

Office for
Students



Improving evaluation regulation and practice

**A collaborative approach to developing
the OfS standards of evidence and self-
assessment tool**

Richard Shiner

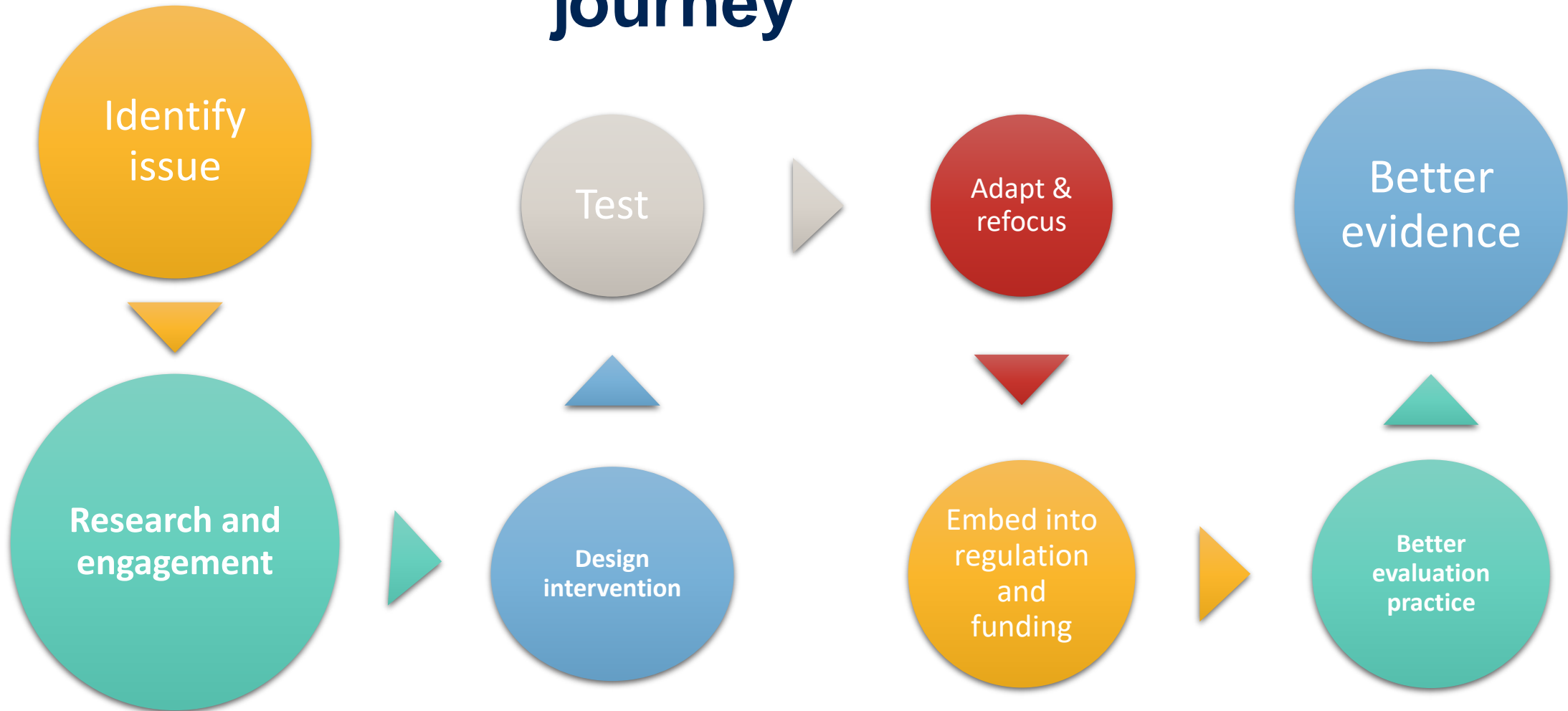
Head of A&P evaluation

NERUPI Evaluating for equity: A praxis based approach

18th September 2020

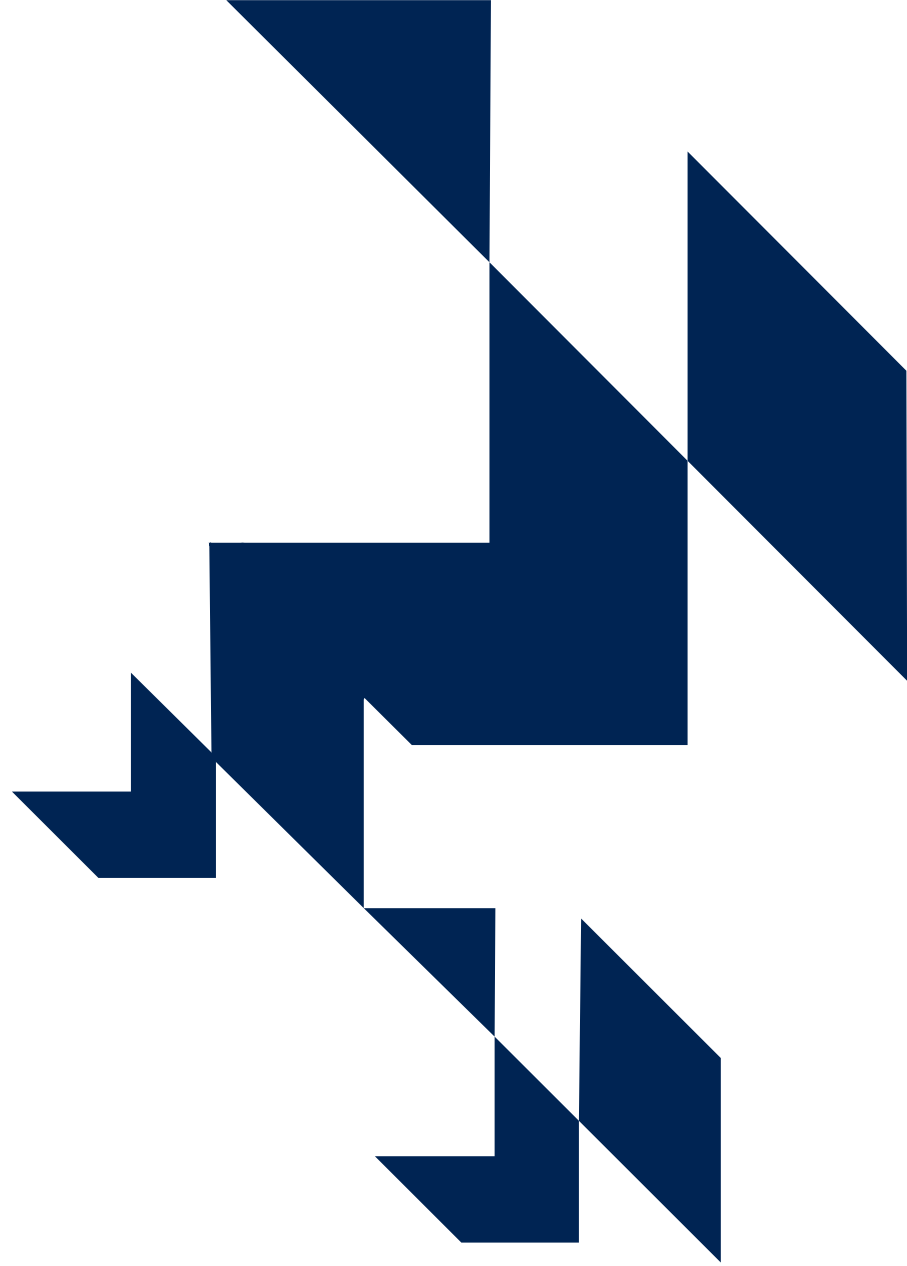
Follow us on Twitter at

The project journey



Identifying the problem

Lack of evidence & good
evaluation practice

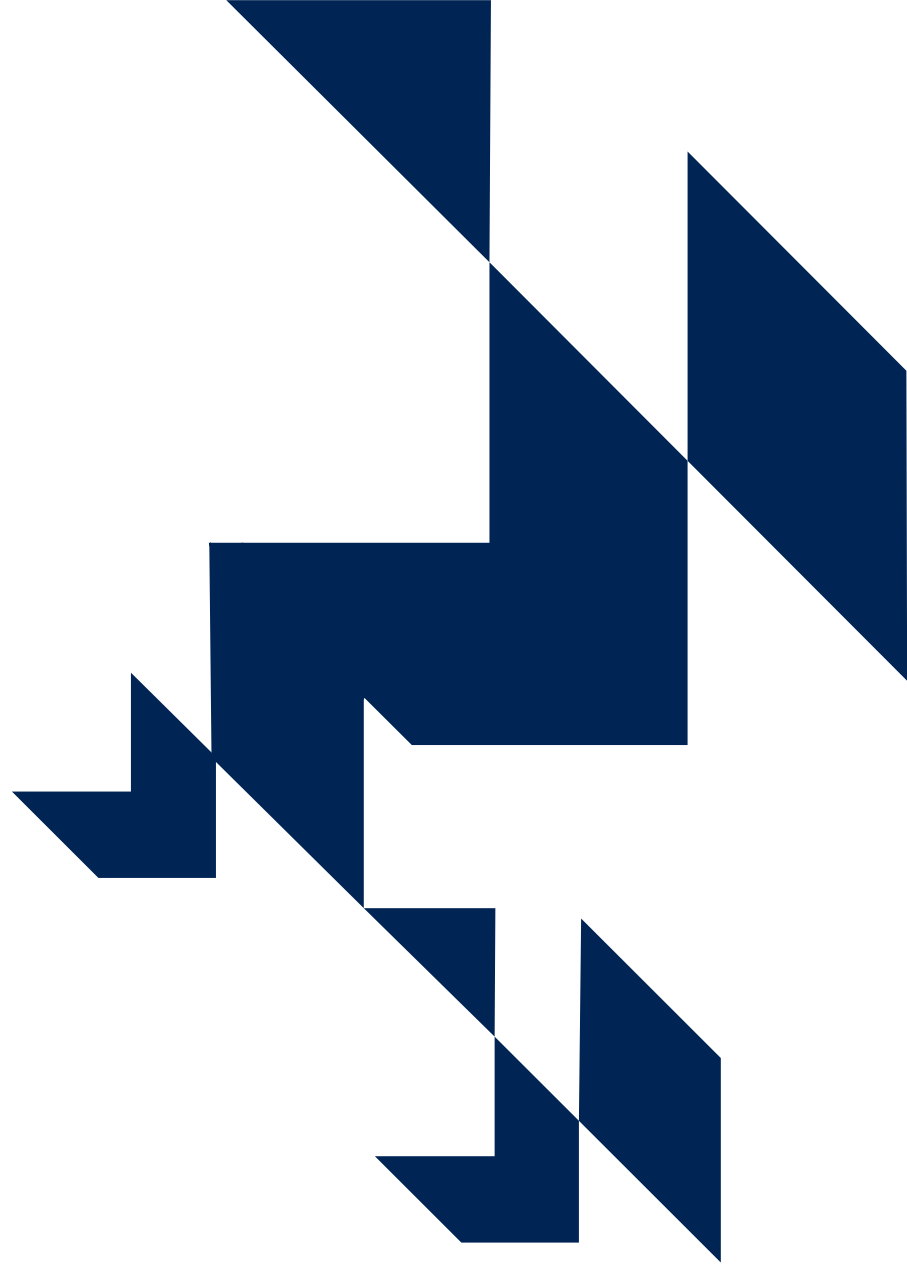


Identifying the problem

- Lack of evidence to support decision making
 - Gorard 2006 / ARC network 2013 / CFE 2014 / Sutton Trust 2015
- Lack of high quality evaluation practice
- No clear guidance on what 'good' looks like
- Sector calling for support to improve evaluation practice
- OFFA's new evidence strategy focused on collaboration and practical solutions
- 'Evaluate 2016' event resulted in birth of several new projects

Designing the intervention

Understanding barriers and
developing solutions



Commissioning the intervention

- Commissioned Dr Clare Crawford and Dr Robin Naylor to undertake two-part research project:
 - Understand current evaluation practice and identify barriers
 - Develop practical guidance to improve practice
- OFFA standards of evaluation developed based on NESTA
- A key step forward but mixed feedback

OFFA Standards of Evaluation Practice

OFFA Level 1:

The HEI can provide a narrative to motivate its selection of outreach activities in the context of a coherent outreach strategy

Evidence: The HEI can refer to evidence of impact elsewhere and/or in the research literature on outreach effectiveness

OFFA Level 2:

In addition to a narrative account, the HEI has collected data on impact and can report evidence that those receiving an intervention treatment have better outcomes, though this does not establish any direct causal effect

Evidence: Quantitative and/or Qualitative evidence of a pre/post treatment change or a treatment/non-treatment difference

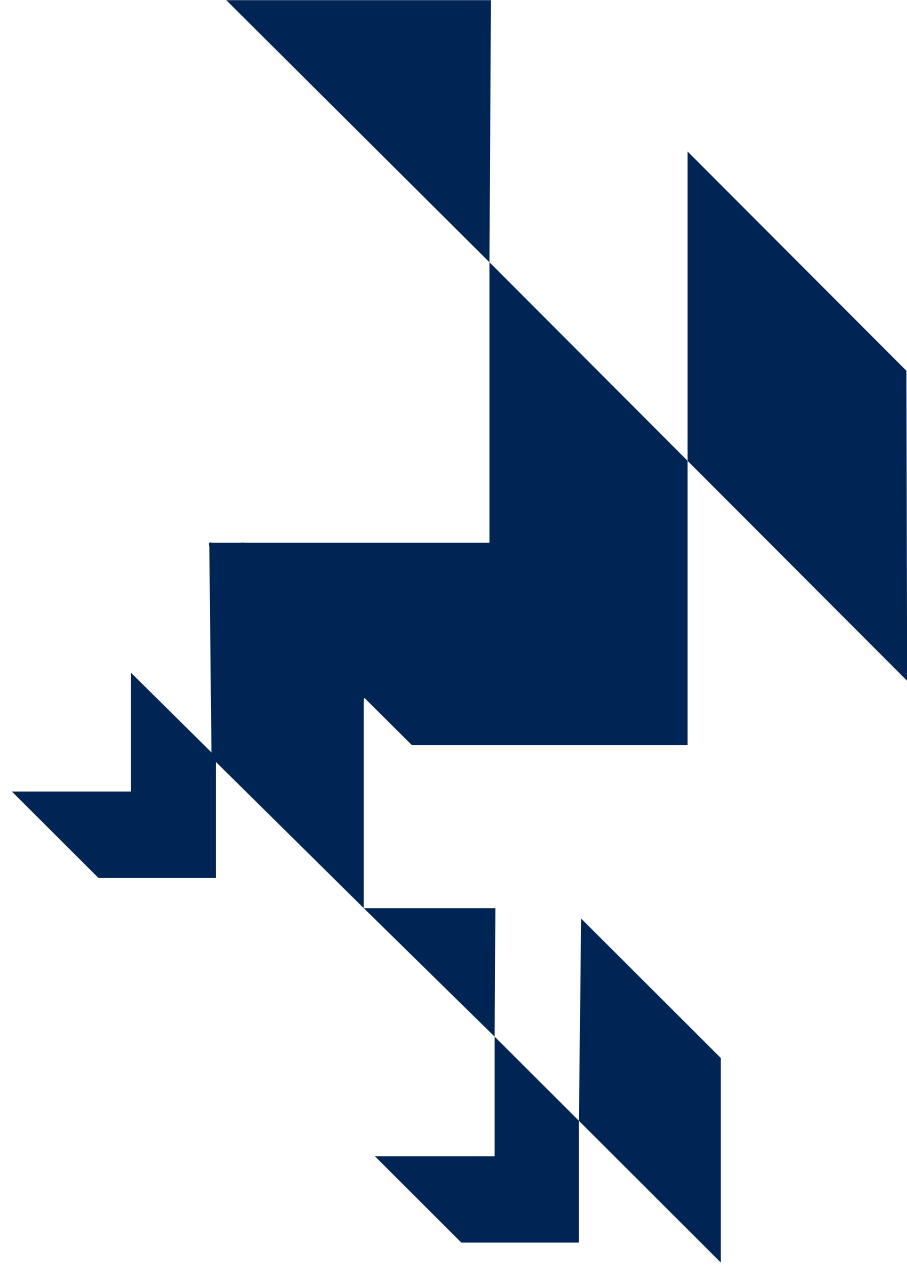
OFFA Level 3:

The HEI has implemented an evaluation methodology which provides evidence of a causal effect of an intervention

Evidence: Quantitative and/or Qualitative evidence of a pre/post treatment change on a treated group relative to an appropriate control or comparison group

Testing the intervention

Refining, adapting, adding



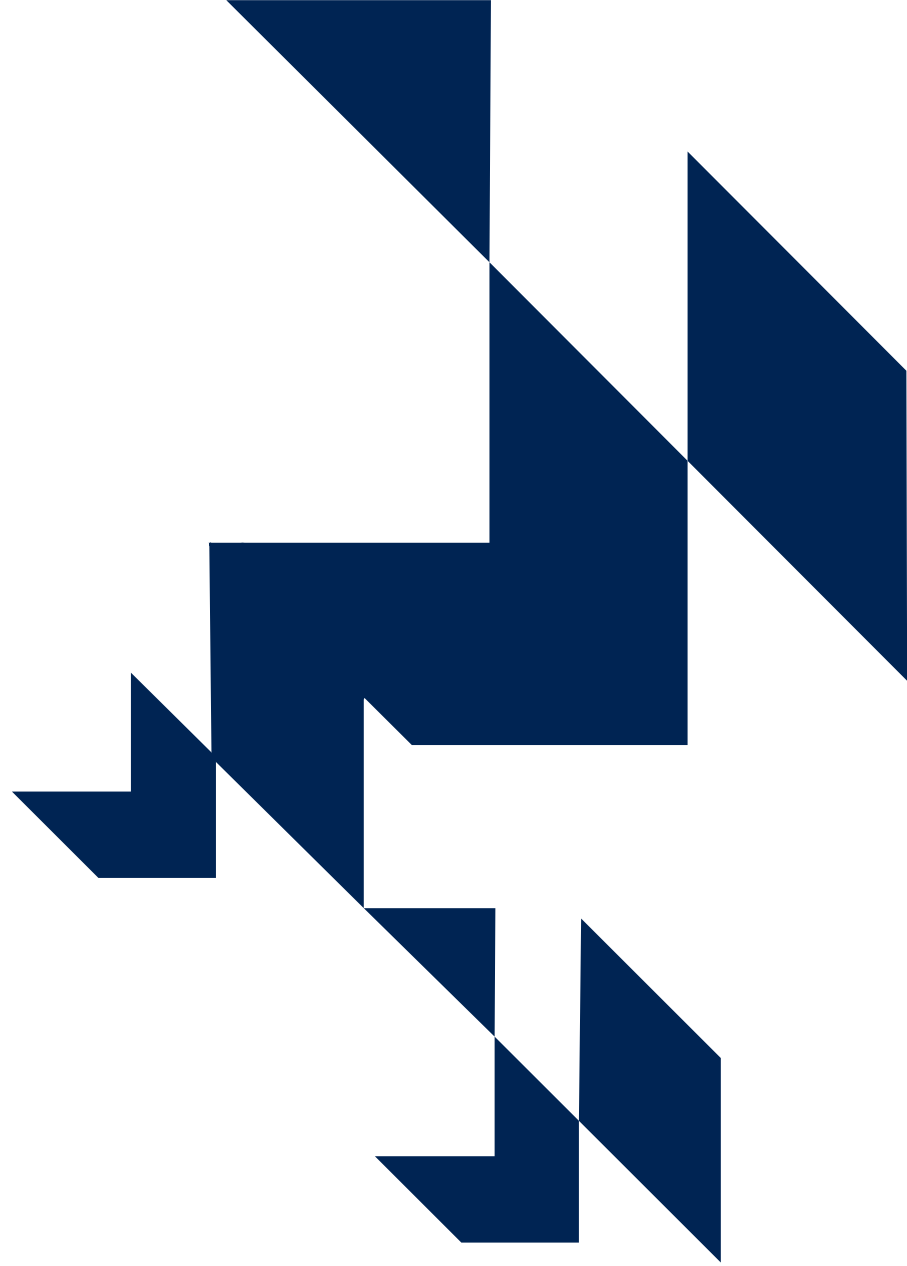
Pilot testing the evaluation resources

- Mixed initial feedback – too academic, too rigid and hierarchical, too quant heavy
- Important to test utility and validity on the ground
- Commissioned Dr Anna Mountford-Zimdars to pilot test the standards of evidence
- Collaborative, action-research project involving multiple partners
- Partners received expert advice and support in exchange for testing the validity of the standards



A shift in focus

Self-assessing evaluation



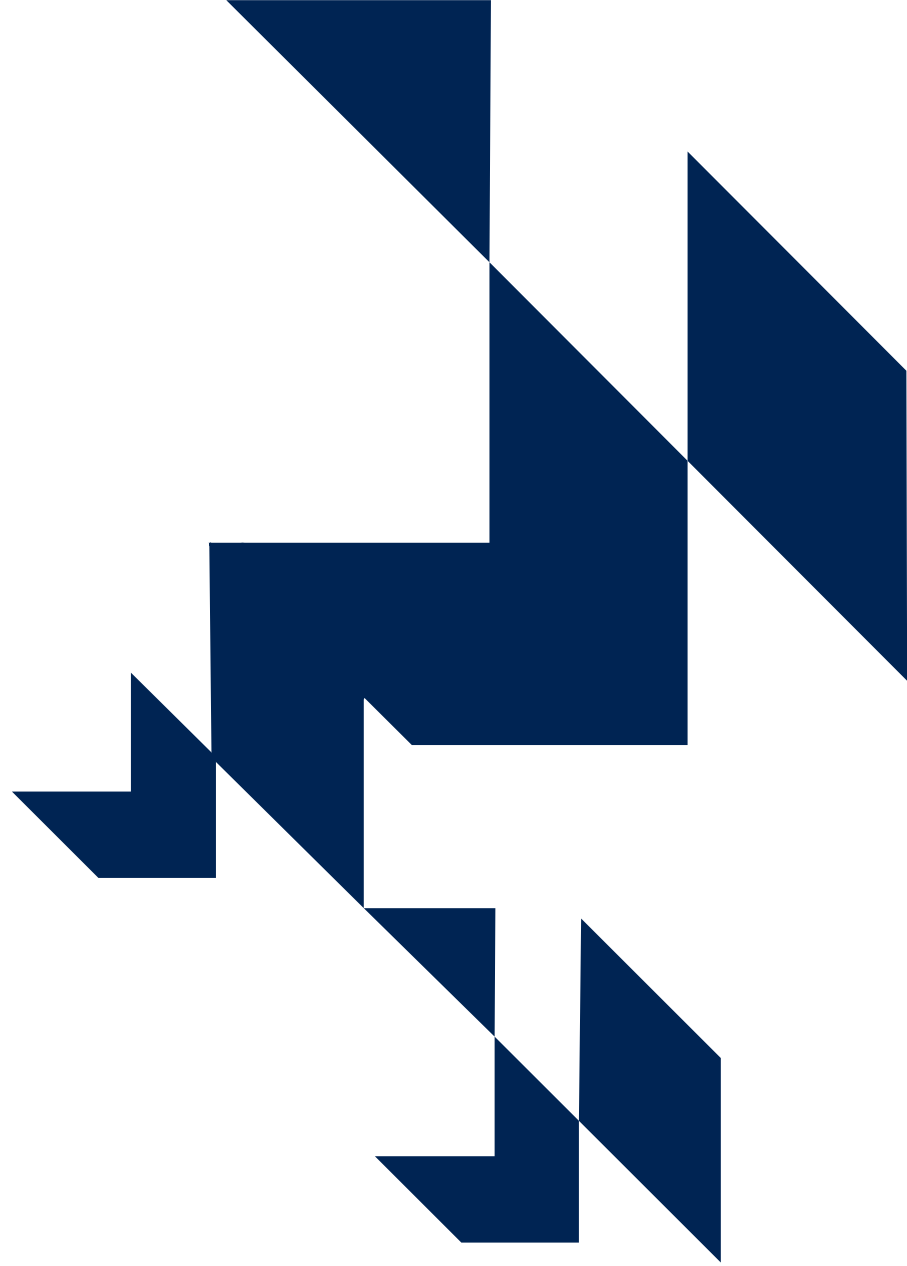
Evaluation self-assessment tool and guidance

- Shifting the framework from levels to types
- An emphasis on quality within the evidence types
- Key building blocks needed before good evaluation can take place
- A new self-assessment tool for evaluation
- A greater focus on learning and improvement
- A way to improve rigour of methods and evidence



Embedding into A&P regulation and funding

Adopting the tool in the OfS

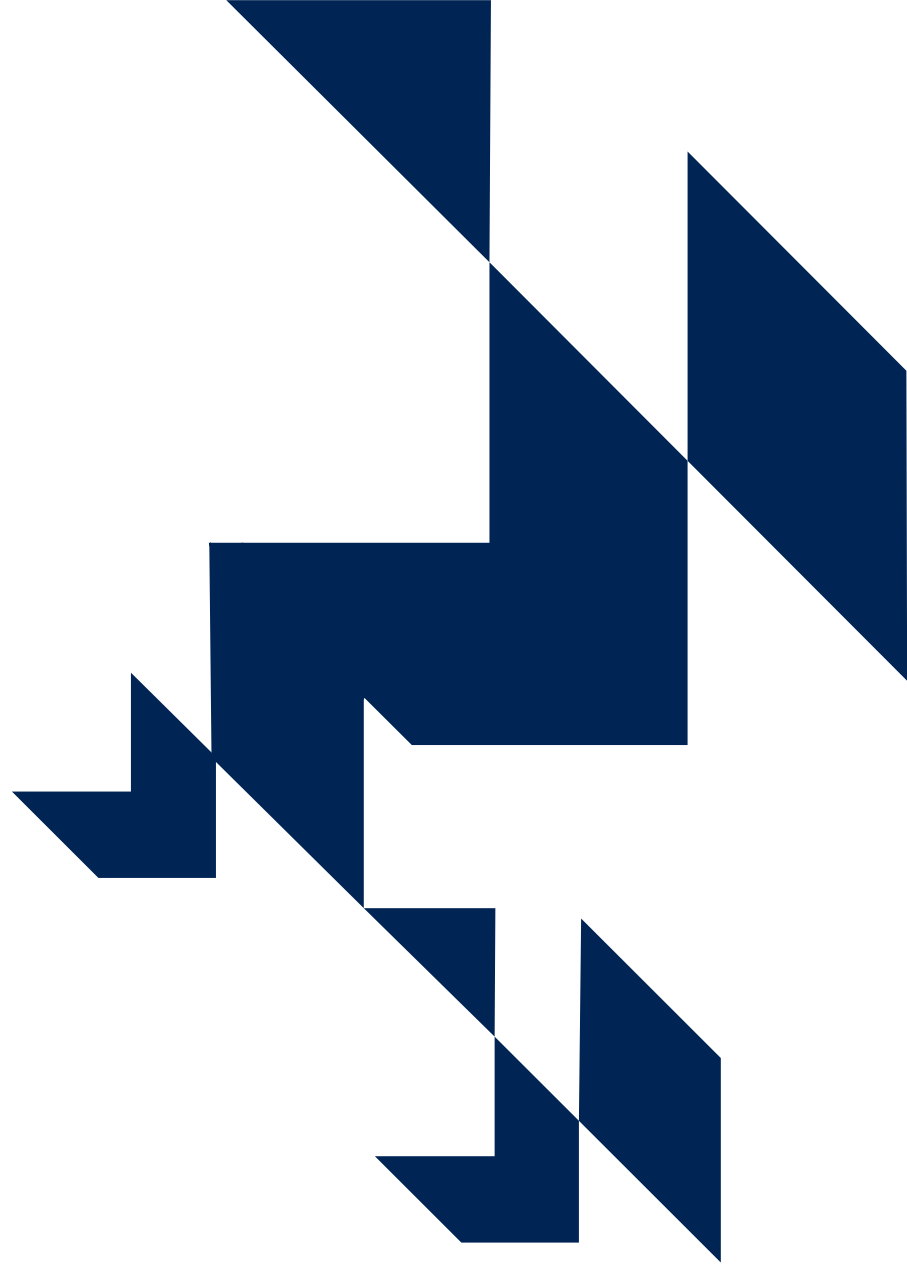


Embedding self-assessment and standards into regulation and funding

- Became part of Regulatory Notices 1&6 – access and participation plan guidance
- Formed the basis of the Uni Connect phase two evaluation guidance
- Uni Connect evaluators use standards of evidence to assess local evidence
- Self-assessment tool used in other projects e.g. mental health challenge competition
- 5 point framework used to inform development of internal evaluation practice
- TASO evidence ratings based on OfS standards

A step-change in practice?

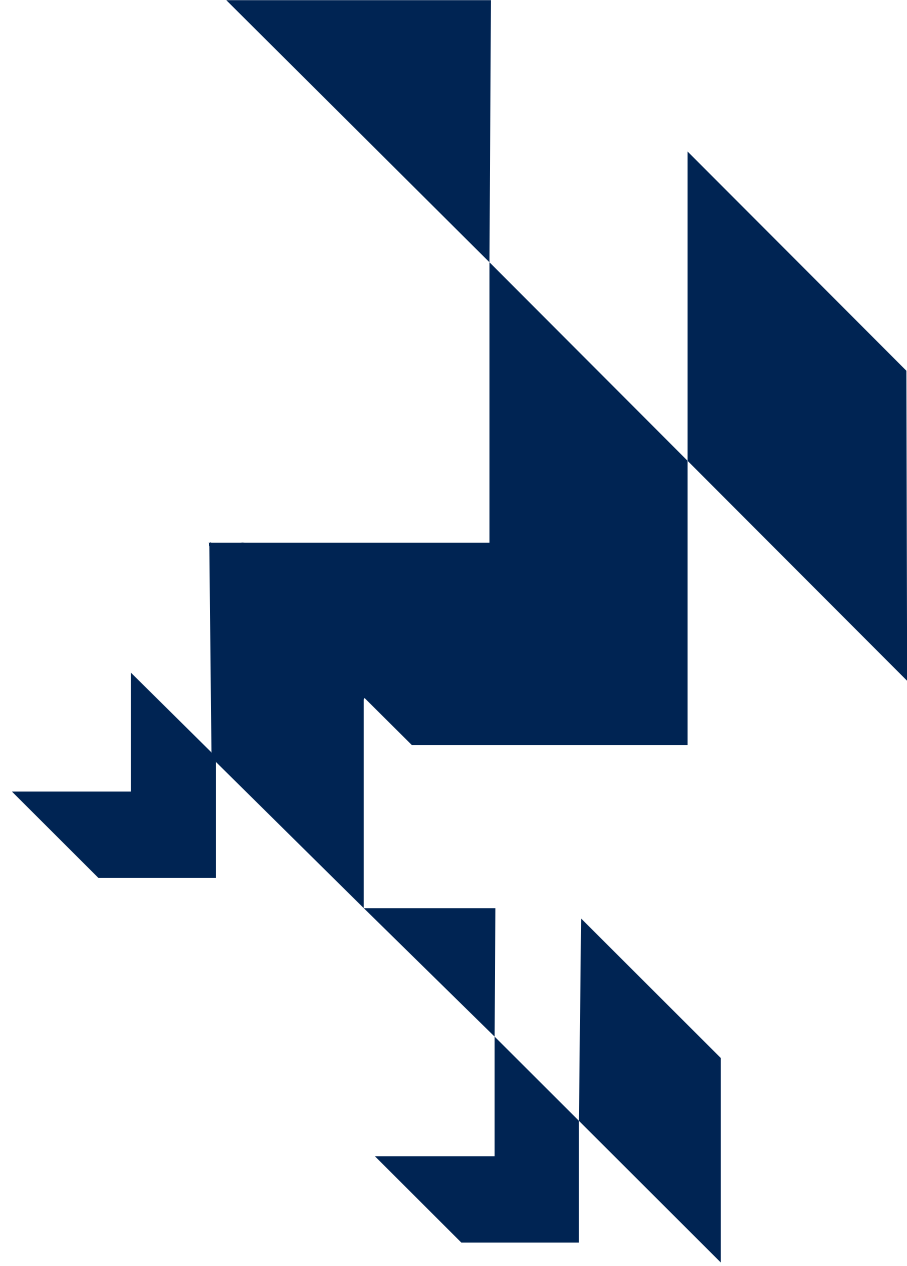
Better evidence and evaluation



Better evaluation practice and greater availability of evidence

- Clearer expectations for providers from the regulator
- Evaluation strategies in A&P plans significantly improved
- A greater focus on impact evaluation
- A better understanding of the claims that can be made from evidence
- A consistent approach to evaluating OfS funded programmes
- A route into TASO – contributing evidence to the national What Works Centre

What's next?



Thank you for listening

Copyright ©

The copyright in this presentation is held either by the Office for Students (OfS) or by the originating authors. Please contact info@officeforstudents.org.uk for further information and re-use requests.