



DEPARTMENT INITIATIVES

AUGUST 2019

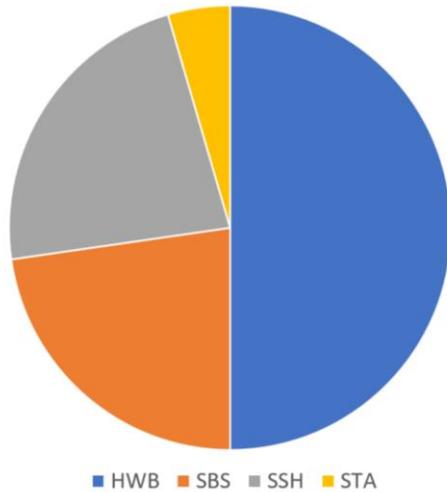
Narrowing the Gap

**Sheffield
Hallam
University**

Summary of findings

Headline facts

Total evaluations submitted by Faculty/Dept

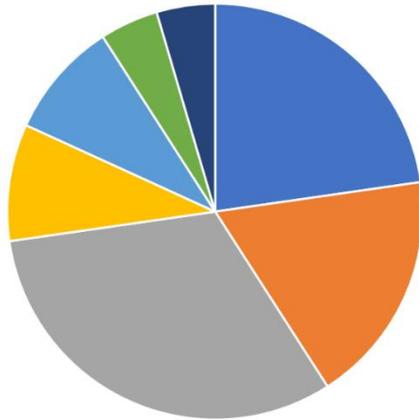


(Refer to appendix 1 for faculty breakdown)

Target audience of projects by faculty:

Faculty/audience	Count of Projects
HWB	11
Job applicants	1
Staff	3
Students	6
Staff and students	1
SBS	5
Staff	1
Students	4
SSH	5
Staff	3
Students	1
Staff and Students	1
STA	1
Staff and students	1
Grand Total	22

Key themes of projects



- Academic writing
- Decolonising the curriculum
- Student support/Mentoring
- Placements
- Staff awareness
- Staff recruitment
- Student cultural awareness

Key themes of projects by faculty:

Faculty/themes	Count of Project name
HWB	11
Academic writing	4
Decolonising the curriculum	1
Placements	1
Staff awareness	1
Staff recruitment	1
Student support/mentoring	3
SBS	5
Student support/mentoring	2
Decolonising the curriculum	1
Placements	1
Student cultural awareness	1
SSH	5
Academic writing	1
Decolonising the curriculum	2
Student support/mentoring	1
Staff awareness	1
STA	1
Student support/mentoring	1
Grand Total	22

Summary of Findings

1. It is essential for the institution to ensure that resources for evaluation are prioritised and to ensure staff members have opportunities to capacity build, for example, through access to CPD and evaluative leadership provision.
2. An area for improvement concerns establishing a coherent account of why an initiative might have the desired effect and how the activities link to the desired results in the longer-term, with a particular need to focus on the role of medium-term indicators of success.
3. Evaluation should be in place from the start of activities by agreeing the approach and action plan as part of the overall initiative specification, which includes identifying objectives, indicators of success, data collection methods and use of the evaluation at inception.
4. There is a need for the institution to prioritise longitudinal evaluation of initiatives rather than a short-term focus, which will require sufficient funding and resourcing.
5. The institution should establish clearer reporting mechanisms for initiatives for evaluative purposes, for example, the Narrowing the Gap project team will work more closely with initiative leads and local areas to maximise access to existing reporting processes.
6. Local-level and themed working groups must have buy-in from senior leadership, distinct governance and reporting mechanisms and adequate resourcing from the institution.
7. A high-quality evaluation checklist will be developed and distributed to initiative leads in order to guide practice, while the creation and dissemination of other resources will also aid this process.

Recommendations

- The impact of these working groups will be dependent on having buy-in from senior leadership, clear governance and reporting mechanisms and adequate resourcing from the institution.
- The university must work towards promoting the importance of evaluation across the whole institution and provide opportunities for capacity building for all stakeholders, including academics, practitioners and professional services staff.
- Evaluation objectives should be as clear as possible and initiative leads are encouraged to apply the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound) framework, which is a simple and practical tool (Parsons, 2017). Any initiative should focus on the intended outcome first, with the planned activity designed to achieve that outcome, not the other way around. Tools such as logic models and Theory of Change enable a process of thinking to be established about an initiative from conception to its conclusion (Parsons, 2017). These tools can allow a pathway of change to be formulated that demonstrates how the desired outcomes will be achieved.
- There is an array of sources of evidence which can be drawn upon to inform the design of an initiative, most notably: the results of previous evaluations of the activity; relevant theoretical or practitioner literature; participation in knowledge sharing platforms, such as conferences and networks; repositories of evidence which provide synthesized and translated findings.
- Shorten the timescales for measured outcomes by selecting indicators that cover the short-term benefits and medium-term outcomes alongside the longer-term impact. Refer to the examples of indicators at each stage of the evaluation provided by Liz Thomas and TSEP in the Student Engagement Evaluation Framework (2017).
- Evaluation should be in place from the start of activities by agreeing the approach and action plan as part of the overall specification. Preparing a formal evaluation plan can enable an evaluation to be undertaken most effectively. Consider using existing tools for developing an evaluation, such as the RUFDATA (Reasons, Uses, Focus, Data, Audience, Timescale, Agency) tool which is available on Lancaster University website.

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- The type of evaluation adopted should be dependent on the claims that researchers and practitioners want to make as a result of their activity (see Table 2).

Quantitative and qualitative data can be highly complementary, with the former capable of identifying what happened while the latter can provide insight about how or why it happened.

Use existing evaluation frameworks as a starting point for planning evaluation activities. The Student Engagement Evaluation Framework (Thomas, 2017) suggests that an action plan should ask the following questions:

What are the key activities?

Who will lead them?

Who else will be involved and what is their role?

What resources of support is required?

When will key activities take place?

What will be the outputs of each activity?

How will the evaluation team work together?

- Before data collection begins, decide what is needed, why, how it will be used and what will be done with it during and after the evaluation.
Utilise existing sources of data and tools to collect evidence for evaluations, such as the list provided by [Liz Thomas and TSEP in the Student Engagement Evaluation Framework \(2017\)](#), which includes examples of national and institutional. Other useful methods are also listed by [Evaluation Support Scotland](#).
Consider baseline measures and 'pre' and 'post' initiative assessments and avoid relying on end of programme feedback.
- All research and evaluation activity should adhere to the highest ethical standards, such as [BERA guidelines](#), and be subjected to approval via institutional processes.
The data of participants and stakeholders must be protected by adhering to the requirements of GDPR, which is available on the [Sheffield Hallam external website](#).
Consider using pre-validated tools or use cognitive testing and pilot tools to test any bespoke tools that have been developed.
- There are a number of approaches to generating data on outcomes after the initiative has occurred, such as implementing follow-up surveys and activities with participants. However, resourcing and securing adequate response rates can be challenging. Existing data could be available internally (for example, within the institution) or externally (for example, UCAS and HESA) which might mean that collecting primary data is not necessary. Nevertheless, some of these may depend on having appropriate data-sharing agreements and permissions to access data in place.

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- It is essential for the institution to ensure that resources for evaluation are prioritised and to ensure staff members have opportunities to capacity build. This is particularly relevant due to the recent emergence of key sector drivers for capturing evaluative evidence. Evaluation costs can be lessened by having a focused evaluation, building data collection into delivery and utilising internal sources of expertise.
 - Using an evaluation framework can help researchers and practitioners to plan the ways in which the findings can disseminated and how stakeholders can be engaged to discuss the results and recommend actions.
It is important to commit to a continual improvement of the effectiveness of an activity in its context through an ongoing cycle of review, consideration and revision.
 - The evaluation design of those initiatives that have collected primary data as part of their evaluation (those that are aspiring to gather at least type 2 empirical standards of evidence) need to be strengthened in order for their results to be generalised beyond their immediate contexts.
Draw upon data from a range of perspectives and consider using 'critical friends' and stakeholders to bring scrutiny to the evaluative process.
Evaluation is a source of lessons learned and it is necessary to highlight where impact has not been achieved, which can help inform improvements to initiatives.
 - Initiative leads are encouraged to engage with internal mechanisms, such as an evaluation repository and working groups that will be established and piloted in 2019/20, which will provide opportunities for the results of evaluations to be shared internally. Permitting that initiatives have received ethical approval to do so, there are opportunities for the results of evaluations to be disseminated externally, such as publication of reports, journal articles and conference presentations.

For more information read the full report

Appendix

(Appendix, 1)

Total evaluations submitted by Faculty/Dept:

Faculty/Dept	Count of Projects
HWB	11
AHP	3
Sport	4
Biosciences	2
Faculty-wide	1
Nursing	1
SBS	5
Finance	1
Management	4
SSH	5
DLC	2
ECI	1
NBE	1
PSP	1
STA	1
Computing	1
Grand Total	22