



Supporting Evaluation

Who is this for?

- Are you involved with designing, developing and implementing a project aimed at creating change in tertiary education?
- Are you interested learning about how to effectively evaluate your project?
- Are you looking for tools to support you to measure change and impact?
- Do you want to know more about Theory of Change (ToC)?

If you answered 'yes' to any of the above, then this resource is for you, whether you are a student, a member of academic staff, or working in professional support services.

Introduction

This short document signposts you to resources that will support your evaluation work and provide broader reading around using data and evidence, which are central to the use of metrics in Theory of Change (ToC).

QAA Scotland has been working with ToC and logic models to evaluate enhancement work impact for the past ten years. We have used ToC to measure impact for individual Themes ([Liz Thomas](#)) and undertaken a 20-year retrospective across all 12 Enhancement Themes ([Stella Jones-Devitt and Liz Austen](#)).

Theory of Change is used by others in the education sector, including [TASO](#) (Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education). The [Scottish Government](#) uses ToC to assess impact of its policies.

In addition to the ToC work, the Enhancement Themes themselves have created novel resources. For example, the [Beyond the Metrics: The Intangibles project](#) gives a renewed understanding of the intangible assets that contribute to the success of higher education.

Which resources will help you?

Our general evaluation resources will give you a basic understanding of evaluation and are a great starting point for those new to evaluation or for those seeking a refresh.

A glossary of terms will introduce you to the language of evaluation and help you familiarise yourself with the key concepts.

The resources aimed at upskilling for evidence gathering will support you in exploring different approaches to collecting evidence of impact (metrics). Wider reading around ToC will give you a better understanding of its mechanics. The *Changebusters* interactive game, produced by Sheffield Hallam University for AdvanceHE, is a hands-on tool that will help you put ToC into practice.

Other related useful resources on using evidence include the Staff and Student Guides to Using Evidence and five webinar recordings that cover a range of evidence-related topics.

Evaluation – general resources

If you are seeking a general read on the topic of evaluation, then look no further than [A Guide to Basic Evaluation In Higher Education \(Why Needed and How To Do It\)](#). This 24-page guide assists practitioners to gain confidence in using basic forms of evaluation.

Within the Guide, you will find a [Ten Point Framework](#) for evaluating the overall impact of interventions. The Framework outlines the steps each initiative should apply at planning stage to ensure robust evaluation of impact. The Framework also poses key questions to address sub-theme prompts for covering further detail, as considered appropriate to notional scale and context.

A [Glossary of Terms](#) will familiarise you with the key language and concepts around evaluation.

Metrics: upskilling for evidence gathering

The following are recorded workshop sessions with associated resources, which focus on different approaches to collecting evidence of impact (metrics):

[Easy does it: a no-tears approach to gathering evaluation evidence in the Resilient Learning Communities Theme](#) (PowerPoint slides)

These introductory slides to evaluation reference the Ten Point Framework.

[Sensational Surveys](#) (Recording)

[Sensational Surveys: The Biscuit Challenge](#) (Document) A deliberately poorly designed survey for critique.

[Sensational Surveys: Survey Design Checklist](#) (Document) A detailed checklist supporting the design of a well-constructed survey.

This is a great set of resources if you are planning survey work with staff, students, employers and other stakeholder groups.

[Fantastically Active Focus Groups](#) (Recording)

You may find this recording helpful if you are planning on using focus groups to further probe stakeholder views, for example after conducting a survey.

[Using creative methods in evaluation](#) (Recording)

This recording may be useful to you if you are looking for more creative approaches to surveys and focus groups or you are interested in storytelling as an evaluation approach pre- and post- intervention.

[Universal Evaluation Framework](#) (Interactive Tool)

The Universal Evaluation Framework is an open access tool for planning evaluations or for gathering evaluative evidence. The Framework aims to liberate colleagues from their fears around evaluation tasks and capabilities. It has been designed to support all, regardless of levels of evaluation experience, role and starting points.

Theory of Change – an interactive game

[Changebusters](#) (2021) is an interactive game that applies the Theory of Change to interventions in higher education in order to evidence impact. The game aims to support users to understand the stages of a Theory of Change, build confidence, explore evaluative questions, and extend learning through application to their own context. The goal is better intervention design and evaluation which in turn, should lead to better student outcomes.

Wider reading on the Enhancements Themes ToC

If you are interested in wider reading around the ToC activity that Professor Stella Jones-Devitt and Dr Liz Austen undertook on the Enhancement Themes and associated work, then you may wish to explore the following:

Contributions to Enhancement Conferences: [2022 in-person/online workshops](#) Evaluation made much easier? (PowerPoint slides) and [2023 keynote presentation](#) Evaluation for All: The Scottish Enhancement Themes (PowerPoint slides)

A [published paper](#) Evaluation for all? Why evaluation within and beyond higher education should be universal and accessible in Open Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (2023)

[Wonkhe article](#) Solving gaps in evaluation needs wicked solutions (2023)

[Exploring evaluation wicked issues with the HE sector](#) (QAA Membership Collaborative Enhancement Project (2023))

Other useful resources

Using evidence

The Staff Guide to Using Evidence and Student Guide to Using Evidence are designed to support and encourage, respectively, students (and students' association / union staff), and academic staff, professional services staff and senior managers, to engage actively with data and evidence. For individual or collective use, the Guides are aimed at increasing confidence and are highly practical, explaining key principles which are then applied in a series of case studies.

You may be a student officer preparing for committees, devising new campaigns or delivering services. You may be a member of staff responding to student feedback, or re-developing learning and teaching strategy. Whatever your role, the relevant Guide is for you.

[Staff Guide to Using Evidence in Higher Education](#) (2020)

[Student Guide to Using Evidence in Higher Education](#) (2019)

Staff webinar series on evidence and data topics

Activity that was part of the *Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience* Enhancement Theme included a [series of staff webinars](#) covering a range of evidence-related topics.

Beyond the Metrics: Charting the Intangible Aspects of Enhancement - Not everything that matters or is highly valued in tertiary education is quantifiable or easily measured. This project developed a novel conceptual model and associated mapping process to help institutions identify, evaluate and enhance these so-called 'intangible assets'. [A webinar recording](#) provides an overview of the project, the findings, outputs and some guidance on how they might be used as part of a holistic approach to evaluating the student learning experience.

Students using students' data - This [webinar recording](#) explores the importance of involving students in data processes, considering barriers and potential solutions, and examines a case study of good practice. The webinar also investigates the ways that students in different academic representative systems generate, use and share (or could potentially generate, use, and share) data and evidence to improve the student experience.

Making sense of surveys - Student surveys are powerful sources of evidence about learning and teaching, but they also have important statistical limitations. Discussions about tools such as the National Student Survey (NSS) often become polarised; honesty about the limitations of the data can help to foster more balanced views. [This webinar](#) discusses a range of accessible ways in which NSS data can be presented, taking statistical limitations into account, and explores what realistic expectations about the NSS's role in enhancement might look like.

Data Delving: Engaging staff in student experience data - [This webinar](#) explores the challenges in finding actionable insights upon which to improve the student experience. The session explores how to present and use data for different audiences along with the use of appreciative inquiry and fictionalised/caricatured data sets.

Just Enough? Why we need to question our assumptions about evidence - [This webinar](#) explores the use of evidence to drive improvement in educational practice. This topic has progressed in recent years, yet the idea of evidence-informed practice remains unclear and controversial. The webinar debates the nature of evidence and the role of methodology in educational decision-making, with particular focus on credibility. The presenters discuss the promises and pitfalls of hierarchies of evidence, and the effectiveness of using unreliable data to capture unintended consequences.

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