

INTRODUCTION

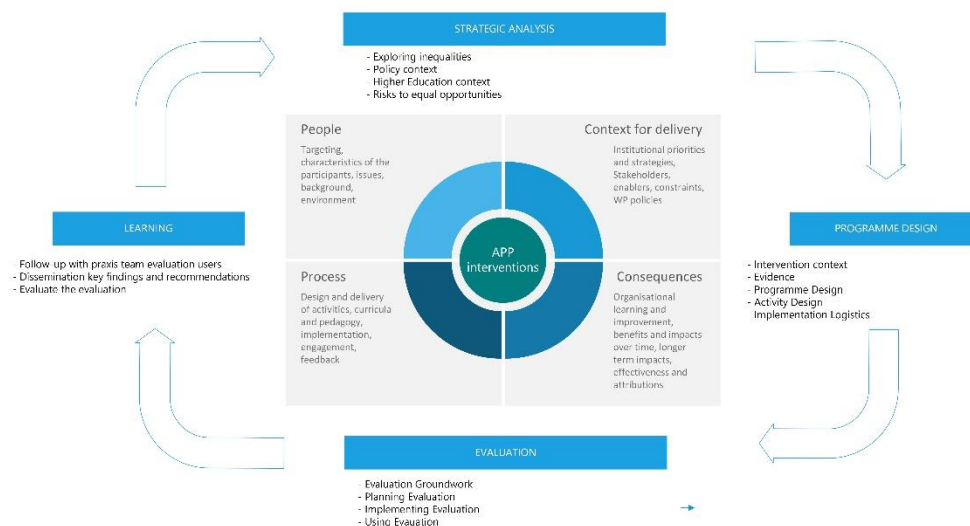
The NERUPI Toolkit is designed to support evaluation for continual improvement of access, participation and success programmes, and adaptive policy processes involving multiple stakeholders. It proposes an iterative approach which is practitioner-driven, practical and realistic, with a focus on mixed-methods designs to offset the limitations of any individual method. The focus is on identifying effective practice through theory-based evaluation proceeding in stages whereby learning is fed back into action. The Toolkit encompasses four fundamental aspects which underpin all widening participation and education programmes:

- Strategic analysis of the situation and what's required to address equity gaps;
- Planning and delivery of the intervention which will bring about the desired changes;
- Evaluation of the intervention; and
- Learning from the evidence.

These aspects are common sense; the difference with the proposed praxis approach is that the team commit to developing a dynamic and collaborative plan of critically informed action and to observe and reflect on the action and context carefully and systematically in order to use the stages as a source of knowledge and the basis for improvement. A dynamic complementarity links all four aspects into a cycle, and ultimately into a spiral where the cycles are repeated as part of a continual improvement approach. Interventions are further developed and the basis for further planning and subsequent action, through a succession of cycles. The rationale for the intervention will strengthen each time it is tested in practice and over time the knowledge develops into a critical perspective on widening participation practice.

Figure 1 outlines the phases and steps involved in planning and evaluating widening participation interventions, which are discussed in detail in Table 1, which highlights tasks and challenges and signposts to NERUPI tools and resources. The processes can be adapted locally. The People-Process-Context-Consequences (p-p-c-c) framework underpins the approach in order to systematically focus the evaluation and guide the process of making a judgment about programme effectiveness for continuous improvement

Figure 1: NERUPI approach and process map



The approach argues for an integrated model involving stakeholders, managers, practitioners, evaluators working together in Praxis Teams (<https://www.nerupi.co.uk/members/toolkit/basics/communities-of-praxis>), and combining practitioner-led action research, process, outcome and impact evaluation. The praxis team could be identified through a programme steering group, or existing committee.

Table 2: Phases and steps

Phase/Step	Key Tasks	Potential Challenges	NERUPI Tools and resources
STRATEGIC ANALYSIS PHASE			
Step 1) Exploring Inequalities Rationale: Different factors give rise to inequalities in higher education and affect people's capability to progress in education, even when they have the potential capacity to do so.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtain a holistic view of the political, social, economic, historical and cultural factors affecting widening participation and their effect in your context Consider how research and theorising about educational inequalities can inform our work in improving access, participation and progression in higher education to develop understanding, improve practice and engagement in order to respond to national and local policy initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The complexity of the issues underpinning unequal HE participation and outcome belie easy solutions. Unequal distribution of the capitals and economic resources continues to have a significant impact and the cultural legacy of inequalities and discrimination remains and is often reproduced in different forms. 	More on groups experiencing relative disadvantage in higher education NERUPI aims and framework
Step 2) Policy Context Rationale: The policy context for widening participation is important to understand how new interventions will fit with existing priorities and initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider how national, local and regional widening participation policies and strategies align with the issue of concern. Other policies to consider depend on context, for example, policies of statutory, regulatory and public bodies, as well as institutional strategies and departmental planning documents. There is also a requirement to ensure widening participation activities build on the lessons learned through implementation, including local knowledge, evidence generated through evaluations and third-party data sources, use of experimental approaches, and increasingly there is an emphasis on cost-effectiveness analyses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The national requirements vary across UK nations (in England, established by the Office for Students), as do multi-agency/regional and sectoral strategies. 	Information on widening participation National policy context
Step 3) Higher Education Context Rationale: the HE context will influence the scope (e.g. local/regional/national and sectoral/subject related), infrastructure, plus institutional factors, such as culture, traditions, staffing, resourcing, etc. have an effect on equality between student groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand how the HE context will influence the field of action (and therefore constraints/opportunities for widening participation activity). Understand how geography affects some of the reasons for continued educational inequalities (e.g. local deprivation and coastal or rural factors for instance) Identify the hidden expectations and exclusionary practices that can limit student success and progression. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many of the factors identified may be considered outside the influence of widening participation practitioners. This provides a challenge, but it is important to be aware as it can mean an alternative strategy is needed (e.g. a programme of institutional change/lobbying and influencing) and because the implications of the HE context provide the context for evaluation of future success. 	Questions to consider when thinking about the HE context Information on organisational indicators (TBA)
Step 4) Understanding the Equal Opportunities Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand how risks identified at national level play out in your institution by analysing the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a lot more data available to HE providers (for example the OfS's Access and 	EORR information has been mapped to the NERUPI

Phase/Step	Key Tasks	Potential Challenges	NERUPI Tools and resources
Rationale: HE providers are required to ensure equal opportunities but some groups remain under-represented, are misrecognised and experience different outcomes in class of degree and employment. In England, the OfS has adopted a risk based approach.	<p>available data (e.g. the risk of insufficient academic support is identified by differences in continuation, completion or progression rates for students from particular groups).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek to obtain a nuanced understanding of your context using available data: e.g. by cohort, subject areas, qualification types etc. 	<p>Participation Dashboard however providers need appropriate skills and insights to know how to interpret the information and what to look for in order to avoid becoming overwhelmed with data.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the same time, there are data issues (especially for smaller providers and cohorts) and data lags which mean that getting a accurate picture can be difficult. 	Framework to enable mapping of indications of risks and risks by student characteristic to the NERUPI objectives.
Outputs at this stage: Strategic review, stakeholder analysis, framework for action (e.g. APP)			
PROGRAMME PLANNING PHASE			
Step 5) Intervention context Rationale: Action depends on the particular socio- economic circumstances affecting participants in widening participation work and needs to ensure that participants and stakeholders are at the centre of the analysis).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fact finding to refine understanding of the topic (at this stage not only collecting data but analysing/reflecting and hypothesising/speculating about action). People: Once the broad area for activity has been agreed identify participants' needs and circumstances and consider the extent to which the programme and the activities engage and relate to participants. Context: Assess the setting for the programme and what's needed to make it work (inputs, resources, linkages, relationships) 		<p>Planning as part of the reflexive cycle Considerations for planning</p> <p>https://www.nerupi.co.uk/members/toolkit/context/exploring-inequalities-2</p> <p>Student voice</p>
Step 6) Evidence (Type I evaluation: Narrative) Rationale: Effectiveness is improved if the planning process is thorough, considering the evidence and building on what's already know about potentially effective measures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the available evidence in order to understand what this says about effective practice. Develop the narrative underpinning the intervention: i.e. a clear narrative for why we might expect an activity to be effective. This narrative is normally based on the findings of other research or evaluation but importantly should also include evidence/evaluation from your own experience as part of the praxis based approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successive reviews of widening participation have considered that the evidence base is under-developed. However, the evidence is starting to build including TASO (link?). It's important to consider the types of evidence that are most useful to inform action. Even if there is strong causal evidence of effectiveness you will still need to consider transferability and the implications for your own situation. 	NERUPI practice examples (Link?)
Step 7) Programme Design Rationale: A Theory of Change (TOC) process is a recommended to ensure that programme design is collaborative and that the process gives consideration to identifying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design the programme using a Theory of Change (TOC) process. Ideally the process for developing a theory of change is participatory/collaborative and typically arises from a facilitated process amongst a stakeholder group with shared concerns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It takes time and effort to explore what stakeholders think, and probe to find what it might be possible to do. Trust is also needed within the group so that members plan action together, act collectively, and reflect together in a supportive 	<p>Theory of change resources</p> <p>Defining the outcomes and impacts appropriately and thinking about the measureables at this stage can be a real help to</p>

Phase/Step	Key Tasks	Potential Challenges	NERUPI Tools and resources
mechanisms, assumptions, outcomes and impacts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make sure the TOC process captures the thought processes involved in hypothesising/speculating about what's needed and what will happen (i.e. predicting based on analysis/reflection). This is important in order to be able to test the hypothesis fully. <u>Consequences</u>: identify the intended learning goals, benefits, outcomes and impacts Make sure the outcomes and impact are clear. Usually the TOC process starts at the end – i.e. with the impact the programme is designed to make. Consider alternative perspectives. For evaluation purposes clarity on the purpose of the project and the desired outcomes it is aiming to achieve is crucial, but make sure the proposals identify different stakeholders, and assess their expectations in terms of the purpose and what they hope to achieve in order to help shape the foundation of the plan. 	<p>environment (aiming for more critically informed plans through a deliberate process as the group consciously constructs its own understanding and history).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Theory of Change should be realistic, so the discussion needs to decide what it is feasible to work on (usually a group project) which may mean some compromises (i.e. what's likely to work rather than in an 'ideal world'). If the programme design is based on a previous project, it can take time and encouragement to make sure those delivering the activities specify what they are teaching, why and how they would know that the participants had reached the desired level/outcome. It could be that the mission for the project is a sub-set of a wider vision about what it needed, so the TOC could need to articulate with a wider mission. 	<p>evaluation later down the line (note on setting broad objectives (ref SMART and PEST criteria)?</p> <p>Mechanisms of change</p>
Step 8) Activity design Process: Understand and assess project strategies (curriculum, pedagogy) and procedural strategies designed to meet goals and objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set the learning aims and objectives (based on understanding the overall learning requirements, the participants and how the activity is supposed to benefit them). Identify and agree/adapt content relevant to the learning aims (making sure the content is most relevant to audience who needs to take part and how the programme is supposed to benefit them in line with the theory of change). Agree the pedagogy, making sure to promote active learning strategies, student ownership and engagement (i.e. as against passive learning which largely involves sitting in a classroom and taking notes) that the design takes account of stakeholder insight and reflects the situation of the participants. This could mean intervening to change and modify existing teaching approaches if applicable. The pedagogical processes should be specific, deliberate and controlled – although there may be an element of testing through careful and thoughtful variation of practices – in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focusing on reliable and measurable objectives is important but this can be hard (the NERUPI framework conceptualises these as benefits to participants and it's helpful to have a common language by which they can communicate and improve their collective understandings and actions). Content that does not align with a learning objective is obviously problematic, but sometimes practitioners need to revise the learning objectives if they feel it is something that students do not need to develop required skill sets, knowledge, or to be successful in higher education. Deciding on content often requires the exercise of practical judgment (e.g. depending on the time, situation of the activity). Often practitioners are bound by what has been done before/previous ways of working, so it's helpful to encourage thinking which sees practice as ideas in action (i.e. a platform for 	<p>The NERUPI framework aims to provide a common language as the basis for agreeing the learning objectives for activities.</p> <p>Materials on Curriculum and Pedagogy</p> <p>Perhaps we need something on active learning strategies or to pull out examples of where active learning is occurring?</p>

Phase/Step	Key Tasks	Potential Challenges	NERUPI Tools and resources
	<p>order to assess the effects of different approaches. For example, in relation to undergraduates, it's important to consider how content and pedagogy are mobilised in ways that enable students to access the curriculum and not just in terms of addressing issues related to the 'hidden curriculum'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make sure that appropriate feedback is included to participants. ▪ Consider how you will keep the delivery under review to take advantage of learning from practice (e.g. based on assessment of the extent to which participants were engaged and focused on the content). ▪ Consider how theory, research and practice underpin the educational assumptions, goals, objectives (and how all these will inform the delivery of activities). Capturing the information at this stage can be useful to inform later evaluation stages. Often this involves not only explicitly addressing knowledge questions but also pointing to sociological theories of agency, resilience and personal development in order to connect the content and pedagogy to the benefits to participants. Reflect on the implications of the content and pedagogy for the theory of change. If necessary, amend the theory of change to capture new perspectives on the outcomes and these will be achieved. There is also an aspect of how the delivery values the social and cultural capital that students from less privileged backgrounds bring with them. 	<p>further development of later action rather than set in stone). Usually the content needs to be regularly reviewed in order to take account of new information or to stay on top of HE policies and best practice in the field.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It needs to be recognised that although pedagogy decisions are based on informed educational intent, the delivery cannot necessarily be completely controlled since real time factors and issues arise. Being flexible and open to change in the light of circumstances is helpful, therefore it's also helpful to encourage reflection and review in order to make sure the monitoring and evaluation captures what actually happened. ▪ Negotiation and compromise may be necessary (which in turn should be captured as a contextual factor impacting on the work). 	
<p>Step 9) Implementation Logistics Rationale: Delivering the programme (the action phase) is not just about running the activities but also putting in place strategies to manage and monitor the work and address risks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agree the implementation strategy. This involves making decisions about the time, place, staffing, resources, participants, budget etc (making sure the plan is realistic and considers all variables). In practice implementing the plan involves breaking it down into tasks and phases, timelines and milestones, assigning responsibility and resources and identifying opportunities to reflect on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A successful project plan takes a lot of thought since it needs to identify everyone involved and how they are impacted by the project (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed): lack of clarity can be barrier to making progress, ▪ Taking account of risks is part of ensuring a critically informed plan but it's tricky as it 	<p>Materials on Intervention logistics</p> <p>Project planning template?</p> <p>Materials on Targeting</p> <p>Risk assessment template? With examples of risks?</p>

Phase/Step	Key Tasks	Potential Challenges	NERUPI Tools and resources
	<p>progress (project management tools may be useful).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put in place operational and logistical monitoring processes that will allow you to capture what happens in practice (e.g. track progress regularly) and consider what the procedures are for resolving issues and making adjustments. Manage the risks by considering and mitigating for the risks that the programme is likely to encounter (e.g. social, political and material constraints etc) and how likely these are to arise. This involves thinking through the consequences of the potential risks in the setting and put in place plans for action (these could be immediate or prospective plans). Make sure the procedures are in place for decisions about what is to be done, and for the exercise of practical judgment. You could consider the possibility of setting monitoring 'triggers' (threshold values on critical metrics which when crossed, signify that need for an adaptive response). Compare actual progress against the plan, address any deviations, and make adjustments as necessary (could include a variation to the APP). If appropriate, consider the use of tools like dashboards for things like task completion and resource usage. Make sure there are procedures for capturing the implementation of the educational design (especially if through a pilot or initial programme) – e.g. a log to note regular events and progress and engagement etc. This could also include student surveys regarding or tracking of how students are engaging. Records of progress through direct and frequent measurements need to be appropriate to the goals and objectives but can be important to assess the educational design and implementation factors (e.g. activities postponed, added or removed). Observations and learner feedback should be considered 	<p>involves some future thinking which goes beyond the present situation. The risk assessment needs to identify potential mitigations (i.e. to empower those involved to act more appropriately given the situation), but if the risk are high then an alternative course of action may be preferable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring aims to collect evidence about action in order to be able to evaluate it thoroughly so to be prepared for evaluation it's important for practitioners to find time to give thought to the information needed before they act. Monitoring should generate evidence to evaluate the action critically – so practitioners need to have buy-in to the techniques being used to monitor their action and its effects (rather than it being imposed on them). This could mean making sure the monitoring information is used to report and reflection on the educational design process (as well as meet the needs of funders). 	<p>Monitoring pages of the website</p> <p>Link to examples of using dashboards? – e.g. Kent, WIN?</p>

Phase/Step	Key Tasks	Potential Challenges	NERUPI Tools and resources
	important monitoring information (as well as quantitative information on numbers etc).		
Outputs at this stage: Institutional strategy, Theory of Change, programme action plans, risk assessment, monitoring framework			
EVALUATION PHASE			
10. Groundwork			
Step 10.1) Approach to praxis and learning from evaluation Rationale: Organisations that are ready to engage in evaluation as a tool to support praxis need the key people involved in the delivery of equity initiatives, and who will be affected by evaluation, to become interested in thinking about evaluation and how they will use it for learning and development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the praxis team (new stakeholder group or existing group/committee) for involvement, decision-making, and operationalising evaluation. Facilitate open conversations and review existing evaluation (e.g. baseline previous evaluation, ask stakeholders about their attitudes to evaluation, undertake evaluation self-assessment). Build commitment to following through an evaluation and using the findings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrating evaluation users and evaluators into an effective working group. Building trust for honest discussions about capacity for evaluation and how evaluation is viewed. Avoiding asymmetric relations and power differences that can hinder the communications and complicate the evaluation. Keeping the focus on the stakeholders who are the primary users of the evaluation. 	An overview of the NERUPI approach to evaluation Link to the OfS Evaluation Self-Assessment Tool
Step 10.2) Resources and capability to undertake evaluation Rationale: Evaluation is more likely to be useful if users understand about evaluation and build expertise, as well as feeling ownership of the evaluation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine the level of interest and capacity within the praxis team and organisation. Identify existing expertise for evaluation and build people's skills and capability to engage in evaluation. Facilitate the praxis team to identify their expectations and norms for evaluation. Identify standards within which evaluation will be conducted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating the climate for evaluation doesn't only mean identifying an evaluator and agreeing an evaluation that practitioners want to be part of, but also helping them to develop evaluation expertise. The praxis team relies on establishing trust, commitment and willingness to work together to evaluate and mitigate any issues affecting the rigour and credibility of the evaluation. Getting clarity on perspectives of different people and arriving at consensus can be difficult in multi-disciplinary teams as different people have different views on how the world works. Sustaining interest and skills in evaluation can be difficult if there are competing priorities or changes in the team (may need to involve new evaluation users over time). Evaluators who are outside of project delivery need to develop sufficient knowledge of the programme to be credible with key stakeholders and to be able to lead discussions on substantive issues. 	The NERUPI evaluation toolkit series can be used for ongoing professional development, to build on the expertise of evaluators and those supporting evaluations' (new to evaluation) NERUPI materials on standards of evidence reviews the types and gives ideas for strengthening different types of evidence A resource list to key sources on evaluation and professional practice guidelines for evaluation is in development

Phase/Step	Key Tasks	Potential Challenges	NERUPI Tools and resources
<p>Step 10.3) Identify and assess the programme theory of change (TOC)</p> <p>Rationale: The programme TOC provides a framework for evaluation by setting out the intervention model which describes how the intended benefits, outcomes and impacts will be produced.</p> <p>This step also informs the p-p-c-c framework.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a meaningful presentation of the TOC in which the connections are clear, logical, sequential, plausible and testable. Specify the processes and mechanisms underlying the TOC (i.e. what's needed to make change happen). Review the evaluability of the TOC and draw out the implications for the p-p-c-c framework (might also involve deciding which parts are the priority for evaluation). Generate shared understanding within the praxis team around the implications of the TOC for evaluation. In complex programmes it's helpful to have a series of activity level TOCs feeding into the overall outcomes and impacts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressing the TOC in enough detail to make the programme theory clear can be challenging, especially where the activities are new as it can be hard to know what will happen in advance. The evaluator may need to support evaluation users in understanding the purpose of the theory of change for evaluation and to consult with the programme team to tease out how the programme is expected to work. There are different options for conceptualising the programme, and for capturing the different elements of the change process – e.g. a linear logic model; a map of systems and relationships; a series of inter-related models etc. The key issue is finding the presentation that is most helpful in supporting the primary intended users to understand and engage in the TOC. 	<p>The NERUPI website theory of change materials include in-depth guidance, templates and a presentation</p> <p>A resource describes the use of theory of change in praxis teams</p> <p>A checklist for reviewing the evaluability of the theory of change and implications for the p-p-c-c framework</p> <p>Resources are in development on linking theory of change to evaluation</p>
<p>Step 10.4) Ensure fundamental requirements are being met</p> <p>Rationale: Systematic and ongoing approaches to monitoring, feedback and tracking need to be embedded from the start in order to support evaluation by gathering observations and data to assess what happened, with whom, and with what result. Routine data collection and monitoring are key activities underlying evaluation. Getting the monitoring right is particularly important in long-term programmes which are likely to need adaptation as new insights emerge over time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design a monitoring framework that can inform the praxis team about what is delivered with whom and with what result to support adaptive processes. Incorporate process aspects and participant feedback into the monitoring framework in order to assess the effectiveness of the delivery methods. Incorporate what's needed for longitudinal tracking and follow-up of participants (e.g. identifiers needed and consent for tracking) and build these into the routine data collection processes). Perhaps link the monitoring framework to use of meta-data (e.g. progression trends). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There can be challenges in moving beyond the traditional approach to monitoring (linked to recording activity and expenditure) to achieve monitoring which supports theory-testing and evaluation. Systems and processes for data collection and storage are needed (including data that incorporates the process characteristics of what's delivered). The main challenge is linking monitoring to decision-making, since this requires feedback loops. A useful approach is to monitor the most critical assumptions against key 'signposts' (evidence that the activities are as planned) and 'triggers' (threshold values which when crossed, signify that need for an adaptive response). The monitoring systems may need to work in different contexts, as part of multi-stakeholder programmes where there are multiple dimensions involved. 	<p>NERUPI guide to monitoring gives suggestions for different types of monitoring and feedback data</p> <p>NERUPI methods guide to stakeholder feedback discusses collection of feedback.</p> <p>The NERUPI methods guide to tracking discusses different ways of obtaining longitudinal data (with links to including comparator groups in HEAT tracking reports.</p> <p>Guidance on process evaluation includes suggestions for using feedback evidence.</p>
Outputs at this stage could include:	Stakeholder analysis, praxis team TOR, first draft evaluation self-assessment tool, evaluation development action plan, monitoring arrangements, TOC evaluability assessment		

Phase/Step	Key Tasks	Potential Challenges	NERUPI Tools and resources
II. Evaluation Design			
Step II.1) Identify evaluation purpose(s) and uses Rationale: In order for evaluation to support iterative cycles of reflection and action, there needs to be clarity of purpose: for example, is the main present purpose to contribute to programme improvement, to assess whether the ToC holds up in practice, for accountability uses or making major decisions based on impact? The purpose will change over the lifetime of the programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with evaluation stakeholders to establish the present purpose for evaluation, making sure the evaluation takes account of the primary evaluation users as well as the accountability context for the programme. If the evaluation has several purposes, clarify how these work together (e.g. primary and secondary uses) so it's clear where the effort needs to go and what different evaluation users can expect. Agree the approach to capturing impact and the issue of 'proving' the results were down to the programme. Consider whether evaluation will generate evidence-based practice findings that might be transferable beyond the programme and contribute to knowledge development in the HE sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing clear priorities can be difficult if there are competing views about what's most important or concerns about the potential positive and negative effects of prioritising different aspects in evaluation (i.e. formative evidence for development, participatory evidence for empowerment and summative evidence for measuring). It is usually better to conceptualise a staged programme of evaluation which contributes to different objectives over time rather than to try to do everything at once. 	Guidance on process evaluation Discussion of the differences between activity and programme level evaluation Exercises to help with thinking about the purpose(s) of evaluation
Step II.2) Identify and prioritise focused evaluation questions Rationale: The praxis team needs to determine evaluation questions to focus the evaluation on the insights needed to understand the programme. Different evaluation questions could be asked at different times (building cumulatively on what is already known).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify focused questions which the evaluation will address (in the initial stages questions are likely to address implementation and process issues; in mature programmes, attention might turn to testing conditions under which outcomes are optimised). Agree the timelines for evaluating results. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Judgements may need to be made about the feasibility and utility of evaluations to answer different questions at different times (for example, can the question be answered sufficiently well and in a timely way to inform actions?; is it worth the cost?; have the evaluation users identified the question as important? etc). Agreeing how to phrase evaluation questions needs discussion and revision to ensure that they can be answered, and the answer is not pre-determined by the question. Prioritisation may be needed (no evaluation can look at everything). 	Guidance on developing evaluation questions (based on the PARSEC framework) ¹ Linking theory of change to evaluation
Step II.3) Define the evaluation design (i.e. the approach to how evidence will be analysed) based on the evaluation questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree the evaluation design making sure the implications of the design for the claims that you can make from evaluation is understood. Specify what's needed to implement the design in terms of data (e.g. types of data, sample sizes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data availability and expertise will vary so it can be challenging to work through the different options. 	NERUPI guidance on theory-driven evaluation approaches included methods guides on: Comparative case study analysis; Realist evaluation; Process tracing;

¹ PARSEC is an acronym to put the focus on asking questions that are Pertinent; Answerable; Specific; Reasonable; Evaluative; and Complete

Phase/Step	Key Tasks	Potential Challenges	NERUPI Tools and resources
<p>Rationale: The evaluation design is crucially important, not only to answering the evaluation questions but also to take account of considerations, such as resources, timeliness, data availability, expertise.</p>	<p>required for different research designs) and expertise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the resources and expertise required by the design are available and mobilised. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation stakeholders might need to be educated about the options (and the methods debates that affect choices).² In some cases a good result might be to prevent a worsening situation rather than generating progress so the design might need to take this into account. 	<p>Qualitative comparative analysis; Contribution analysis. NERUPI guidance on process evaluation NERUPI guidance on impact evaluation discusses different types of research designs for attributing impact. Methods guides are also available on the following: mixed methods; experimental and quasi-experimental methods.</p>
<p>Step 11.4) Select indicators and measures for people-processes-context-consequences</p> <p>Rationale: It's important to be specific about the variables that need to be included in the evaluation design and how these will be used to assess progress and make evaluative judgements (something that is easier with a narrowly focused theory).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify indicators and measures to represent the achievement of successful benefits, outcomes and impacts (i.e. results). Identify indicators that capture how well the programme is being implemented and the processes involved in delivering good results. Examine the relationship between the regular monitoring activities and the evaluation. Identify the factors that it will be important to understand to assess the situation and context of the programme and the implications for the evaluation (it can be helpful to distinguish between enabling and constraining factors). And those in and out of scope of the programmes influence. Identify the measures that capture who the programme is working with and in what context(s). Identify any assumptions that need to be tested about what would take place in order for the programme to work.³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The focus is usually how to measure the ToC, but general theories of human development can also be applied and there are a wide range of developmental outcomes, assumptions and mechanisms of interest. A wide range of processes and assumptions could be involved - the specific measures need to be contextualised to the intervention in question. The indicators need to be measurable and appropriate to the purpose of the evaluation. Identifying the critical contextual factors that can affect the programme can be challenging because it isn't always possible to know in advance what importance individual and local processes and pressures will have. There is the challenge of understanding and taking into account system issues and interrelationships over time as they emerge (especially challenging in a changing world). A baseline might be needed to be able to compare the situations before/after, and 	<p>Guidance is available on characteristics of strong indicators and measures</p> <p>Question Bank resources including overview of the indicators in the NERUPI framework, a bank of questions which can be used as part of evaluation research with participants in order to draw out achievement of learning aims in the NERUPI framework, and a tool to link NERUPI objectives to the MOAT</p> <p>A question bank is in development for use as part of process evaluation projects</p>

² Different designs have different appeals: descriptive studies (good for describing what happened and why); studies of association (good for showing how inputs relate to outcomes); or experimental designs (good for attributing impact). One of the key current debates is that around experimental versus non-experimental designs and internal versus external validity of the results. Ultimately the design should meet the needs of the evaluation users (e.g. are they looking to make generalisations or seeking context-specific conclusions?).

³ The link between the outputs (project deliverables) and the purpose of the intervention (the beneficial change from the project) is critical, and this link must be specific, realistic and plausible. It's helpful to revisit the ToC before finalising it to make sure that the purpose and the outputs of the programme will meet the needs of the situation/target groups, that the overall logical pathway is specified, and the goals are clear and measurable).

Phase/Step	Key Tasks	Potential Challenges	NERUPI Tools and resources
		<p>with/without the intervention, or if this doesn't exist, monitoring may need to be put in place first to enable a baseline to be constructed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Designs using a control/comparison group need to consider 'contamination' factors (external variables affecting their outcomes). The further away in time the harder it can be to isolate the intervention effects from 'contaminating' factors.	
Outputs at this stage:	Evaluation purpose statement, Evaluation Questions, Evaluation design and framework of indicators and measures,		
12. Evaluation Implementation			
<p>Step 12.1) Specify the methods</p> <p>Rationale: There are numerous methods that can be used to collect evidence, with implications for the type of data generated and the extent to which the methods are designed to be objectives focused or participatory, empowering and inclusive.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Select the method(s) capable of answering the evaluation questions (making sure evaluation users are involved so that the evaluation is credible and the results taken seriously).▪ Consider how evaluation methods might be embedded into the programme or conducted in ways that increase skills, knowledge, confidence, self-determination, and a sense of ownership among those involved in the evaluation (delivery team and participants).▪ Ensure the methods are realistic, appropriate to the uses and cost-effective▪ Check that the results from the method(s) can be used in the intended way to meet the needs of the evaluation▪ Risk-assess methods for threats and put mitigations in place mitigations.⁴▪ Assess the match within the praxis group between the existing skills and the challenges of doing the evaluation. This involves not only evaluators needing to be reflexive about their own strengths and weaknesses, and but also identifying skills and capacity for	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The type of evidence needs to fit with how the findings will be used. The NERUPI approach recommends the use of mixed methods and a proportionate approach, where possible triangulating different types of evidence to answer the evaluation questions.▪ You may have to navigate potential trade-offs between desirable methods and what is possible in your circumstances.▪ Evaluation is a contested area, so there is a need to understand how the methods will be judged – e.g. the quality criteria for different methods and what will be credible with your evaluation users.	<p>NERUPI guide to methods gives an overview of different approaches and links to a series of detailed methods guides</p> <p>Guidance on developing questionnaire surveys (includes cognitive testing advice)</p>

⁴ Potential risks to the success of the evaluation include, for example, issues of data quality, difficulties in implementing certain procedures, engagement issues, staff/expertise bottlenecks, etc.

Phase/Step	Key Tasks	Potential Challenges	NERUPI Tools and resources
	evaluation of the evaluation users and stakeholders.		
<p>Step 12.2) Address the ethical and legal issues</p> <p>Rationale: Ethics and safety are paramount, and this means respecting the rights of participants and minimising the risk of harm. Policies on research ethics have been agreed for higher education, and most providers convene an institutional Research Ethics Committee to make sure that research and evaluation studies are designed ethically. Data collection, analysis and storage are also subject to a legal framework, implemented by the Information Commissioners' Office (ICO).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make sure that you are familiar with the ethical approval process at your organisation. Ensure the methods are ethical, legal and appropriate to the situation, and enable evaluators to act ethically throughout the process of conducting the methods. Make sure the benefits outweigh the risks, and then minimise the risks through mitigations which address the risk of harm. Protect the rights of individuals who are the subjects of evaluation by making sure they are fully informed of what's involved, how their information will be used, and have agreed to take part. Make sure data collection, analysis and storage conforms to laws concerning data protection and harm to others and consumer legislation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It can sometimes be hard to know which evaluation activities require formal ethical approval through a Research Ethics Committee and which don't, especially since programme evaluation studies can be closer in nature to audit and feedback activities than to research studies.⁵ The process of obtaining ethical approval for the evaluation through a university Research Ethics Committee takes time, so this needs to be built into the timelines for the evaluation. 	<p>The NERUPI methods guides include commentary on the key ethical considerations for different types of research methods. Comprehensive guidance on navigating ethical considerations in access and participation work has been developed by TASO-HE in partnership with University of Central Lancashire. This includes practical tools and resources (such as templates for obtaining consent).</p> <p>HE providers have codes of research ethics setting out the principles and guidelines on the process for scrutiny by the Research Ethics Committee.</p>
<p>Step 12.3) Agree the plan and launch the evaluation</p> <p>Rationale: Although not strictly necessary, having an event or formal communication to launch the evaluation can be a useful opportunity to get buy-in and enhance stakeholders' understanding of the evaluation. The process can ensure transparency – e.g. materials for informed consent - which are needed to communicate the details of what's involved to the evaluation participants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree the evaluation plan and lines of accountability. Communicate the vision for the evaluation, what's involved and how the information will be used. Make clear the requirements for participation in the evaluation (and different roles if relevant). Decide on the best activity (e.g. launch event, workshop, briefing, web page etc) should aim to maximise the commitment to the evaluation and communicate what's involved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing expectations is a potential issue; there needs to be a positive vision for the evaluation but also realism about the barriers to engagement in the evaluation and the limitations in terms of design and methods. Hopefully any conflicts around design and methods for evaluation will have been resolved before the launch but evaluators need to be prepared to debate the choices made and be able to defend the methods and convince others of the utility of the approach chosen. 	<p>Guidance on evaluation work planning (with links to the HEAT Evaluation planning tool)</p>

⁵ Evaluation methods that involved adults, and fully inform the participants what the study is about and any risks, obtain and record consent to participate, and deal with participants' information anonymously tend to be low risk in terms of ethics. Studies involving children and young people, seek to track or record a large amount of data from a large number of people, are potentially higher risk. However, all evaluation needs to be designed with ethical considerations in mind, regardless of whether or not it is scrutinised by a committee.

Phase/Step	Key Tasks	Potential Challenges	NERUPI Tools and resources
Step 12.4) Manage the collection and collation of evaluation evidence (with attention to use) Rationale: evaluation evidence may be drawn from various sources so management systems and processes are needed to ensure rigour, plus the emerging evidence needs to be looked at to make sure it's fit for purpose (for example, running a pilot first and making adaptations if necessary).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Make sure data collection is managed to ensure quality and data that is credible and reliable. Processes and standards for evaluation are needed if data collection happens in different places (e.g. in schools participating in outreach) so the 'rules' need to be clear – e.g. around consistency, how to go about recording of information, and arrangements for secure data sharing etc.▪ Address any capacity problems, supporting the data collection (e.g. training practitioners in data collection processes).▪ Simulate the analysis and data presentation (real or dummy data) to make sure the data meets the needs of the evaluation. It can also be helpful to prepare stakeholders for what to expect, and how the results can be used.▪ Make changes to data collection if needed (whilst keeping the evaluation users informed).▪ Ensure everyone's contribution is valued.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Communicating what's required in terms of data collection process can be challenging, especially where there are multiple delivery involved and there is limited capacity. Those who support collection of evidence need enough information on the requirements without being over-whelmed with masses of technical detail.▪ There is the issue of making sure processes are maximising the data collection without inappropriately affecting responses or the validity of the results.▪ It's good to anticipate the analysis and results, and to alert the evaluation users to emerging data (although it's also important to differentiate between initial/early findings and the final results – so distribution of interim reports needs to be limited).	<p>Guidance on developing questionnaire surveys (includes cognitive testing advice)</p> <p>Need to consider what tools evaluators are using to manage evaluations in practice?</p>
Outputs at this stage include:	Agreed evaluation plan, with clear roles agreed, responsibilities and timing, Ethnical approval, research protocols and tools – e.g. informed consent process and data sharing protocols, Data collection tools (questionnaires, check lists etc), results of initial analysis		
13. Using Evaluation			
Step 13.1) Analyse the evaluation evidence Rationale: Usually evaluation involves gathering different types of data which need to be studied in order to understand the evidence and generate better understanding, which helps in developing evaluation conclusions and supports further study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Organise the data into a useable format and assess it in terms of scope and content (for example, collating survey results into a format that can be analysed or transcribing comments from interviews/focus groups).▪ Undertake an analysis of the emerging evidence - making sure this is appropriate to the type of data and the evaluation design. Essentially the should answer to contribute to answering a research questions: quantitative analysis usually involves looking at trends and making comparisons, search for correlation/associations in the data; qualitative analysis usually involves drawing out themes and looking for the reasons behind the patterns).▪ Make sure there is clarity on the approach you are taking to doing the analyses and why. Use the Theory of Change as a conceptual framework for	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Depending on the data, there are a plethora of potential practical issues, including: the time involved, access to data, the need for background knowledge and understanding as well as technical skills in data analysis. There needs to be a focus on processes and resources for undertaking the analysis since this tends to be time-consuming and reliant of specific kinds of expertise. It can often be the 'weak link' in evaluation. How the data will be analysed and the resources required should have been agreed in the early stages as part of the process of agreeing the evaluation design and methods.▪ There might be a lot of data, so the scale of the analysis task can be a challenge, especially where there much qualitative data.	<p>More on analysis as part of the NERUPI mixed methods approach</p> <p>The NERUPI resources include guidance on analysing qualitative data and undertaking quantitative analysis</p> <p>A method guide is available on statistical tests and pre/post analysis and benchmarking</p> <p>Resources on triangulation of data as part of mixed methods research</p>

Phase/Step	Key Tasks	Potential Challenges	NERUPI Tools and resources
	<p>the analysis (i.e. referring to the system of assumptions, expectations and theories that structured the evaluation).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record the stages of the analysis so these can be included as part of a description of your methodology. It can be helpful to draw on existing analysis processes for this (e.g. Braun and Clarke's six steps approach which is often used to undertake thematic analysis of qualitative data). Record limitations and perspectives. For example, limitations could include difficulties in drawing transferable conclusions because of the nature of the sample or data. Perspectives could include being clear on how research design has defined topic, how researcher(s)' subjectivity shapes understanding of the topic and how you are conceptualising the problem/issue and the decisions made as a researcher/evaluator. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applying rigour and professionalism in analysing data is not just about the ability to find the key facts, describe the patterns and give them meaning, it also involves making value judgements and the basis for such judgements needs to be subject to a process of epistemological and personal reflexivity. In complex studies it can be a challenge to keep the presentation simple and understandable, whilst making sure the analysis presents the 'whole picture'. This is why it's helpful to focus first on what the data reveal before moving into interpretations and judgments. 	
<p>Step 13.2) Interpret the evaluation evidence</p> <p>Rationale: Once the data has been analysed, interpretation is needed to make sense of the patterns and to make judgements about what the evidence is saying, and any recommendations as a result. The process of interpretation and making conclusions cannot be the responsibility of one person (i.e. the evaluator). The interpretation of the data needs to facilitate its use by the evaluation users, and in a way which addresses the key questions for the evaluation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise a meeting of the praxis team to consider the evidence. Once the data has been analysed it needs to be considered by the praxis team to make sense of the patterns and to make judgements about what the evidence is saying. Actively involving users in interpreting findings as part of the praxis team approach is designed to help to identify what is most significant and to support identification of the explanations for the findings before drawing definitive conclusions. Use the meeting to encourage active reflection recalls to make sense of processes, problems, issues and constraints made manifest in the evidence. Make sure this takes account of the variety of perspectives and comprehends the issues and circumstances in which they arise. Through discourse, group reflection leads to the reconstruction of the meaning of the social situation and provides the basis for making recommendations and revising the project. This process of reflection is partly descriptive (i.e. building a more vivid picture of the analysis, but it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It can take time to undertake analysis and to then reflect and learn from it. Sometimes the reasons for different findings will be unclear. Combining process evaluation with outcome evaluation can help in the interpretation of the results since the process findings are the context for the results. It is likely that the patterns in the data will vary and there could be varying degrees of certainty in the findings (if this is the case the reporting needs to be open and explicit about strengths and uncertainties or limitations in the analysis). The analysis might require making evaluative judgments – in which case there is a need to be clear about the values that underpin the judgments made (and to make these explicit to evaluation users). 	<p>A method guide is available on statistical tests and pre/post analysis and benchmarking</p> <p>Plus, resources on triangulation of data as part of mixed methods research</p>

Phase/Step	Key Tasks	Potential Challenges	NERUPI Tools and resources
	mainly has an evaluative aspect — it asks praxis team members to weigh their experience —to judge whether effects (and issues which arise) were desirable, and suggest ways of, proceeding. Doing this in a group setting means that there is a collective sense of what might now be possible, for the group, and for its individual members as actors committed to group goals.		
Step 13.3) Agree an evaluation output(s) Rationale: The evaluation output(s) needs to be agreed with the evaluation users in order to make sure they will be used. The praxis team is likely to be the main audience in the first instance, but there may be other people that the evaluation results need to be communicated to maximise the use and influence of the evaluation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate the evidence considerably, to provide balance and make sure that comparisons are made carefully and appropriately. Make sure readers understand the detail on the methods used, definitions and any technical issues are included. Make sure the evaluation outputs maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of the research participants and conform to reporting standards. If recommendations are made, make sure these are directed at those who can actually action them, that they are supported by the findings and that the costs, benefits, and challenges of implementing recommendations are discussed appropriately. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decisions on the most appropriate output(s) can be tricky, especially where there is more than one audience, and it may be necessary to adapt the initial report for different audiences and uses. Using the evaluation output to make recommendations can be problematic: the report should make clear the difference between findings and interpretations/ judgements about the evidence. Any conclusions drawn should be supported by the evidence. 	<p>Suggestions are available for an evaluation report format.</p> <p>Guidance on preparing academic articles is in development.</p>
LEARNING PHASE			
Step 14) Evaluation follow up with users Rationale: Usually having an evaluation report or other output is not sufficient for the evaluation results to be used. Facilitation and follow-up (possibly internally and externally) is a good idea to support the use of the findings and any recommendations for action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate the process of using evaluation to make strategic decisions and choices. Ask questions about ‘what now/next?’ seeing evaluation as an ongoing process of learning, rather than an end in itself (especially since findings often lead to new questions to be addressed). Consider how learning from the evaluation will be used to further develop the programme (or more widely as part of organisational development). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It may be necessary to report negative or unexpected findings, so the evaluators need to be prepared to help users to understand and deal with negative findings and identify the implications of these for their work. Facilitating use of the evaluation findings and recommendations becomes challenging when the results are met with resistance. Efforts may be needed to facilitate a climate of openness and willingness to reflect and learn from so-called ‘negative’ results: every evaluation is an opportunity for learning and improving. There is also a need to ward-off users from mis-using evaluation – for example, by ‘cherry-picking’ the results for their own ends rather 	<p>The praxis pages of the website include links to resources which discuss the implications of praxis for practice</p>

Phase/Step	Key Tasks	Potential Challenges	NERUPI Tools and resources
<p>Step 15) Disseminate key findings and recommendations to a wider audience (if appropriate) Rationale: The main audience is the praxis team, so the first task is to disseminate internally and facilitate the understanding and use of the evaluation for decision-making on the programme being evaluated. It may be that the case that evaluation merits wider dissemination within the organisation, or across the widening participation community more generally.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take advantage of opportunities to reinforce the messages from the evaluation and the take up of the learning and recommendations (this could include adapting the findings to the needs of different audiences/groups if required). Decide if the evaluation findings merit wider dissemination, and to whom. Determine what kinds of reporting (styles (formal/informal), formats (written/oral etc.)) are going to be most effective for communicating the particular type of results and in light of the needs of the audience(s) identified. Decide on the pathways to disseminate the information (online, in-person, etc) in an appropriate format and the best time to maximise the use of the knowledge from the evaluation (e.g. to inform decision-making). 	<p>than engaging with the (potential) nuance and complexity of the findings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are costs involved, and different formats have different pros and cons. 	<p>The dissemination planning template provides a format and suggestions for preparing an evaluation dissemination plan</p> <p>A method guide covering articles for academic publication</p>
<p>Step 16) Evaluate the evaluation Rationale: Every evaluation is an opportunity to learn lessons and improve and the HE sector places particular emphasis on the use of evaluation for decision-making and informing the sector about what works in access and participation. Whilst the evaluators themselves will be in a good position to evaluate the evaluation, the main issue is how useful it is to the primary intended users so they need to be involved in evaluating the evaluation. It can also be a good idea to get a range of perspectives including external perspectives so that it's not just the evaluator reflecting on their own work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and reflect on the evaluation and uses, firstly with the evaluation stakeholders and users (and potentially more widely through external critique). This means being clear on what went well, or not, the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation and how useful it was to development and decision-making. Use the learning on the evaluation to make recommendations for future evaluation practice and share this with others. This could involve taking the opportunity to design the next stage of evaluation for the same programme or making recommendations about other potential evaluation activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This stage involves evaluators being prepared to have the effectiveness of the evaluation judged by how useful it is to the primary intended users. Colleagues can be more open to critique if the criteria for assessing the evaluation were clear from the start. The main challenge is likely to be finding the time to evaluate the evaluation, to engage with the stakeholders as part of this process and to disseminate the lessons. This can often be seen as low priority after the effort of completing the evaluation itself, but is important to maximise the learning, and it can also support professional development (which is one of the aims of the peer evaluation process). 	<p>The NERUPI Peer Evaluation course is an example of evaluators critically reflecting on each others' evaluations and supporting each other across institutions.</p> <p>The NERUPI working groups and events bring evaluators together to discuss planned and completed evaluation projects.</p>

Phase/Step	Key Tasks	Potential Challenges	NERUPI Tools and resources
Outputs at this stage:	Internal and external evaluation reports and other output(s) appropriate to the audience, executive summary, technical outputs, data and results, policy implications document, academic outputs (e.g. academic article) and follow-up materials e.g. recommendations for future evaluations, reflection/peer-evaluation output, plus dissemination action plan outlining next steps to maximise the impact of the evaluation results		