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The Self-Assessment Tool for Evaluation:

Developed for and with the Office for Students
by the Centre for Social Mobility

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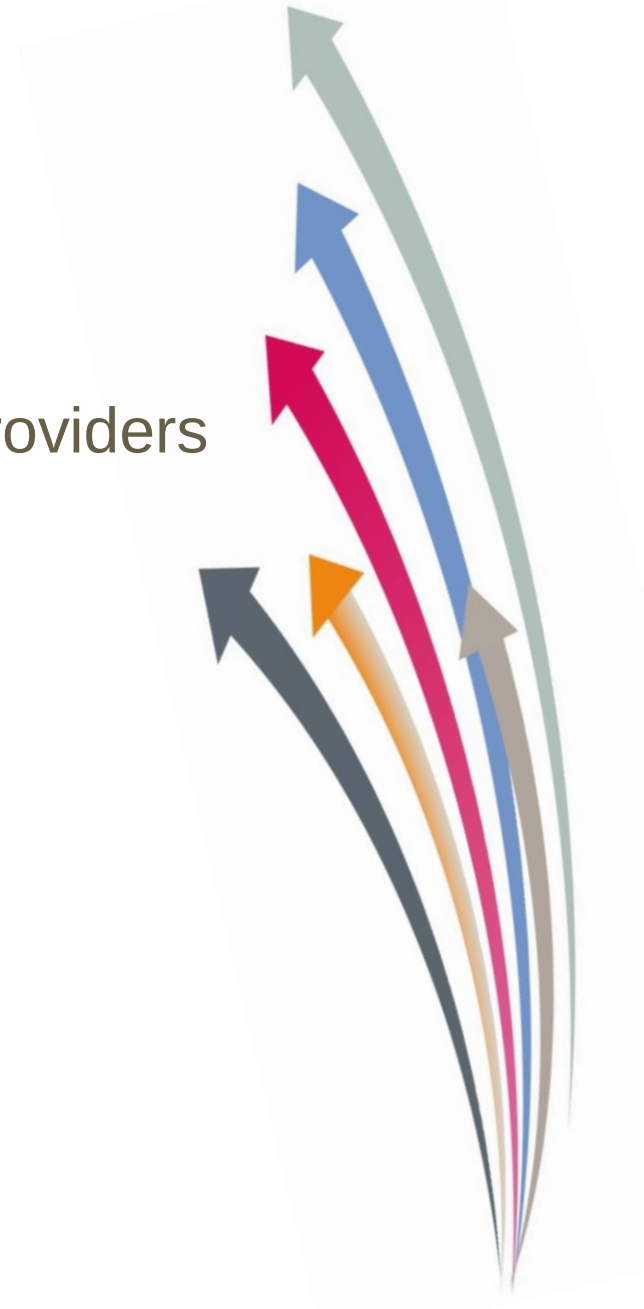
Session plan

1. Introducing the Centre for Social Mobility
2. Understanding effective outreach project: experience of providers
3. The self-assessment tool for evaluation
4. Over to you: enhancing evaluation of outreach exercise
5. Dimensions of the self-assessment process
6. What does this mean for your practice?
7. Discussion



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Our Vision

Combine practice and **research insights** to **benefit**

- students, prospective students, staff and partners
- wider society
- academic debates

to support social mobility through higher education

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Our Research Ambition

- Applied policy research that develops resources with practitioners
- Theoretically rooted Research that relates to real-world issues in social mobility
- Empirical Research
  - Quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods
  - Ranging from large-scale data analysis to studies with several students
- Our research scope is:
  - Institutional, national, international
  - Pre-university, at university, post-university (access, success, progress)
  - Fundamental research into processes relevant to social mobility

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Centre membership

- Academic Staff in the Graduate School of Education
- Academic Staff across the university

- Professional Service Staff in Access and Widening Participation
- Professional Service staff across the university

In development:

Students

- Schools
- Outside Partners

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The understanding effective evaluation of outreach project

- Method:
  - Collaborative work with partner universities and third sector parties
  - Development of guidance and case studies of evaluation practices
- Partners:
  - Research phase: University of Plymouth; University of Liverpool; Loughborough University; University of Exeter, Royal Northern College of Music; Coachbright; Brightside; The Access Project; The Sutton Trust;
  - Self-assessment road testing phase: MMU; Open University; SOAS; Aston University; LIPA; Bishop Groseteste; University of Birmingham; London School of Management Education; UCEM; University of Liverpool

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Key findings

- Structural issues: lines of responsibility, application of resources for evaluation, systems for data and tracking.
- Standards of evaluation need to be applied flexibly
- Range of different types of outcome measures: more attention needed to links between intermediate indicators and long term progression outcomes
- Student tracking processes are a particularly important building block for future outreach impact evaluation studies
- One of the key issues is applying appropriate expertise in evaluation techniques and data analysis

Ingredients of Successful evaluation: Shopping List

1. A senior level WP evaluation contact
2. A culture of evaluation within institutions
3. Regular cycle of project and programme review
4. Clearly articulated and measurable short, medium, and long-term outcome measures
5. Identified a skills base/expertise for undertaking and / or commissioning evaluation
6. Collaborative partnerships within and across institutions to share expertise
7. Mechanisms to enable evaluation results to influence practice internally and externally

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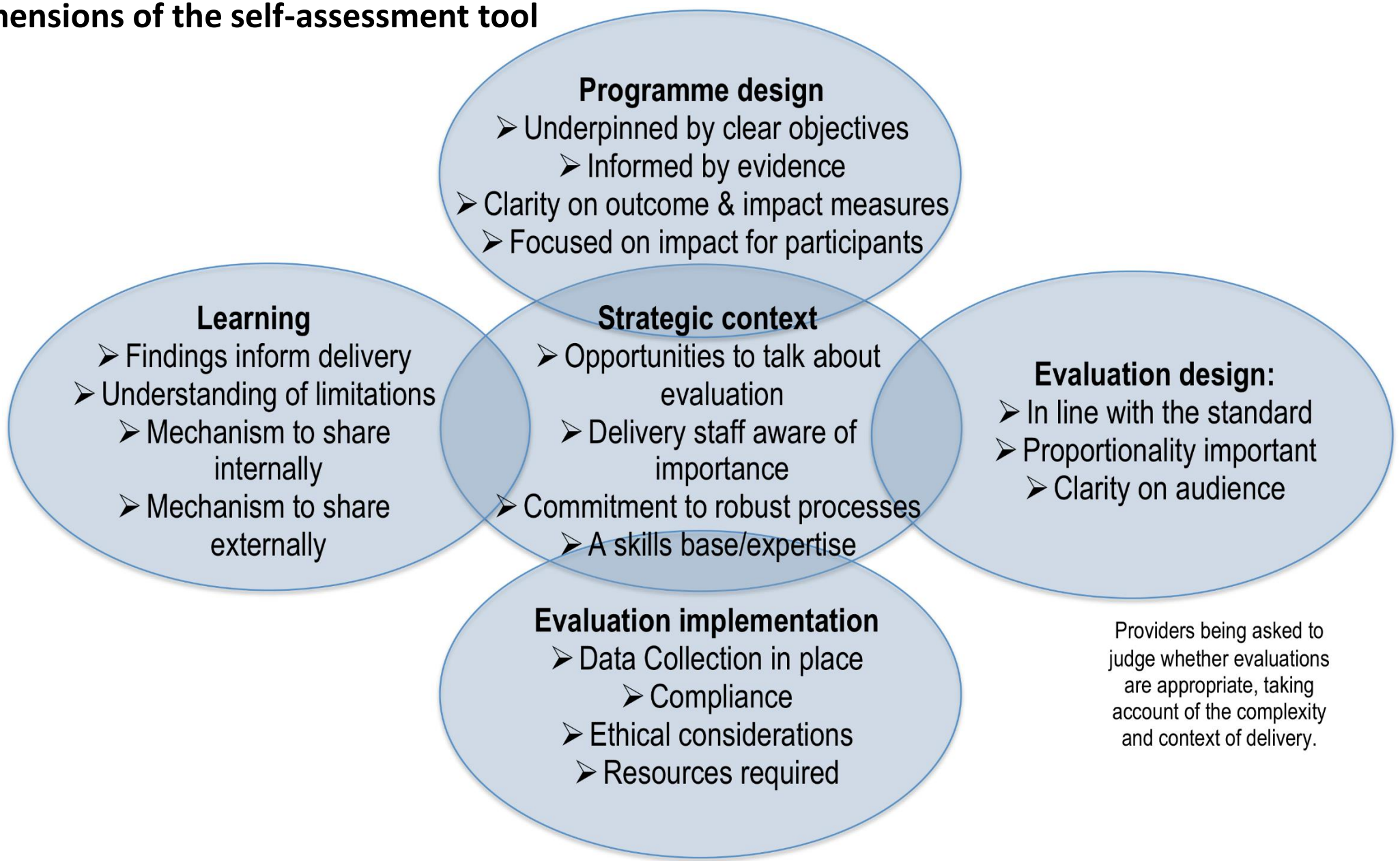
Road-testing the self-assessment process

- Process of self-assessment was largely helpful to support organisational development.
- Subjectivity involved (results not comparable)
- Should be part of a cycle every few years
- Issues about content/coverage of the tool
- Responsibilities not necessarily ‘joined up’ across student lifecyle
- Wide range of contexts, mixed use of standards
- This is challenging work and support is needed

Dimensions of the self-assessment tool



Providers being asked to judge whether evaluations are appropriate, taking account of the complexity and context of delivery.

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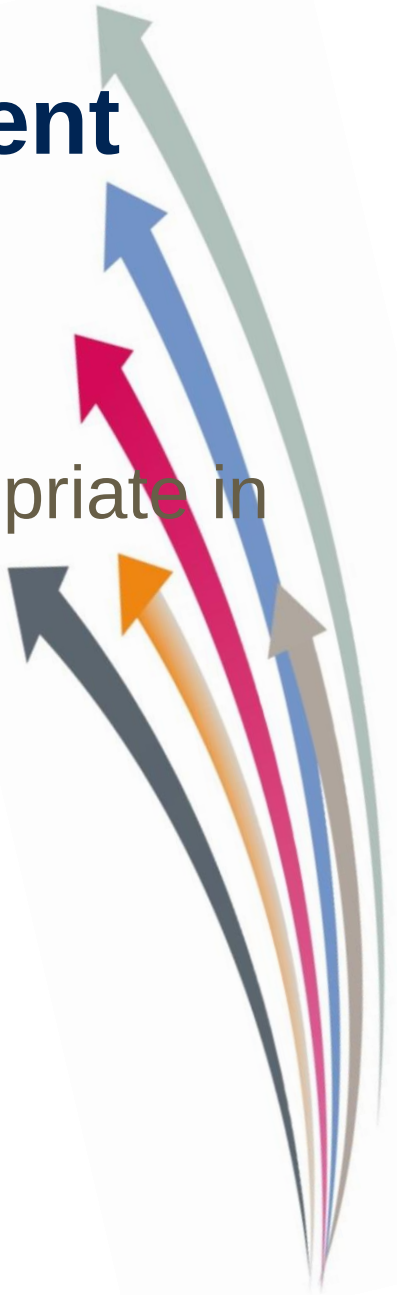
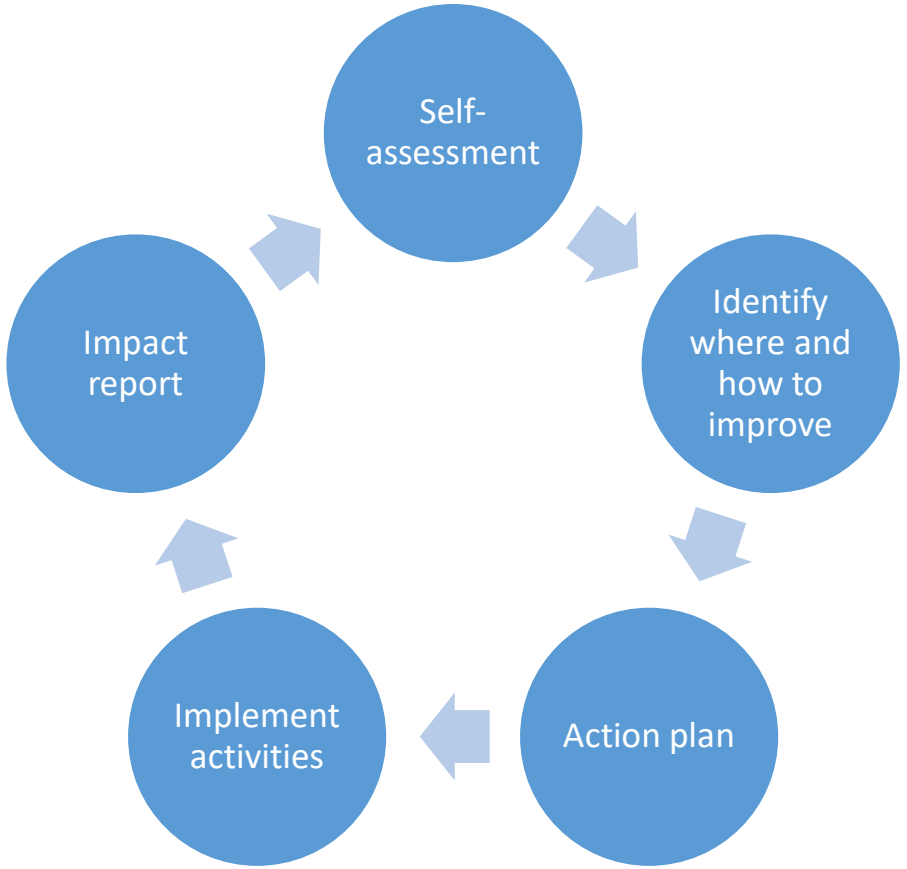
Key principles of evaluation self-assessment

- Open and honest approach in order to identify where the approach can be strengthened
- Requires judgments about what evaluation is most appropriate in each context
- Collaborative (different teams/individuals involved)
- Seeking to embed evaluation at different stages of the project/programme planning cycle
- Use evaluation not just to ‘prove’ but to ‘improve’



Self-assessment as part of continual improvement



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Over to you: Enhancing evaluation of outreach

- Here are some examples of approaches to evaluating different types of outreach

- Questions:
  1. **What type of evaluation is this?**
  2. **Why?**
  3. **What's good (if anything) about the approach?**
  4. **How could the approach be improved?**

	Description	Evidence	Claims you can make
Type 1: Narrative	The evidence provides a narrative to underpin the selection of outreach activities in the context of a coherent outreach strategy	Evidence of impact elsewhere and / or in the research literature on access and participation activity effectiveness or from your existing evaluation results	We have a coherent explanation of what we do and why Our claims are research-based
Type 2: Empirical Enquiry	The evidence reports on impact and reports that those receiving an intervention have different outcomes compared to what otherwise might have happened, although does not establish any direct causal effect	Quantitative and/or qualitative evidence a difference compared to what might otherwise have happened (e.g. a pre/post intervention change and/or against an appropriate comparison group)	We can demonstrate that our interventions are associated with beneficial results.
Type 3: Causality	The evaluation methodology provides evidence of a causal effect of an intervention	Quantitative and/or qualitative evidence of a pre/post treatment change on participants relative to an appropriate control or comparison group who did not take part in the intervention	We believe our intervention causes improvement and can demonstrate the difference using a control or comparison group

Type 1: Narrative		Type 2: Empirical Enquiry *(encompasses Type 1 and the following)*		Type 3: Causal claims *(encompasses Type 2 and the following)*	
✓ Yes Please	✗ No thanks	✓ Yes Please	✗ No thanks	✓ Yes Please	✗ No thanks
Coherent strategy	Disjointed activities	Clear aim of what activities seek to achieve	Aims developed after activity	Have a target as well as a control or comparison group	
Approach and activities underpinned by evidence from literature or other evaluations	No rationale for developing approach and activities	Select indicators of your impact	No concept of measuring success	Could use an experimental or quasi-experimental design	Using groups that are not comparable
Shared understanding of processes involved	The model of change is not shared	Quantitative or qualitative data – or both, 'triangulation' is good!	Information not systematically collected	Think about selection bias and try to avoid it	Selection bias in comparator groups
Reason for activity	Ad hoc activities	Pre/post data (minimum two points in time)	Only collect information once		
Clear conception of why the changes you seek to make are important	No understanding of needs of target groups	Analysis competently undertaken	Data not related to the intervention		
Programme reviews	No review or evaluation	Sharing of results and review of activity	Results not used to inform decisions		

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Feedback on the examples

- Evidence supporting a Type 1 evaluation:
  - An evidence-base for what you are doing.
  - A well articulated conceptual framework which describes how your activities will lead to the outcomes and processes involved
- Evidence supporting a Type 2 evaluation:
  - Able to demonstrate a change above and beyond what might otherwise have occurred.
  - Drawn from different research traditions and evaluation approaches
- Evidence supporting a Type 3 evaluation:
  - A research design methodology that establishes the extent to which observed results are caused by an intervention.

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Strategic Context:

- Opportunities for your WP team(s) to have conversations about evaluation on a regular basis.
- Delivery staff and partners aware of the importance of evaluation and committed to facilitating robust data collection processes.
- A skills base/expertise identified amongst professional service staff for undertaking or commissioning evaluation of A&P programmes.

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Programme Design:

- Programmes underpinned by clear objectives.
- Programme design informed by evaluation.
- Clear on how to measure all of the outcomes and impacts of your programmes.
- Success measures focused on impact in terms of achieving outcomes for participants.
- Evidence underpinning choice of outcome measures for A&P programmes.

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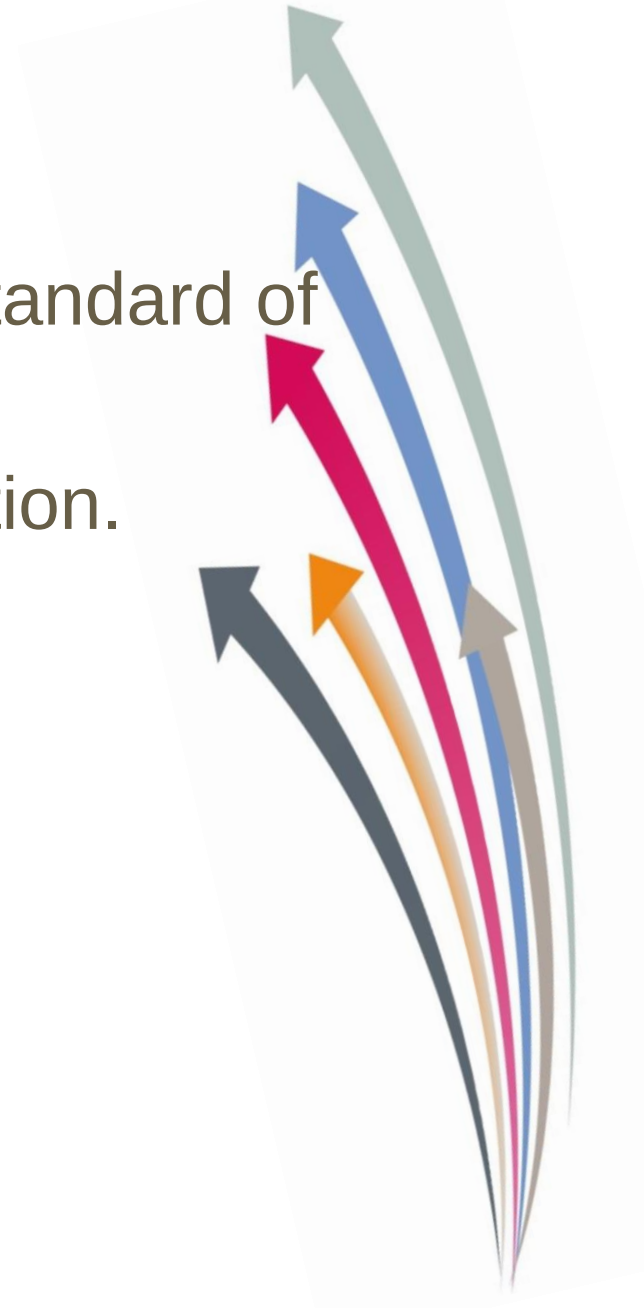
Evaluation Design:

- Evaluation plans for programmes in line with the standard of evaluation expected by the OfS.
- Clarity about the intended audience for the evaluation.



What does this mean for my activity?

	Narrative Evaluation *A coherent explanation of why the activity is expected to work and why*	**Empirical Enquiry** *Collects data to show those receiving an intervention have better outcomes*	**Establishing Causality** *Provides evidence of a causal effect*
Multi-activity intervention programmes (e.g. transition support programmes)	◆ Important for all activities to inform programme choice and delivery	◆ Important for all activities to justify use of resources	✪ Commended for resource intensive programmes for which an evidence base needs to be established and where there is access to reliable outcomes data and appropriate comparison groups
Intensive interventions (e.g. residential programmes)	◆ Important for all activities to inform programme choice and delivery	◆ Important for all activities to justify use of resources	✪ Commended for resource intensive programmes for which an evidence base needs to be established and where there is access to reliable outcomes data and appropriate comparison groups
Long term interventions (e.g. mentoring programmes)	◆ Important for all activities to inform programme choice and delivery	◆ Important for all activities to justify use of resources	✪ Commended for resource intensive programmes for which an evidence base needs to be established and where there is access to reliable outcomes data and appropriate comparison groups
One-off interventions (e.g. campus visits, subject taster sessions)	◆ Important for all activities to inform programme choice and delivery	★ Important for innovative projects for which an evidence base needs to be established	⃠ Not usually feasible unless part of a multi-intervention package
'Light-touch' intervention (e.g. information dissemination projects)	◆ Important for all activities to inform programme choice and delivery	★ Important for innovative projects for which an evidence base needs to be established	✪ Commended in situations where it is possible to capture appropriate outcomes data and the effect of the intervention can be isolated

◆ Expected for all types of activities; ★ Commended for resource intensive and pilot interventions; ✪ Highly commended if conditions allow and conducted appropriately;
⃠ May not be feasible unless special conditions apply.

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What does this mean for my practice?

- Taken Annex 2: Guidance on outreach activity and evaluation type

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Evaluation Implementation:

- Identified how to access the data required to measure outcomes and impacts.
- Approach to data complies with the requirements on data collection and data sharing.
- Procedures in place for addressing ethical and data protection considerations.
- Assessed the level of resources required and allocated these for evaluation.

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Learning:

- Clarity about how findings will be used.
- Evaluation reporting acknowledges the limitations of the research design approach used in each case.
- A mechanism in place to share the findings from evaluation internally.

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Discussion

- Questions/queries?
- Is self-assessment useful?
- What are the opportunities and constraints?
- Do you have any suggestions on how the approach to supporting provider self-assessment on evaluation and evidence can be supported and improved?

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Thank you

for your participation and listening

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