By the end of this section you will be able to:

- Identify the major constituents for effective use of evidence.
- Extend your learning, explore some of the links and checklists provided.
- Apply your learning throughout this Guide, review the successful case study to help you consider a ‘real life’ example associated to the content of this section and others.

Has your use of evidence had an impact?

This section pulls together all previous sections and ideally should be accessed when all other associated content has been completed. In contrast to other sections, this one starts with a case study in which things go really well. See if you can identify important points in the process and the actions that might have led to success.

Glenn – Associate Dean for Student Experience at Exquisite Evidence University

Exquisite Evidence University (EEU) is committed to ‘producing tomorrow’s students today’. This sentiment forms a central part of the EEU 10 Year Strategy. Glenn was seconded to the VC’s Office to bring this strategy to life as an evidence-informed, owned process, which comprised:

Looking at critical success factors in the sector across all areas of University life, in order to scope wider aim(s) and objectives. This process identified exploring several domains: Our Students, Our Staff, Our Courses, Success Criteria for Our Students, Learning and Teaching, Research, Our Organisation. Glenn had already considered Section 2: using evidence in Higher Education within the Guide to using evidence and shared these starting points with key stakeholders within and beyond the University and Students’ Association and established an oversight group made up of a diverse array of such stakeholders.
Glenn then worked with key strategic allies to create an evaluative methodology (see Parsons, 2017) based on ‘What Works’ principles in each of the seven domains listed above. Glenn had already published widely on this process and already had a recognised track record of quality outputs which instilled confidence. The What Works approach drew upon an integrative review research process which synthesised thought-leading evidence of good practice alongside local application to context. This integration formed the emerging evidence-base for strategic action at EEU. Glenn also sense-checked this process with the EEU Executive Group for strategic approval. Glenn had noted the need for using different types of evidence (see Section 3 of the Guide to using evidence).

To engage wider stakeholders and to encourage ownership, a series of open access workshops were held, in which sector-leading peer-assessed evidence was synthesised and, using an Appreciate Inquiry stance (which is noted for its effectiveness in helping achieve organisational change) participants were asked to envision whether this evidence of excellent practice could be used to fully realise the ‘local’ dreams of EEU. Glenn also drew upon the HE Data Landscape Resource to consider the evidence around different learning and engagement styles and designed a range of approaches in the workshops to maximise on effective participation.

In addition, Glenn employed a critical thinking cycle within the sessions (see Section 4: thinking critically about evidence in Higher Education of the Guide to using evidence), which enabled participants to a) assess the original evidence-base b) consider underpinning assumptions and challenge where necessary c) consider this triangulation of evidence in light of the accepted knowledge and wisdoms of EEU d) think about whether more evidence needed to be sought or considered e) develop a shared praxis perspective in which turning evidence into action is addressed.

Evidence emerging from these sessions was shared using a range of communication tools to maximise ongoing dialogue. To ensure effective coverage, Glenn had sought advice from both EEU and Students’ Association communication specialists. The focus upon What Works and how will this be captured longitudinally really energised participants and consequently a set of tangible outcomes and impact measures were identified as part of an evolving blueprint for action and continuous evaluation (see Section 7: Evidence of evidence use of the Guide to using evidence).

Glenn is now testing the underpinning evidence and assumptions with deliberately diverse target populations - especially those with less ‘voice’ - to see if it works for all EEU stakeholders (see Hartlep et al, 2017). The next steps in the process have already been identified across stakeholder groups and these have also been agreed by the oversight group. Key steps include:

- Developing a realistic and proportionate implementation process.
- Agreeing which of the seven domains should be given priority.
- Testing each of the seven domains with diverse populations and establishing communities of practice so that the work will be owned and progressed across the University.
- Offering career progression opportunities for staff and students who wish to lead specific strands of strategic enquiry.

Glenn is now mentoring several Principal Lecturers so that further capacity-building and succession planning is in place, given the longevity of the process. The wider University sector has been very interested in hearing about how the EEU process of integrative review has been used to inform strategy in a more inclusive manner. Accordingly, Glenn and the CEO of the Students’ Association are now acting in an advisory capacity with various regulatory bodies to create good practice guidance for robust evidence-informed strategy development.
Consider the following questions to see if you can identify what things went well and why. It might be useful to cross reference with other elements of this Guide to help you work it out.

- Why is this case study ‘successful’? What are your definitions for success concerning evidence (whether generated, critiqued or both)?
- What leadership skills has Glenn displayed?
- How has Glenn used partnership working effectively in order to influence outcomes and engagement?
- What additional skills, impact and abilities has Glenn used primarily?
- What unintended outcomes were reported in the case study?
- Are there any areas for improvement that you can identify?

Now you have had a go at addressing these questions, see if your responses align with the factors below.
**Leadership skills**

This is probably the most consistently crucial factor for success. It is now widely recognised that the transformational leader model advocated many years ago by Burns (1978) is still really effective for achieving positive change. Such leaders or indeed leadership teams are characterised by:

- having a clear vision of what needs to change
- being able to enthuse and stimulate others
- encouraging meaningful participation
- developing excellent communication skills
- demonstrating loyalty and commitment to both tasks and to others
- having a sense of the bigger picture
- working with strong personal Integrity
- being able to inspire others.

In the case study, Glenn managed to display all these characteristics whilst working within stakeholder teams rather than as an individual. It might also be useful to revisit the ‘Existing Data Sources Case Study’ in which Madison needed to develop informal micro-leadership skills, as advocated by Lumby (2015) to recognise the impact of the everyday interaction in enhancing personal impact.

**Defining success**

In purist terms, success might be viewed as whether initial aims and objectives of any evidence-based or evidence-informed initiative have been met. However, as noted in Section 4, initial assumptions underpinning aims and objectives should be revisited throughout as the original thinking can be inappropriate or misguided. A good way of ensuring that you gain a successful process and outcomes is to make sure that you use evidence to inform and challenge all stages of planning and review. Revisiting the ‘What Critical Questions Should You Ask of Evidence?’ checklist will help you to develop a clear but realistic view of what is achievable.

**Partnership working and developing effective relationships**

Within any complex organisation, there will be subtle cultural differences with how things are done, alongside the range of opinions that such diversity generates. In this case, Glenn used partnership working very effectively to: draw on expertise across the organisation to support the ‘what works’ approach; develop a sense of identity for the initiative and to cultivate ownership by bringing together a well-considered Stakeholder Group; use situated power of themselves and others to influence and drive change at the right levels; ensure that the maximum amount of resourcing and capacity-building were in place to enable every chance for success; enlist others who can implement change; help to maximise reach of findings and dissemination and push through recommendations. You may recall that one of the problems for Module Leaders Reese and Harper, their students and the Programme Leader within the Using Evidence in Higher Education Case Study concerned the lack of an effective relationship to discuss emerging evidence before it became problematic.
In working collaboratively, Glenn clearly developed some skills and abilities that link to those expected of an effective leader.

Skills developed include: design and planning skills for using evidence effectively; insight into how to incorporate effective evaluation into the process at the outset; a range of leadership, influencing and communications skills; applying positive and inclusive change-management principles.

To capture personal development in more detail, Glenn could assess impact against the following checklist: 10 types of evidence to show impact and supporting data produced below by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (2017)

| 1. Evidence of difference | Data to show your research has made a difference to beneficiaries or society such as:  
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Difference for beneficiaries, effects or outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Economic difference, cost savings, profit or gain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Direct change in policy or policymaking</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Difference brought about in practice or the awareness, understanding or behaviour of practitioners</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Researcher or stakeholder knowledge and skills or research capacity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Evidence of other types of impact</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>2. Evidence of scale</th>
<th>Data to show your impact is on a significant or sizeable scale, for example:</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- A large number and/or range of beneficiaries</td>
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<td>- Targeted highly significant impact that may be small in scale or have a precise impact on an important issue</td>
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<td>- Data to show people benefit in a way that is important to them</td>
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<td>- Defendable projections of future scale, eg based on new or emerging markets</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Data about regional, national or international reach</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Scale of interest in the research from stakeholders, research users or beneficiaries</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Large-scale altmetric data or impact tracking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>3. Evidence of attribution</th>
<th>Data that helps to elaborate the often intricate or multipart links between the research and the impact, for example:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Explaining collaborations and team contributions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Documented accounts of interactions with research users</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Data about how knowledge exchange has occurred</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Evidence from research users about how they have applied or used the research</td>
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<th>4. Evidence of quality</th>
<th>Data to show that you have achieved impact through high quality research, such as:</th>
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<td></td>
<td>- Independent reviews of research quality</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Audit trail to show research questions are well considered, for example, you used a robust decision-making process to reach your hypothesis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Data to show a robust research design eg tests or scores</td>
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<td>- Data about institutional support structures</td>
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| 5. Evidence of partnership | Data to show how partnerships contributed to impact, for example:  
| | - Data about collaborative research partnerships eg number of partners, contact hours or episodes of interaction  
| | - Illustrative data about the nature of the collaborative research partnership  
| | - Data about partnership with industry, public sector organisations or charities eg initiation, duration and growth of partnerships  
| | - Data about the international reach of the partnerships, international member organisations or contributors |
| 6. Evidence of engagement | Data to show that engagement of stakeholders, research users or the public is integral to the research, for example:  
| | - Accounts of engagement events with professionals or practice communities  
| | - Data to show knowledge exchange or knowledge transfer partnerships  
| | - Data log of stakeholder engagement  
| | - Data about research user testing or comments on the research design  
| | - Data about the contributions of members of the public involved in the research |
| 7. Evidence of experience | Data to show that the individuals involved have a strong personal track record in their area of research, for example:  
| | - Grants and other research income recognised expertise  
| | - Data about researcher impact skills, knowledge and competencies eg. communication or implementation skills  
| | - Data to show a track record of projects and funding  
| | - Data on publications and dissemination work |
| 8. Corroborative evidence | Data from users of your research or beneficiaries to corroborate the impact you have had, for example:  
| | - Data from independent evaluation or self-evaluations of impact  
| | - Data about the impact of participation or involvement on research users  
| | - Reflexive accounts, eg a research impact diary or log  
| | - Research user’s own accounts of the impact of the research on them |
| 9. Evidence of accessibility | Data to show that you have made information about your research accessible, for example:  
| | - Publication figures and citation of the research by other researchers  
| | - Data about knowledge brokers, knowledge transfer partnerships or secondments  
| | - Data to show that the research has been disseminated to research users and has been taken up by them locally, nationally or internationally  
| | - Numbers of attendees at public events or distribution of lay summaries  
| | - Numbers of visitors to open access databases or data deposits to open access repositories  
| | - Access figures for videos, infographics or visual material  
| | - Viewer figures for television, radio, the press, or social media |
| 10. Evidence of recognition | Data to show that researchers and other audiences recognise and value your research, for example:  
| | - Extracts from independent reviews  
| | - Quotes from feedback  
| | - Formal awards or recognition of the importance of the research |
Understanding what works and capturing success is crucial. You will need to identify appropriate leadership skills required of a team or individuals, develop effective partnership working, learn how to influence via advocates supporting you within complex organisations and develop capacity-building so that evidence can be used sustainably for future students. Developing robust impact processes will assist your own effectiveness alongside making the most of evidence-informed policy and practice.

www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/current-enhancement-theme/student-engagement-and-demographics/students-using-evidence


Lumby, J (2015) In the wings and backstage: exploring the micropolitics of leadership in higher education, London: Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.


QAA Scotland (2019) Focus on Graduate Skills 2018-19 www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/focus-on/graduate-skills

Digital glossary for this section

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
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<tr>
<td>Research</td>
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Collating evidence is not always a logical or linear process. Data sources may not neatly corroborate and may even contrast each other. To make sense of your data landscape, spend some time reflecting on the process and the outcome. Evidence can include notes of unintended outcomes of the research/evaluation and personal reflections of the researcher/s. Once a conclusion has been reached, it is also important to state any limitations in the evidence base.

Critical thinking will develop alongside your confidence at navigating the data landscape. You will be required to make some tough decisions about what you can realistically achieve. You will need to scrutinise processes and defend your judgements. You will need to assess best practice and modify for your own context. Be open and honest in sharing what has worked and what hasn’t. This will help those colleagues who begin this journey after you.

A good grasp of how data has been generated (either by yourself or others) will allow you to think critically about how it can be used within an evidence base. Adopting a mixed methods approach will also allow for the strengths of one method to compensate for any limitations in another.

It is important not to assume that evidence gathered in one context using a specific methodology, will apply directly to another. Try to move from evidenced-based decisions to evidence-informed decisions to account for your own environment and limits of proportionality (Parsons, 2017). Proportionality realistically balances best practice against any limitations in time.

It is important to know why you need to plan and audit how evidence is used to inform decision-making (either by yourself or others). Doing so will allow you to justify your reasoning and any changes in direction. It also assists in the capture of unintended outcomes.

It is important to assess the appropriateness of each data source and challenge yourself to be innovative where possible. This is how evidence becomes inclusive of all voices and less likely to keep some voices hidden and silent. It is essential that you triangulate data sources where possible so that limitations of one can be addressed by strengths of another. Consider different types of triangulation which can strengthen your evidence base: data; methods; theory; researchers.

There is a vast amount of data available which could help explore almost any area of higher education. Sometimes this data landscape can be overwhelming. Start any project with a set of clear aims and objectives and a question that you want to answer. Ask yourself ‘What do I want to find out about this chosen area’? Then ask critical questions of your proposed data sources.

Understanding what works and capturing success is crucial. You will need to identify appropriate leadership skills required of a team or individuals, develop effective partnership working, learn how to influence via advocates supporting you within complex organisations and develop capacity-building so that evidence can be used sustainably for future stakeholders. Developing robust impact processes will assist your own effectiveness alongside making the most of evidence-informed policy and practice.

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