



## Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience

### Evaluation tools and guidance

The Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience Theme has adopted a logic model approach to evaluate activity and impact. We are applying this approach across all levels of Theme work: institutional, collaborative clusters and sector level.

In liaison with our evaluation consultant Professor Liz Thomas, we have developed a number of resources to support the application of the logic model. These resources are available on the [Theme web pages](#) and are summarised below:

- **Evaluation webinar recording** (2 October 2019). Professor Liz Thomas presents on the logic model covering: aims and objectives of the approach; achievements to date; challenges and successes; and clarifying activity to complete the work
- **Evaluation guidance.** Additional guidance on evaluation activity to support completion of the work
- **Light-touch template.** A template for recording light-touch case study projects and activities
- **In-depth evaluation template (planning).** A template to help establish logic chains for each activity to be evaluated in-depth; identifying short-term benefits, medium and longer-term impact and associated indicators
- **In-depth reporting template.** A template for recording light-touch case study projects and activities
- **Impact evaluation workshop (December 2018).** Professor Liz Thomas' first workshop, introducing and exploring the logic model and supporting institutions' development of their evaluation plans
- **Road-testing resources feedback template.** A template for institutions to record, and share with QAA Scotland and the sector, the outcomes and impact of using sector-level Theme resources

The latest additions to these resources feature:

- the completed end of year 3 report from The Open University in Scotland
- the light-touch and in-depth case studies completed by The Open University in Scotland
- PowerPoint slides of two presentations: a presentation from Gill Ryan and Shadia el-Mokdad (The Open University in Scotland) explaining how they applied the logic model to their Theme work, and a short presentation from Clare Parks (QAA Scotland) with an overview of evaluation activity progress
- a Zoom recording of the two presentations listed above.

The first three are part of this bookmarked pdf. The Zoom recording is available through [YouTube](#).

# Evaluation and Impact

Clare Parks, QAA Scotland

August 2020

# Session plan

Item	Who	Duration
Presentation	Clare Parks, QAAS	10 mins
Presentation	Gill Ryan and Shadia El-Mokdad, OUiS	10 mins
Breakout discussions	QAA officers	40mins
Plenary	Clare	10 mins
Network and Q and A	All	50 mins

# Evaluation : key points



Logic model approach established (in-depth and light touch and applied to HEI, sector and collaborative cluster projects)



HEI evaluation plans submitted at start of 2018



Sessions and materials delivered by Liz Thomas and QAAS staff (TLG)



Submission of light-touch and in-depth case studies ongoing



TLG focus groups and sector stakeholder discussions and feedback



Evaluation/impact report

# Evaluation : key stats

A total of 130 HEI projects: 32 projects not being evaluated through logic model.

Expected	HEIs	Collaborative clusters	Sector projects
In-depth	29(e) 1(s)	1(e)	4(e)
Light-touch	69(e) 36(s)	4(s)	3(e)

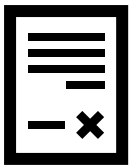
e = expected  
s = submitted

# Evaluation : resources

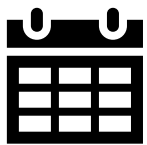
## [Evaluation Web page:](#)



- Liz Thomas webinar
- Liz Thomas' TLG session (December 2018 workshop)
- HEI evaluation plan template
- Short guidance document (April 2020)
- Exemplar in-depth report



- In-depth reporting template
- Light-touch template



**30 October 2020 – key deadline**

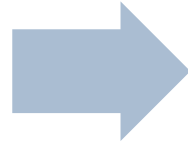
All case studies

End of year 3 report – section on evaluation

# Evaluation : outputs and outcomes

## Output

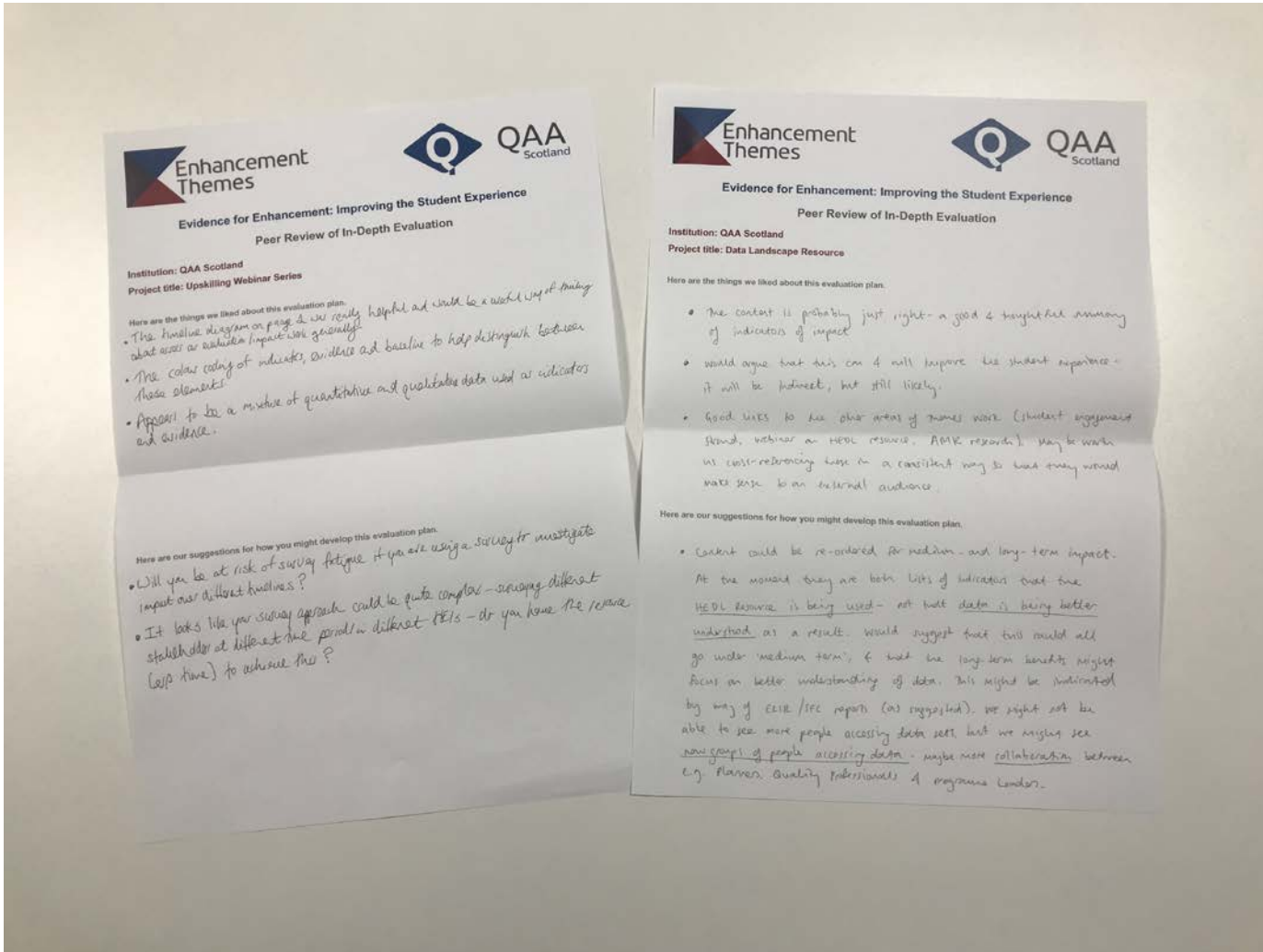
- Main report
- Summary report
- Summary flyer



## Outcomes

- Points to be added

# Peer support activity



HEI pairing to focus on specific in-depth project:

- Things that were liked about the project plan
- Suggestions for how the project plan might be developed





# Peer support activity

- Table of breakout room pairings.

## **In your pairings, please discuss:**

What indicators and measures have worked well to evidence medium to longer term impact?

Where projects are not fully completed, how are you using the evidence you currently have to anticipate longer term impact?



# Plenary

**Please also use the chat function to post comments or queries and share links.**

**We will collate TLG's contributions and post on the Theme web page so we can share TLG's views and suggestions.**



# Over to you!

Any questions from TLG members about Theme activity?

Opportunity for TLG members to catch up with each other.



## Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience

### End of Year 3/End of Theme Report for The Open University in Scotland

#### Institutional team

Since the Year 3 plan was submitted in September 2019, the following changes have occurred:

James Mooney took up post as APSS Manager on a permanent basis in November 2019, replacing Gill Ryan who was acting Manager (TLG staff representative) and who has now returned to her substantive post as APSS Officer.

Shadia El-Mokdad moved into the APSS Officer's role (TLG alternate) in October 2019.

The ET institutional group lost Kenny Stewart (Communications and Policy Manager - Scotland), who moved to a new post in December 2019.

#### Outcomes/activity

Coming into the final year of the theme, the main priorities for 19/20 have been:

1. consolidating current activities
2. completing evaluation of activities over the three years
3. sharing the learning from these activities

Our work continued in line with our Year 3 Plan, with the major focus of activity on evaluations. Due to unexpected staff changes it was decided that we would not begin any new projects and would instead focus on ensuring comprehensive evaluations of our existing projects. Cooperation among colleagues and project leads has enabled us to be successful in achieving our evaluation aims, and as a result of this focus, we have managed to ensure activities for each project have been consolidated, and the projects have been conclusively evaluated.

While we have encountered challenges due to staff changes and the COVID-19 crisis, leading to a number of projects being behind initial timescales, we are now in a strong position to take forward learning and continue to disseminate this within the OUiS and sector.

Initially, in addressing the challenge of the Evidence for Enhancement Theme over the period 2017-2020, the OUiS focused on the priorities underpinning our new Students First strategy and the OUiS Outcome Agreement. This evolved to reflect the OU's revised strategic objectives with a particular focus on student success.

These documents set out the OUiS vision and strategy for reaching more students with life-changing learning that meets their needs and enriches society, and make clear that

improving how we generate, use, and share evidence and insight will be crucial to realising this vision and meeting our key objectives.

To measure success and embrace the theme, the OUiS has focused on:

1. Student outcomes: Retention, success and sense of community
2. Confidence in evidence: Skills development and support around evidence-based practice
3. Sharing what works: Internal knowledge-exchange

An outline of the activities relating to each of these factors can be found below:

Retention, success and sense of community – how evidence can inform our interventions in these areas and help us evaluate their impact.

- Supporting students from deprived backgrounds: closing the attainment gap (SIMD20) – evidence from phase 1 of this project is being collated and analysed with a report due in July 2020. This will be used to inform the refinement of interventions from 20/21 and the design of future interventions
- Effectiveness of Psychology hubs on student engagement and performance – this project has not been completed due to the Covid-19 shutdown so the evaluation of impact will be delayed.
- Sense of Belonging – workshop incorporating the findings of this project has been rolled out to Associate Lecturer colleagues and a short online course called 'Developing a Sense of Belonging in Online Distance Learning' has been created and is hosted on OpenLearn Create. So far 90 educators have enrolled on the course and many more have accessed the tools.
- Student-led event – the Open University Students Association led a Student Forum on learning analytics in November and produced a report detailing recommendations for improving communication to students on what data the university holds, why it is collected and how it is used to support progression and enhance the learning experience.

Evidence-based practice – improving data literacy and capability of staff including how and when to use evidence to support our objectives

- Alternative, inclusive assessment practices for graduate apprenticeship provision (Remote Pair Programming) – the project has raised awareness of the need to use evidence in pairing students for remote team-working, and has been extended as a result of the Science, Technology, Engineering's and Maths (STEM) Faculty supporting its wider investigation. Further collaborations may be prompted, and the work will be shared with HEIs.
- Data users for enhancement – visual presentation has shared the good practice across OUiS of colleagues using data to enhance the student experience, and sparked conversation around projects and data.
- Change of study intentions pilot – intensive 12 week skills development programme, incorporating learning from the pilot, is being rolled out to all student recruitment and support staff. Resources have been created and recommendations made as to the long-term impact of the project.

Sharing what works - encouraging internal dialogue and discussion

- Knowledge exchange workshops: 'Wellbeing in the curriculum', and 'Equality, diversity and inclusion' (OU four nations) well attended by OUiS staff

- Fika sessions (OUiS) – monthly drop-in sessions - providing an opportunity for staff to showcase outcomes of projects and interventions, and demonstrate how evidence has been used to inform them - are now embedded in OUiS culture

From the beginning of the theme, the overarching aim has been to work with our university community to foster a culture of critical engagement with evidence, in all its forms, to improve student experience and outcomes. These activities have benefitted staff understanding of data and how it can be used to inform practice, so they are better able to intervene and support students. We also have a better understanding of what enhances a sense of belonging / community among distance learning students. As a result, evidence-based interventions will improve the student experience.

Our projects did this through a range of engagement activities and projects focusing on different parts of the OUiS, wider OU, and sector engagement, and these factors have continued throughout the theme.

## Evaluation and impact

Title	Scale	Evaluation
Supporting students from deprived backgrounds: closing the attainment gap	Medium (OUiS and wider OU)	In-depth (completed)
Data users for enhancement	Small (OUiS only)	Light-touch (completed)
Student-led project	Small	Light-touch (completed)
Fika sessions	Small	Light-touch (completed)
Psychology Hubs	Medium	In-depth (delayed due to Covid-19)
Assessment practices for graduate apprenticeships (Remote Pair Programming)	Small	Light-touch (completed)
Sense of Belonging	Large (cross-institution)	Light-touch (due to staff changes in each of the three participating universities)

## Key learning points

The evaluation tools and webinars have been hugely helpful in shaping our approach to evaluation. It was reassuring to be able to contact Professor Liz Thomas with any question. We found her guidance particularly useful for the projects which did not go according to plan. She suggested reflecting on what hadn't worked and revising timelines with indicators and milestones for the indepth evaluation of the SIMD20 project. The light touch evaluation templates gave clear guidance on the evidence we needed to provide and encouraged us to ask questions we may not otherwise have thought of in terms of unexpected outcomes. We also looked at different ways of gaining evidence beyond the usual outputs, such as a Fika focus group to gain qualitative evidence and insight into impact beyond the sessions themselves. We will be building on this approach to using evidence and incorporating it into other work areas outwith the enhancement theme.

## Dissemination of work

Internally there are a number of mechanisms we use to disseminate the outcomes of the Theme activity, which have been noted in last year's report. The monthly **Fika sessions** continue to provide an opportunity to share the Theme and other projects within the OU in Scotland. These sessions have proven consistently popular and attract 25-30 staff members from a range of teams. The slides from each session are also made available to all staff.

In 19/20 we produced a series of posters and postcards which were displayed and disseminated around the Edinburgh office to showcase the **Data Users for Enhancement** project. PDF versions were shared with colleagues in the wider Open University. They are also available on the [Enhancement Theme page](#) of our website.

Enhancing our learning and teaching is a core aim of Theme activity but disseminating outcomes and resources to our dispersed network of Associate Lecturers (AL) can be a challenge. We designed and delivered a workshop in partnership with a student, an AL and a staff tutor, incorporating the outcomes of the **Sense of Belonging** collaborative cluster activity and rolled this out to teaching staff at AL staff development events in Scotland, England and Ireland.

Another output from the **Sense of Belonging** project – a short online course called [Developing a Sense of Belonging in Online Distance Learning](#) – now sits on our OpenLearn Create platform so it is accessible to the sector (and beyond). As an open educational resource, the content is made available with a creative commons licence which means it can be adapted and customised by other institutions. We continue to promote this to sector colleagues and through social media networks.

The student-led event on the theme **Learning Analytics** which took place in November 2019 had involvement from the OU Students Association, Student Analytics staff, staff tutors and associate lecturers. This enabled a very constructive interchange between students and staff, which improved student understanding of what data was collected and how it was used, and improved staff awareness of the need to enhance communication on data and analytics.

We have also been disseminating to the sector through academic conferences in Scotland and the wider UK. We have been successful in having papers and/or posters on current Theme projects accepted to the following conferences, though the current Covid-19 crisis has meant that some of these have been postponed or cancelled:

- Access, Participation and Success conference, Milton Keynes, April 2020
- CSEDU 2020 – 12<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Computer Supported Education
- eSTEEem (OU centre for STEM pedagogy) conference, April 2020
- QAA Scotland Enhancement Theme conference, Glasgow, June 2020
- PCF9, the Ninth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning, September 2019

We intend to add these papers, and other project outputs, to the [Enhancement Theme page](#) as soon as they have been completed. In addition, a regular staff mailing will curate our own and other universities' Theme outputs, as well as QAA Scotland resources, for a wider group of colleagues in 2020/21.

## Supporting staff and student engagement

In November 2019, student representatives, in partnership with OUiS and wider OU, planned and delivered a full-day student event on Learning Analytics. The day focused on analytics and how the OUiS uses data to support learning. As a distance learning university, the student-led event enabled students to engage in a tangible way with the theme. The student reps worked in partnership with the APS team to plan, facilitate and report on a successful theme activity. Student Voice activities enabled findings to be shared with students, with both a student and staff facing report being produced.

These reports have reinforced the importance of using evidence to support student experience, and highlights students' current understanding, their concerns and their ideas around the topic of analytics. This will be circulated to participating students, within the Students Association and amongst Open University staff. A version will be shared more widely with the student body. Feedback taken from the day has also been shared with the Data and Student Analytics team, which will be used to inform practice. This will enhance our efforts to ensure the OUiS can instil an institutional culture that collects and utilises data ethically and uses it effectively to support student success. We will continue to engage with students to facilitate this.

A range of staff and student reps engaged in the knowledge exchange workshops from our Learning and Teaching Development colleagues from Milton Keynes in October 2019. The two workshops were on Towards Embedding Mental Wellbeing in the Curriculum, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity in Assessment.

The Enhancement Theme Institutional Group comprises student reps and a range of staff, including Associate Lecturers (AL) who are involved in module delivery. We have delivered theme sessions at AL staff development events and involved ALs in the design and delivery of the workshops. In 2020/21 we will be delivering Fika sessions online so ALs working remotely will be able to engage.

Another important mechanism in supporting staff in theme activities has been the theme evaluation. Staff have been involved with evaluation processes when reflecting on their theme projects. Materials and resources have been available for use, and the evaluation templates have allowed staff to address unexpected outcomes and findings in relation to the thematic work. These resources have allowed staff to be supported from the outset and initiation of projects, to the final evaluation phase.

### **Organisation and delivery**

The organisation and delivery of this Theme was been impacted by a period of significant staff changes for the institutional team. Our collaborative cluster activity was similarly affected by staff changes in other institutions. While the lack of continuity created some issues in terms of project reports and evaluation, we were able to deliver on most of the planned Theme projects.

We made the decision at the beginning of Year 3 not to take on any new projects but to focus on completion, reporting and evaluation of ongoing projects. We have used this time to reflect on the outcomes of the various projects and how the Theme fits into the wider work of the team. This has been effective and as a result we have produced more timely, thoughtful and comprehensive evaluations than we may otherwise have done. It has also given us more insight into the value of the Theme across other areas of activity in the university.



We have concluded a review of the team which leads on the Enhancement Theme, which has been renamed the Access, Participation and Success team. Enhancement is one of our four key areas of work in our plan for 2020-25:

- Widening access
- Increasing success
- Student voice
- Enhancement of learning, teaching and support

With this renewed focus, we intend to be more proactive in our approach to the new Theme and to ensure engagement from incoming student representatives, ALs and other staff teams within the OU in Scotland and the wider university. We will review the membership of the Institutional Group and improve collaboration with faculties undertaking enhancement activity in other parts of the UK, such as eSTeEM.

This year, we used the Theme funding to continue two projects carried over from last year – the student-led event and the SIMD20 attainment research – and made funding available to colleagues to support and evaluate projects on:

- Psychology Hubs
- Remote Pair Programming

This model of providing seed funding and support for evaluation for projects in other teams, rather than the APS team taking the lead on all Theme projects, worked well and we are likely to continue this into the new Theme.

### **Sector resources**

The evaluation materials have been invaluable in facilitating and guiding our evaluation work. The templates have allowed us to reflect on aspects of projects we may not have otherwise considered, and allowed for both in-depth and light-touch evaluations to present a full and rounded report of the projects. The evaluations facilitated consideration of unexpected outcomes, which gave us the opportunity to report on how the projects evolved over the 3 years, and when this question was posed to project leaders provided a though provoking evaluation of our projects.

As a team we also found the webinars engaging and again were beneficial in provoking ideas as the projects progressed. Unfortunately, while recognising the value of the resources, we found it difficult to engage students in these. While student representatives attend many of the TLG meetings, they did not engage with the online resources. Nevertheless, the TLG meetings did provide a great opportunity for us to learn how other students were engaging with these resources, and we hope to embed, from the beginning, a strong engagement with the resources for the next theme.

### **Key learning points**

To ensure resilience of the Theme activity, the learning from this year has been to not over-commit to projects and ensure that the work is shared in such a way that projects are not dependent on a single member of the team. We would also factor in evaluation earlier in the project, using the tools and templates developed with Liz Thomas, and allow space for effective evaluation and reflection in Year 3. This was done by necessity this year but will be built into future plans as it worked so well.

Similarly, we will not over-commit to cluster or sector-level work and will ensure that projects are resilient to staff changes across institutions. Again, we will build evaluation of the project in at an earlier stage and ensure responsibility for reporting, dissemination and evaluation is clear at the outset.

A key learning point this year is to involve more students, in addition to the student reps, and ensure they have ownership of projects and tools. For example, the team found the Student Using Evidence resource really useful for planning student activity, but the student reps were reluctant to use it as they did not find it specific enough for the context. We would suggest that Theme resources are made available with a creative commons licence so they can be adapted by students. We will also ensure Enhancement Theme activity is part of the induction for the incoming student representatives.

### Transition into the next Theme

The current Theme may not have appeared as immediately relevant to colleagues as the previous one of Transitions, and it took some engagement and awareness raising on the part of the institutional team to convince colleagues that they did indeed use evidence for enhancement. The legacy of that engagement is that there is now more awareness of the different types of data and evidence we use as a university. Colleagues who previously may not have engaged with the Theme have done so, both in participating in Theme projects and in linking their enhancement activity to the Theme and collaborating with us to evaluate it, such as the **Change in Study Intentions** project. We have also been effective in involving colleagues in the wider university, particularly in relation to the **Learning Analytics** and the **SIMD20 attainment** projects. This engagement with colleagues will be a key activity at the outset of the next Theme.

The Evidence for Enhancing theme has also embedded an awareness within the OUIS and has challenged staff and students to examine the way they use data, both consciously and unconsciously. The theme provided a starting point for many pilot projects, which will continue successfully as the theme comes to an end.

The current Theme has informed our new Access, Participation and Success Plan, which embeds an evaluation approach in all areas of activity and sets out clear aims and objectives for participation with the next 3-year theme.

One piece of advice for supporting the next theme would be to ensure early engagement from students and the creation of robust group of student representatives to lead on student voice activities relating to theme work. This would ensure that both staff and students engage equally with the planning and initiation of theme projects. Our outgoing Scotland student rep has committed to creating a smooth handover on the Theme with incoming reps.

Another piece of advice would be to build in evaluation work periodically throughout theme activities. This will ensure data and analysis in relation to the evaluation is collected through the life of the project and will enhance the final theme evaluations.

<b>Report Author:</b>	<b>Gill Ryan, Access, Participation and Success Officer</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>09 June 2020</b>

<b>Author:</b>	<i>Shas Littlejohn</i>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>17<sup>th</sup> June 2020</b>



## Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience

### Evaluation template for smaller projects

#### Overview

The purpose of this document is to support the collection of evidence of impact for smaller projects, which may operate in one part of the institution, e.g. through a funded-project, as a result of a larger intervention or following the identification and sharing of practice. It offers a light-touch approach to evaluation by providing a semi-structured way to support respondents to provide useful information, but it can be used flexibly.

#### Template

Please provide as much of the following information as possible. For further guidance please contact Liz Thomas [liz@lizthomasassociates.co.uk](mailto:liz@lizthomasassociates.co.uk) or your Theme Leaders' Group (TLG) member.

#### Title of your project

Changing Study Intentions: test and learn pilot

#### Description of project

*Please state what your project aims to achieve and how. Approximately 150 words.*

The Open University in Scotland is committed to using data and evidence to enhance student success by reducing retention gaps at all stages of the learner journey. Students are encouraged to contact our Student Support Teams when they are experiencing difficulties with their studies. Our advisors offer appropriate information, advice and guidance (IAG) to help the student reflect on their situation, and study-related options to empower the student to make the right choice for them. An explorative and reflective conversation with a deferring student should in the longer term encourage the student to resume their studies, better prepared.

In February 2019 a test and learn pilot group was set up to focus on how we approach IAG conversations with students who are considering deferring or withdrawing from their studies. Our Information Analyst took part, to widen advisors' knowledge of student demographics, trends and completion rates and gain insight into the characteristics of OU students and factors that may affect their success. Intensive skills development sessions and reflection was an important feature of the pilot, achieved through keeping journals and weekly peer reviews.

#### Categorisation

*Please indicate how you would categorise your project:*

(You can tick as many boxes as required)

Collection of additional data or evidence

Improving the use of data or evidence

By staff

By students

## Specific activities undertaken

*Please list the activities undertaken.*

A pilot group was formed to take part in this project. This included Student Recruitment and Support Advisors, Senior Advisors, and Educational Advisors – all of whom can engage with students at different points throughout the deferral process. The pilot group took an inclusive approach to shaping actions and implementation which helped with shared ownership, commitment and ensured the actions taken built on current good practice. Consideration was also given to challenges, constraints and what support and development might be needed to implement improvements.

Strategy drivers and data insights were embedded at an early stage. It was important to highlight some of the key trends and predictors for completion to allow the group to reflect on their experiences of supporting students considering deferral. This highlighted that an individual approach to every IAG conversation is required, challenging preconceived ideas and making no assumptions about the student. Exploration with the student through effective questioning and adapting approaches to meet the student's needs is key.

Throughout the pilot the team met regularly, meetings were focused on reflections and development activities primarily related to IAG skills development but also including other activities to build confidence with helping students considering deferral.

Development activity included:

- Questioning skills
- Building rapport
- Active listening and contracting
- Data insights
- Email IAG
- Understanding assessment strategy
- What is guidance; and
- Motivational interviewing.

An important feature of the pilot group was a focus on reflection. This was achieved through regular meetings, writing journals and weekly peer reviews. To differentiate from more formal management review, peer reviews were focussed on the listener and their learning.

The group also trialled an appointment system with a view to increasing successful phone contact with students which had varying levels of success.

## Summary of student involvement

*Please say how students have been involved in the design and delivery of your project, if relevant.*

While students have not been involved with the design and delivery of the project, students have been directly involved in experiencing the pilot project. Students were not made aware they were part of this project.

## Changes made

*Please describe changes made to policies, processes and practices as part of, or a result of, your project? Who is affected (individual, course, faculty, institution etc)?*

As a result of the project, changes are being made to the processes and practices of approaching and engaging with Change of Study Intentions conversation with student. An intensive 12 week skills development programme is being rolled out to all student recruitment and support staff, which has been designed to incorporate all the learning from the pilot. *Further details are included in the long-term impact section.*

The group created two significant resources during the pilot:

- A bank of helpful questions to consider using in deferral conversations
- Redevelopment of OU in Scotland email set texts using plain English to make them easier for students to understand. The new version of the texts also encourages more personalisation in email responses.

## Short-term benefits and medium-term outcomes

*Please describe how staff or students have benefited from the project in the short and medium terms. Short-term refers to immediately after activities have been delivered; medium-term is approximately a year. Please explain how you know this, including formal evaluation evidence and informal knowledge.*

Staff and students have benefited from the project in several ways and the pilot was evaluated by taking a three-pronged approach:

1. Feedback from the staff group which included an evaluation meeting and group members individually writing an impact testimonial. The dedication, engagement and sense of pride from the group shone through throughout the pilot. The evaluation meeting feedback and outputs echoed that.

‘My induction taught me how to do my job, but the pilot helped me consider how to do it well’

‘I have picked up tips and skills used by other colleagues which has helped me develop my own questioning and advice techniques’

2. Qualitative evaluation: calls for each pilot group member (before and after the pilot period) were reviewed. Managers looked for evidence of application of the skills that were covered in the development sessions and changes in approach. Each call was scored using the SRSC Quality Assessment scorecard system. There was a marked increase in scores across all staff by the end of the pilot.

3. Quantitative evaluation: reviewing the student records for every student who received deferral IAG from the group around (around 200 students). The students gave a good representation of our student body in Scotland, although we see slightly higher proportions of women and disabled students in the group than in our student body. We will be going back to look at these students again in March 2020 to see what choices they have made about returning to study.

Feedback from students - a student who sent a follow-up email to a phone call to say ‘I cannot thank you enough for your help this afternoon. Felt so much better.’

## Longer-term impact

*Longer-term may be beyond the life of the project.*

*How do you think your project has or will improve the student experience?*

*How has or will your project contribute to creating or improving an institutional culture that collects and utilises evidence?*

*What other longer-term impacts have you seen or do you anticipate?*

*Please explain how you know this, including formal evaluation evidence and informal knowledge.*

Following on from the project, recommendations have been made as to the long-term impact of the project, and how this project can continue to improve the student experience out with the pilot project.

Some of the recommendations from the group include:

1. Working with the Student Recruitment and Support network to:
  - Consider similar intensive skills development programmes
  - Consider ways to improve email IAG
  - Consider methods and approaches to encourage phone contact.
2. In Scotland:
  - Run an intensive skills development programme focussed on other key points in the student journey (e.g. pre-entry)
  - Design and deliver a series of workshops on deferral conversations which include a focus on reflection and peer review

- Create a CSI champions (or experts) group
  - Aim to embed IAG skills, boundaries and referrals into relevant training material
  - Ensure IAG understanding and skills development have more prominence in induction programmes for new staff and incorporate reflection and peer review
  - Consider ways to bring data insights and student support together more often.
3. Consider deferral process improvements, working with Continuous Improvement Team:
    - Use of confirmation webform & emails
    - Consider cooling off period
    - Use of 'retained for now' code
    - Improve data capture accuracy
  4. Working with FASS SRSC, and building on collaboration established through the pilot, consider bespoke proactive interventions or curriculum specific training and development to help staff best support students making module choices in Psychology.

A 12-week skills enhancement programme has now begun, which all student facing staff are required to attend. The programme is comprised of 2 workshops – workshop 1 will cover the background for the initial CSI test and learn pilot and outline the reasons for rolling out the project and its overall aims. Workshop 2 will provide an opportunity to review the previous skills development/enhancement sessions as well as experiences of peer reflection. There will then be a final review meeting to focus on peer review, reflecting on calls and approaches with the line manager, working towards achieving a personal development action plan, and the opportunity to provide feedback on what has and hasn't worked in the feedback focus group.

It is too soon to evaluate the effects the deferral conversations have on students in the long term, however, as mentioned above these students will be revisited in March 2020 to see what choices they have made regarding returning to study, following on from the conversations they have had.

## Other benefits or outcomes

*Are there any unintended benefits or outcomes?*

*Are there other positive outcomes (or negative consequences) not captured elsewhere in the form?*

*Please explain how you know this, including formal evaluation evidence and informal knowledge.*

A few unintended outcomes came from the project:

- Bleed of skills development into other areas of work. i.e. non-deferral conversations
- Development of reflective practice skills; identified by managers in 1-2-1 call and email reflections. There was a lot of practice of this during the pilot, it wasn't one of the aims
- Increased confidence of staff in training/presenting (identified through FIKA and pilot group presenting in skills enhancement programme)
- Greater awareness of OUIs staff regarding deferral conversations shared through Fika and the Data Users for Enhancement posters/postcards

## Your details

Name: Carla Anderson

Department or equivalent: Student Support Operations

Institution: The Open University in Scotland

Email: carla.anderson@open.ac.uk

## How your data will be used

The information provided here will be used to inform the overall evaluation of the Evidence for Enhancement Theme and will be shared with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. Your personal details will be kept securely and not shared with any other party; we may contact you using the email you have specified to clarify information provided in this form. We may include your name and institution as part of the outputs of the Enhancement Theme. Please tick here to indicate that you consent to the use of your details in this way.

I consent to being contacted to clarify information provided in this form

I consent to my name and institution being used in outputs of the Evidence for Enhancement theme.

Please return this form by email as a Word attachment to:

Liz Thomas Associates Ltd - [liz@lizthomasassociates.co.uk](mailto:liz@lizthomasassociates.co.uk)

[QAA Scotland – ARAdmin@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:QAA Scotland – ARAdmin@qaa.ac.uk)

Please send completed forms as soon as possible – don't wait until submission of your end of year 3/end of Theme institutional report.

Thank you.



## Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience

### Evaluation template for smaller projects

#### Overview

The purpose of this document is to support the collection of evidence of impact for smaller projects, which may operate in one part of the institution, e.g. through a funded-project, as a result of a larger intervention or following the identification and sharing of practice. It offers a light-touch approach to evaluation by providing a semi-structured way to support respondents to provide useful information, but it can be used flexibly.

#### Template

Please provide as much of the following information as possible. For further guidance please contact Liz Thomas [liz@lizthomasassociates.co.uk](mailto:liz@lizthomasassociates.co.uk) or your Theme Leaders' Group (TLG) member.

#### Title of your project

Fika

#### Description of project

*Please state what your project aims to achieve and how. Approximately 150 words.*

The Fika project runs 30-minute sessions once per month held in The Open University in Scotland (OUiS) Edinburgh office. These sessions aim to provide an opportunity for staff to showcase outcomes of OUiS projects and interventions, and demonstrate how evidence has been used to inform these. Fika sessions are open to all staff and held in the morning to allow staff to leave their desks for 30 minutes and share a coffee and cake, while learning and sharing best practice within the OUiS. The name comes from the Swedish practice of making time in the working day to share coffee and cake with colleagues. The project is run by the Access, Participation and Success team (formerly MSQ) as part of our enhancement activity.

The aim of the project is to provide all OU in Scotland staff with a forum for sharing information, knowledge and innovative practice and for learning from others, to promote a stronger sense of community across the OUiS office and contribute towards the improvement of outcomes across the whole range of activities engaged in by OUiS staff. Fika aims to ensure that staff have a platform for, see the benefit in, and feel valued in sharing their experience and expertise; and that staff better understand the work of their colleagues and the range of activity OUiS is directly engaged in. We hope that good practice and knowledge are highlighted and shared among staff in different roles within OUiS, and that we can encourage internal dialogue and discussion.

#### Categorisation

*Please indicate how you would categorise your project:*

(You can tick as many boxes as required)

Collection of additional data or evidence

Improving the use of data or evidence

By staff

By students

## Specific activities undertaken

*Please list the activities undertaken.*

The Fika project has evolved from what began as Packed Lunch seminar series, which offered staff at the OUIS office an opportunity to exchange ideas, share practice, and engage in meaningful discussion with colleagues in an informal and inclusive way. It is also an opportunity to share learning from Enhancement Theme-focused projects and activities.

Packed Lunch sessions typically took the form of a short presentation followed by questions. These sessions were held on a fortnightly basis in the staff common room over lunch-time and were open to all staff by email invitation and through the distribution of a programme in advance.

However, a feedback survey in December 2017 showed that OUIS staff felt that having these sessions over lunchtime was not always suitable due to limited time in the working day. Some of the feedback from people who noted they 'rarely attend' included:

- Lunch slots on rota never seems to align with the sessions
- As we are only allowed half an hour for lunch, attending a packed lunch session leaves little or no time to carry out other activities which may be important

Staff were also asked for suggestions on how the Packed Lunch sessions could be improved, and many of these suggestions related to the time of day these sessions were held – “holding such sessions outside of lunch time, where staff are allowed the time away from their day job, may increase participation”.

As a result, these sessions changed from lunchtime seminars to 30-minute, monthly morning events, and were rebranded as Fika, with an encouragement to take time out of your morning to enjoy a coffee and cake with colleagues, while sharing knowledge on a specific project.

Feedback from a July 2019 survey highlighted the recognition of this change – “it's great that the sessions are now held outwith lunchtimes, as I think this gives them the prominence that they deserve”.

## Summary of student involvement

Students were not directly involved with Fika sessions; however, students will benefit from staff having a greater awareness of student-facing projects going on in the OU and being able to provide a better service to students as a result. Additionally, in March 2020 a PHD student will be delivering a Fika session on their current research project.

## Changes made

*Please describe changes made to policies, processes and practices as part of, or a result of, your project? Who is affected (individual, course, faculty, institution etc)?.*

Fika has been embedded into OUIS institutional culture.

## Short-term benefits and medium-term outcomes

*Please describe how staff or students have benefited from the project in the short and medium terms. Short-term refers to immediately after activities have been delivered; medium-term is approximately a year. Please explain how you know this, including formal evaluation evidence and informal knowledge.*

Fika sessions have been continuously evaluated to ensure they meet the needs of the OUIS staff and achieve their original aims. Feedback from an evaluation in July 2019 has shown that staff continue to engage with the Fika sessions, and there continues to be a wide spread of attendees from different teams within the OUIS.

	SRSS	EST	EEPs	MSQ	Employability	FASS	WELS	STEM	FBL	Comms	Marketing	Student Funding and Data	Directorate	Strategy office	Support Services	ALS	Total
30/01/2019	13	0	2	0		1	3	2	0	1	2	1	0		1		26
28/02/2019	6	1		0					6		1	2	3		2	1	22
24/04/2019	1	1	1	0		2		2		1	1	1	1				11
28/05/2019	10	0	3	0		0	0	1	0	1	0	1	4		0		20
18/06/2019	6	2	3	0	1	0	4	2	0	1	0	1	2		0		22
23/07/2019	3	2	2	3	2	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	0		0		16
27/08/2019																	
25/09/2019	11	0	1	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0		0	0	20
31/10/2019	6	1		3	1	1	5			2				1		1	21
28/11/2019	2	2	1	3													8

The table above shows attendance from Fika sessions this year – displaying steady attendance and engagement from all teams at some point throughout 2019. This represents the reach of Fika throughout the OUIs, with the greatest number of attendees being from Student Recruitment and Support Scotland (SRSS). It’s interesting to note that this team has direct interactions with our students on a day to day basis, and some of the learning from Fika may have informed their practice.

From informal discussions with members of staff and regular evaluation surveys, some of the most important short-term benefits to Fika have been an increase in awareness of the different work that is being done around the OUIs, and that Fika has created a useful space for both new and existing staff to meet others. Evaluations have identified that Fika sessions:

- Improved staff members understanding of specific projects
- Enabled a greater awareness of how other teams in the OU use data
- Sustained engagement and interest among staff

Most prominently, feedback has shown Fika to be an important way for both new and existing staff to meet and get to know one another in a comfortable space, and as and a calm and encouraging setting for sharing information. Staff have reported:

- “I feel the better they (SRSS staff) know what is going within the OU the more they can provide better service to students/employers”
- “You are proactively encouraged to meet people”
- “It’s so useful to new staff as a setting for sharing information and is a much more comfortable space to meet people”

For the final Fika session in 2019 in November, we organised a ‘Focus on Fika’ session, which invited staff to come and discuss how they had found the Fika sessions in an informal and interactive way – following the theme of Fika. We discussed what impact Fika has had, and any long- and short-term benefits that can be recognised.

Some of the specific short-term benefits of the 2019 Fika sessions have been:

- A member of the Achieving Your Goals team has attended a Student Recruitment and Support weekly meeting to follow up from the Fika session and how this work will impact the advisors.
- Positive feedback has been received from staff on the presentations delivered. These are all saved in a shared space and can be accessed by all OUIs staff.
- Staff are proactively encouraged to meet people they may not otherwise engage with across the OUIs.
- Increased sense of belonging within the university.
- A greater awareness of projects and the work being done within different teams.

Additionally, staff reported that Fika sessions can be inspiring, and an important way to recognise the great work of the OU and feel proud of the institution. This was echoed by a Fika presenter, who stated “I appreciated the chance to share our enthusiasm about the project as well!”

Fika has also provided a platform for awareness of teams not based in Scotland through colleagues who work in the Edinburgh office. An example of this is the International Development Office (IDO), and The Zambian Education School-based Training (ZEST) programme. The ZEST project does not align to the majority of the work in the Edinburgh office, but is an exciting project that many staff members were enthused to learn more information about.

## Longer-term impact

*Longer-term may be beyond the life of the project.*

*How do you think your project has or will improve the student experience?*

*How has or will your project contribute to creating or improving an institutional culture that collects and utilises evidence?*

*What other longer-term impacts have you seen or do you anticipate? – continuation of Fika out with project timeline*

*Please explain how you know this, including formal evaluation evidence and informal knowledge.*

The intended longer-term outcomes of this project were:

- that staff have a platform for, see the benefit in, and feel valued in sharing their experience and expertise;
- that staff better understand the work of their colleagues and the range of activity OUIs is directly engaged in; and, that good practice and knowledge are highlighted and shared among staff in different roles within OUIs.

Through both formal evaluations, and informal discussions with colleagues, the project can be seen to have met these outcomes, and has gone beyond these in terms of the positive impact Fika has had within the OUIs. Both attendees to Fika and presenters have recognised the benefits in having a platform to share their experience and expertise, and Fika has opened the door to enable staff to have a better understanding of the work going on in the OUIs and beyond.

Longer term, Fika will continue to contribute to enhancing institutional culture around data and evidence by learning from feedback. There were few suggestions on how to improve Fika: many indicated there had been improvements in time keeping, that the format and length were good and that overall, they felt informative and useful. There was feedback regarding the times/days of the sessions, but this is something that cannot be resolved to everyone's satisfaction. The few suggestions there are detailed below:

- More sessions led by frontline staff
- More interaction, less of a 'presentation'

The request for more sessions led by frontline staff has been a common theme throughout Fika evaluations, with a recognition that some OUIs staff have little awareness of the day to day role of Student Recruitment and Support Advisors and Senior Advisors. As a result of this April's Fika session will showcase the work done by these staff in supporting students, and will create greater lines of communication between teams for introductions, shadowing, and follow up sessions.

Further long-term outcomes have come from sessions delivered by the Achieving your Goals team. Their Fika session "led to scoping out potential working partnerships to add value to our project and how we could draw on OUIs expertise from across the building and working more closely with the data team and also the possibility of working alongside care experienced students". This session will be followed up in a session later this year, with a presentation of the longer-terms outcome of the project.

Fika has also been recognised to be a staff development tool within the OUIs. One member of staff saw the importance of hearing from other teams and the opportunities that can come from this – both for personal development and job opportunities. Another member of staff now has 'Attending Fika' sessions as part of their Career Development and Staff Appraisal (CDSA) – this again acknowledges the value of Fika as a staff development opportunity and highlights the embedding of this within OUIs culture. In the long term, we hope Fika sessions will continue to be prioritised, so staff are able to attend.

While the usual set up for Fika has been to approach staff and ask they would like to present in a Fika session, staff have now been encouraged to contact the Fika coordinator and request sessions/topics/subjects they would like to hear about.

A proposal for a QAA themed Fika session will also be put forward at the end of this theme. This will disseminate the work from the Enhancement theme, and introduce the next theme, to ensure contributions to theme-related activities are available to teams within the OUIS.

## Other benefits or outcomes

*Are there any unintended benefits or outcomes?*

*Are there other positive outcomes (or negative consequences) not captured elsewhere in the form?*

*Please explain how you know this, including formal evaluation evidence and informal knowledge.*

In the final 'Focus on Fika' session, feedback from staff was extremely positive, with many staff feeling that Fika is one of the only things that brings all OUIs staff together and is an informal way to engage with the OUIs.

A common unintended outcome of the project has been that Fika sessions have provided staff a 'safe space' to present their work and gain confidence in doing so. The aim of Fika did not specifically intend to improve such skills for staff and was instead aimed more at a creating a holistic approach to working life.

Fika sessions have also been invaluable in terms of training – a session on the OU's CRM system - 'VOICE for non-users: the dummies guide' allowed for members of staff who do not receive official training on this system to receive an overview and demonstration of this. During the evaluation one member of staff reported that they were later asked to use this system, and the Fika session equipped them to do so.

However, this session did highlight a couple of areas of improvement for OUIs:

Some staff felt that a change in attitude was needed to emphasise the import of Fika sessions. A few staff feel they must "justify Fika's worth" in order to get time out to attend and that there is perceived to be a 'do you need to attend?' attitude. It must be noted that many other colleagues highlighted a push from their managers to attend, and did feel supported in requesting time out, when needed, to attend a Fika session.

Fika also emphasised a lack of knowledge within the OUIs about what other teams do on a day to day basis, their remits, and a general introduction to teams. Fika has become a good way to showcase this – staff have requested 'a day in the life of...' for certain teams. This highlights a lack of induction and introductions within the OUIs, out with own teams, and a lack of opportunities for teams to mix and share their work.

As the Fika project continues more teams will share their work, and present good practice across the OUIs. Fika sessions have been picked up by other teams and faculties in The Open University (Milton Keynes campus), who have adopted the name, approach and promotional materials. This demonstrates the appeal of Fika model, the need that existed for such a project, and the wider success across the institution. Knowledge sharing in this format is now embedded within The Open University.

At the December 2019 QAA Theme Leaders Group Meeting, more information about the Fika project was requested by Abertay University. This shows evidence of the cross-institutional benefit of such projects, and profit in attending the QAA and sharing good practice. The OUIs has created a module which could be replicated across other institutions.

## Your details

Name: Shadia El Mokdad

Department or equivalent: Access, Participation and Success Scotland

Institution: The Open University in Scotland

Email: shadia.el-mokdad@open.ac.uk

## How your data will be used

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## Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience

### Evaluation template for smaller projects

#### Overview

The purpose of this document is to support the collection of evidence of impact for smaller projects, which may operate in one part of the institution, e.g. through a funded-project, as a result of a larger intervention or following the identification and sharing of practice. It offers a light-touch approach to evaluation by providing a semi-structured way to support respondents to provide useful information, but it can be used flexibly.

#### Template

Please provide as much of the following information as possible. For further guidance please contact Liz Thomas [liz@lizthomasassociates.co.uk](mailto:liz@lizthomasassociates.co.uk) or your Theme Leaders' Group (TLG) member.

#### Title of your project

Remote pair programming

#### Description of project

*Please state what your project aims to achieve and how. Approximately 150 words.*

Open University computing students learn how to program largely individually and remotely. Previous international research indicates that pair programming can lead to improved quality of programming, enhance programming skills and increase self-confidence when programming. This project was to investigate the benefits to distance learning students of engaging in remote pair programming in their learning. Our investigation focussed upon community and employability benefits, both of which are relevant to NSS amongst other measures of student satisfaction, rather than academic progress. We aimed to investigate three different techniques of experiencing remote pair programming to identify perceived benefits, (i) passive (watching video recordings of tutors who are pair programming), (ii) indirect participation (watching tutors pair programming live and interacting with them at the conclusion), and (iii) direct participation with an online partner. Those techniques and approaches found to be beneficial will be used to derive guidelines for educators considering embedding pair programming in modules that teach programming.

#### Categorisation

*Please indicate how you would categorise your project:*

(You can tick as many boxes as required)

Collection of additional data or evidence

Improving the use of data or evidence

By staff

By students



## Specific activities undertaken

*Please list the activities undertaken.*

Ethical approval was given for a pilot study in which volunteer student participants gave feedback about their perceptions of each of three methods of experiencing remote pair programming:

1. passive: watching a video recording of two expert tutors pair programming "side-by-side"
2. indirect participation: watching two tutors pair programming live online, with the opportunity to interact with them either during or at the finish
3. direct participation: working on a pair programming task with a (remote) student partner online.

A video was created for (1). A live pair programming event was arranged for (2). Two pairs of undergraduate student volunteers were matched for participation in (3), the pair programming task. An online survey was created and used to gather the participants' feedback. The work and preliminary findings were summarised in two posters and a paper to be published later this year.

## Summary of student involvement

*Please say how students have been involved in the design and delivery of your project, if relevant.*

Students have been involved as:

- a. participants in the three phases of the study
- b. experienced student reviewers have reviewed and advised about the online survey questions
- c. experienced student reviewers have reviewed and advised about the interview questions to be used with tutors
- d. later this year, experienced students will interview the tutors and run a focus group of student participants.

## Changes made

*Please describe changes made to policies, processes and practices as part of, or a result of, your project? Who is affected (individual, course, faculty, institution etc)?*

As a result of the project, the OU has funded a larger project to explore the benefits of remote pair programming further. This will involve a scaling-up of the work described above and should lead to the compilation of the recommendations and guidelines for any incorporation of pair programming within the School and (likely) the Faculty for distance learning modules that teach programming.

## Short-term benefits and medium-term outcomes

*Please describe how staff or students have benefited from the project in the short and medium terms. Short-term refers to immediately after activities have been delivered; medium-term is approximately a year. Please explain how you know this, including formal evaluation evidence and informal knowledge.*

Short term

The individual student participants of the pilot project have developed knowledge and awareness of how to pair program and its benefits. A seminar was given to the School of Computing & Communications about the work which has raised awareness of the issues amongst academic colleagues designing teaching and learning activities. A PhD student in the School has been appraised of the work: literature information and technical information is being shared with that student and his supervisor.

## Medium term

Two module team chairs are now aware of this work and are considering using the evidence from it for the updating of their modules for 2021 presentation.

A paper about this work has been accepted for publication in the international conference CSEDU 2020, which is to be held online (as a result of current travel restrictions) in May this year.

## Longer-term impact

*Longer-term may be beyond the life of the project.*

The project effectively is extended as a result of the Faculty supporting its wider investigation.

*How do you think your project has or will improve the student experience?*

We believe that use of remote partner work is likely to be increased in computing modules as a result of this work.

*How has or will your project contribute to creating or improving an institutional culture that collects and utilises evidence?*

The project has raised awareness of the need to use evidence to properly pair students for pair- or team-working remotely. Various methods for pairing students have been investigated, including the use of data to identify pairs who are closely matched in terms of their previous module and assignment results.

*What other longer-term impacts have you seen or do you anticipate?*

It may be that further collaborations are prompted as a result of the conference paper publication. A range of higher education institutions will be made aware of the work as a result of the paper and invitations for collaboration will be extended during the presentation of the paper at the conference.

## Other benefits or outcomes

*Are there any unintended benefits or outcomes?*

*Are there other positive outcomes (or negative consequences) not captured elsewhere in the form?*

*Please explain how you know this, including formal evaluation evidence and informal knowledge.*

## Your details

Name

Janet Hughes

Department or equivalent

School of Computing & Communications

Institution

The Open University in Scotland

Email

Janet.hughes@open.ac.uk

## How your data will be used

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Thank you.



## In-depth evaluation: reporting the impact

### Description of the activities

#### **Project title: Supporting students from deprived backgrounds: closing the attainment gap**

This long-term project aims to:

- collect evidence and data about the extent of and the reasons for the attainment gap for students from areas of multiple deprivation (as determined by SIMD)
- design and implement potential interventions
- evaluate these interventions

Phase 1 (January 2019 – January 2020):

Carry out literature review on attainment gap

Define evidence to be collected

Liaise with University colleagues to refine data request and obtain data on SIMD20 student attainment

Analyse data sets and identify trends and patterns in data

Carry out focus groups with SIMD20 students

Carry out focus groups with Associate Lecturers

Phase 2 (February 2020 – June 2020):

Collate and analyse evidence collected

Compile report on findings

Communicate report to key University colleagues

Phase 3 (July 2020 - ):

Use evidence to design potential interventions in partnership with key University colleagues

Implement pilot interventions

Evaluate interventions in the short-, medium- and long-term to determine impact on attainment of SIMD20 students

### Contextual information

The Open University operates a unique open entry policy, which widens access to higher education for people who do not have the qualifications for traditional university entrance. While this has provided life changing opportunities for many thousands of students in its 50 year history, the OU in Scotland reports lower rates of module completion and degree

attainment compared to rest of the HE sector (OUiS outcome agreement 2019-20). This attainment gap is particularly evident among students from the most socially disadvantaged quintile (SIMD20). This project is an attempt to better understand the extent of this gap, and to gather evidence to inform targeted interventions to support students to succeed.

**Note:** The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation is a relative measure of deprivation across 6,976 small areas called data zones. These 'data zones' were reviewed and updated in 2020, which means the SIMD20 data collected for the project is based on different metrics than will be used for the remainder of the project. We acknowledge that future reporting will have to account for potential discrepancies in the data.

The project commenced in 2018/19 and was originally planned to complete Phase 1 in that academic year. However, due to staff changes in the team and delays in securing ethics approval for the student focus groups, the data collection period was only completed in January 2020. We are currently in the process of analysing the evidence collected so far, so no interventions have yet taken place. As such, the evaluation is not as comprehensive as initially intended. We have sought instead to present some preliminary findings and identify milestones and indicators for the remainder of the project. The project is intended to be long-term and will measure the effectiveness of subsequent interventions against the baseline data collected in Phase 1.

### Evaluation overview

Our theory of change for the project was as follows:

We will know more about our SIMD20 students and how they perform



This data will enable us to identify where we may be able to intervene or support them more effectively



This will allow us to work with the right people to design evidence-informed interventions



Interventions will improve the SIMD20 student experience and increase retention and completion



Short- and medium- term evidence of impact from interventions will enable us to evaluate and refine interventions



Attainment gap for SIMD20 students at level 1 will decrease

As of March 2020, we have completed Phase 1 of the project and are in the process of collating and analysing the data we have collected so we have a better understanding of our SIMD20 students. While the findings have not yet been analysed fully, emerging themes include:

- Evidence of an attainment gap between students in the most deprived quintile (SIMD20) and the remaining four quintiles but it is not consistent across subjects and levels of study.
- Living in an SIMD20 area is not by itself an indicator of future attainment, but where SIMD20 intersects with other markers of disadvantage this may indicate that the student will require additional support to attain

### Outputs from Phase 1

The project has collected extensive evidence from a range of sources on the attainment of Open University students from SIMD20 areas. The outputs from the project so far include:

- A comprehensive literature review on the attainment gap of students from areas of multiple deprivation across the UK, and of Scotland in particular, identifying the types of support that have proven effective.
- A report on statistics of student performance by SIMD quintiles across levels 1,2 and 3 of OU study (SCQF 7-10) based on assignment submission in different courses, identifying trends and patterns in the data which are illustrated with 'heat maps'.

- A report on focus groups carried out with students living in SIMD20 areas on their experiences of studying with the Open University and the challenges they have encountered.
- A report on focus groups carried out with OU Associate Lecturers on their experiences of teaching students from SIMD20 areas.

### Outcomes from Phase 1

This evidence is currently being collated and analysed. We can report that the project team has a better understanding of location of data and challenges and barriers to obtaining it. Identifying the appropriate teams and staff members to engage with in order to source the data required has been a challenge in a four-nation university with a very dispersed staff. However, this has been achieved in partnership with the Student Numbers team in OUiS, the Student Analytics team in Milton Keynes and others. We will work with this network to use the evidence gathered to inform the interventions in the next phase of the project.

Our analysis of the different sources of evidence is increasing our understanding of how SIMD20 students perform and of the challenges they face but this has not been completed and is yet to be shared with colleagues.

### Next steps

Once completed, the findings from Phase 1 will be shared with OU colleagues to improve their understanding of the factors that contribute to a gap in attainment, particularly around assessment submission rates and performance. This evidence will then be used by staff to inform the design of future interventions to support SIMD20. These interventions will aim to improve the student experience and increase retention and attainment among this group of students.

The interventions will be evaluated against a baseline of completion and attainment rates in the 19/20 academic year to determine impact on attainment. The milestones for this are as follows:

**short-term** - module completion and attainment in AY 20/21

**medium-term** - progression to another module and attainment in AY 21/22)

**longer-term** - achievement of an exit qualification and attainment rates from AY 22/23 – 26/2

### Future data collection

We will collect evidence using the recently developed Campaigns Progression Tool, an interactive dashboard developed in partnership with colleagues in the Student Analytics team. This allows us to analyse the effectiveness of proactive interventions at various milestones of the student journey. The tool can filter reports on various measures and student characteristics such as SIMD proportion, age group, gender, disabilities, ethnicity and care experience, as well as module and presentation of subsequent registrations.

We will also collect qualitative evidence from Student Support Team colleagues involved in delivering the interventions and support reflection on the effectiveness of email and telephone contacts, building on the findings of a related project carried out by OUiS student support colleagues in 18/19 to measure the impact of interventions related to Changing study intentions (evaluation previously submitted to QAA).

### Anticipated outcomes

If short-term and medium-term results are used to inform the refinement of interventions from 20/21 and the design of future interventions, we expect staff will have an improved understanding of the value of utilising data to inform practice.

In the longer term, which will be beyond the initial project timeframe, we would expect to see the following changes or impact:

- Evaluation of the effectiveness of interventions to support SIMD20 students in the University
- Evidence of impact of interventions on completion and pass rates for SIMD20 students at level 1
- Decrease in the attainment gap in terms of completion and pass rates for SIMD20 students at level 1
- Increased awareness across the University about the most effective ways to support SIMD20 students
- Sharing of evidence with the wider HE sector and a contribution to the literature on attainment for SIMD20 students

## Conclusions

While the project is significantly behind schedule and there is not as much to report in the evaluation as we had anticipated, a significant amount of work has been carried out to collect and analyse evidence from different sources on the attainment of SIMD20 students. The analysis of this evidence is currently being completed and it will then be used to inform future interventions.

However, we are already seeing an improvement in our understanding of this group of students and the factors that influence attainment. We have also learned from the considerable challenges involved in gathering this type of data, and have an appreciation of how this evidence can be used to improve student experience and attainment. We expect to see more evidence of this improved understanding and use of evidence when the findings are shared with colleagues.

The data gathered in Phase 1 can also be used as a baseline to measure the effectiveness of these interventions. Short-, medium- and long-term milestones have been identified for the lifetime of the project to ensure effective evaluation of planned interventions. We have also committed to sharing this evidence with OU colleagues and with the wider HE sector.

Please refer to [examples](#) on the Themes web page.

Forms to be returned as soon as they are completed or a draft by the 30 April 2020 (aligning with the timing of submission of the end of year 3/end of Theme report) with final draft by the 19 June 2020.

Please return completed forms to <mailto:ARCAAdmin@qaa.ac.uk>