an article for publication. You will need to adapt the narrative to the requirements of the Journal, for example demonstrating how it advances knowledge and making it relevant to national (and often also international) audiences. The time taken to go through the peer-review process can be lengthy and you can expect at least one round of revisions. Therefore, the process takes significant commitment to see it through.

Mixed Methods: Mixed methods research is useful when reporting evaluations of programmes because it allows for triangulation of the evidence and can facilitate discussion of why an intervention works, as well as whether it has been shown to be successful in achieving positive outcomes.

Expertise: Medium to High

Requirements: The scope and length (word count) requirement of each Journal varies and may depend on the type of article you're aiming at. As an indication:

- Original research papers might be around 7,000 words. This type of article presents new research which represents an advancement in knowledge or understandings. The focus is on the new findings rather than background discussion, and you should be able to provide data underpinning the research.
- Communication articles and reports of case studies might be around 4,000 words. They are report-style articles that use an example to illustrate

developments on a theory or introduce novel hypotheses, or evolving methods.

- Review articles are generally longer (around 10,000 words) and present a synthesis and discussion of key issues in a particular area of relevance to the scope of the journal. Reviews need to be critical and define developments and future directions across the field rather than a simple literature review.
- Policy briefs and commentaries/opinion pieces might vary in length (500-3,000 words) and should present coherent arguments and solutions. Policy briefs discuss policy advancements and topics relevant to policy making. Opinions pieces give space for authors to discuss policy issues and the implications.
- Academic articles usually adopt a formal tone (e.g. using the third person) and use words precisely with clear definitions and agreed meaning about concepts, although this is not always the case particularly where personal experience and background are relevant to the work.

Articles are expected to demonstrate understanding of the existing body of knowledge and discourses relevant to the topic. A key feature of academic writing is citing sources and providing references. The source of all ideas and resources used in the article needs to be acknowledged so they can be verified and the quality of conclusions can be assessed. The sources need to be established reports and sources or scholarly articles (i.e., other peer-reviewed sources).

Journals generally do not charge for articles to be published (with some exceptions).

Where there are multiple authors, one will need to be identified for correspondence.

Ethical Considerations: Research ethics matter when publishing academic articles and the Journal editors will want to make sure your research participants were involved voluntarily, in an informed way and protected from harm. Ethical approval processes help to demonstrate this. It's important that the participants understand how their data would be used. Protection of anonymity is important, and this includes making sure the article preserves the identity of individual participants, and that you are reporting the data appropriately.

Work planning:

1. The process might begin with an original project idea or theory of change that you've been testing. Depending on the Journal you're aiming at it will need to be relevant to developing thinking and understanding nationally or internationally. You will probably have already completed the research and written up the study, although of course you might also have been thinking about academic publication from the start.
2. Do your research and identify which journals might be most appropriate for your article. Articles can be rejected because they are not quite right for a particular journal. In this case you would generally be given a recommendation about where to submit it but this can delay the process considerably. Start with the description of the journal's aims and intentions and then look to see the interests of the Editorial Board. Search to see if any articles relate to your areas

of interest. This process can also help to extend your use of literature and discussion of findings.

3. Use the information in your project planning documents, your evaluation plan and your evaluation report used to inform the narrative for the article. You should also aim to include a theoretical and conceptual narrative about the rationale and relevance of your activity, and how your research builds on the body of existing knowledge (with references).

3. Check the publication criteria and rules before starting to draft the article – such as the appropriate formatting, style guide, the maximum word count, the required format for tables, referencing etc.

4. Once you have submitted your article to the Journal, the next stage is the peer-review process. The peer reviewers will be looking at aspects such as the suitability of the article to the aims of the Journal, the relevance and what it adds to existing knowledge, the accuracy of the data and rigour of the analysis, relevance of the citations made and references to the topic, making sure of the correct presentation (i.e. for the text, figures and tables, references and citations etc). The Journal editors will also want to make sure that the ethical considerations have been dealt with.

5. The peer-reviewers will have three options – either to reject or accept the article or to ask for revisions. In the latter case you will be asked to make amendments and send the article for resubmission.

6. Assuming the revised draft is accepted for publication, there will be some technical aspects to agree before publication - such as making sure disclosure of any conflicts of interest (i.e. to acknowledge any financial or other interest from the research), signing copyright forms and submitting a data availability statement. The data availability statement will detail if data associated with the article can be accessed. You might choose to make the data underpinning your analysis available via Open Access.

Analysis:

The nature of the analysis will depend on the evaluation approach, but either way is important to take a critical stance and present the argument logically and coherently. Statements and conclusions need to be based evidence-based and reasoned.

Reporting:

A typical format for the article might include the title, a short abstract, a number of keywords (to make your article discoverable), an introduction to the main text, information on the methods, the key results, discussion of the conclusions, acknowledgments; declaration of interest statement; references; appendices. Table and figures usually need be separate from the text and include captions.

Author details and affiliations should be included (and some Journals ask for Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn information).

Useful link(s):

TASO Ethics Guidance available at <https://taso.org.uk/evidence/research-ethics-guidance/>

Practice Example - Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning (WPLL) Journal

Specifications for articles for the Innovative Practice section

- Submissions to this section of the journal should report institutional interventions which have been evaluated.
- Submissions will be peer-reviewed by the editors and are selected for their contribution to innovative practice.
- The articles should be between 1500 and 3000 words in length.
- Authors' details must include a full international contact address, telephone number and e-mail address.

Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning (WPLL) Journal

<https://www.open.ac.uk/about/wideningparticipation/external-events-and-publications/wppl-journal>