

Evaluating widening access: A review of approaches adopted in Wales.

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Today's presentation

Overview of project

- Secondary data analysis: Explores factors which predict progression on to HE and success in it.
- Field work: Explores approaches adopted by HEIs and RWPs to implementing and evaluating widening access.

Background

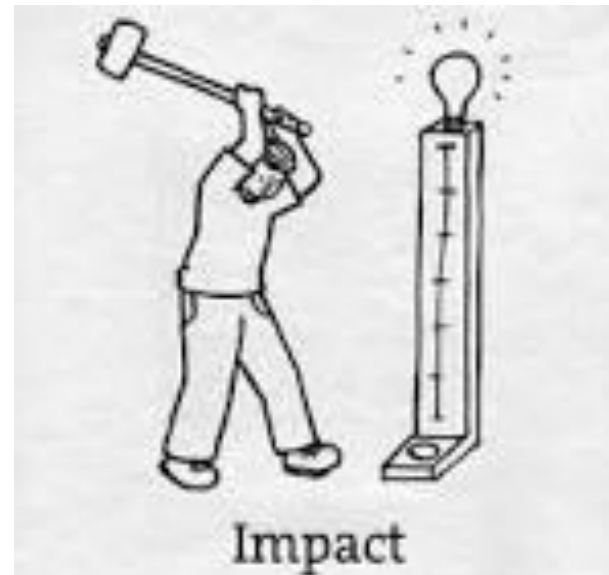


- Inequitable rates of participation in HE.
- Welsh Government's widening access agenda.
- HEIs under pressure to invest in widening access activities.
- Reaching Wider Partnerships established to promote access to HE opportunities.

Impact of widening access?

How effective is widening access work?

How far are HEIs and RWPs measuring the impact of their work?



The fieldwork

Explores the approaches adopted by Welsh HEIs and RWPs to...

- Implementing widening access.
- Evaluating widening access.

Methods

Interviews with RWP and widening access managers.

Content analysis of strategies.



Part 1: Approach to widening access

Pre-entry:

Widening access to a conventional HE experience (through raising aspirations or attainment).



Approach to widening access

Pre-entry:

Widening access to conventional HE experience (through study skills, pre-HE entry preparation).



Approach to widening access

Curriculum design:

Widening access to a non-conventional form of HE through curriculum design aimed at non conventional HE students. For example, Foundation Degrees delivered in FE colleges.

Approaches to widening access

- Divergent approaches to WA
- Differences in terms of *what* institutions are widening access to and to *whom* are they widening access.
- Is a social disadvantage model of widening access the way forward?

Part 2: evaluating widening access

What are the approaches adopted to evaluating widening access?

What interpretations of *impact* are there?

Kirkpatrick's (1994) model

Level 1: Reaction (reaction to the activity)

Level 2: Learning (skills learned, attitudes changed.)

Level 3: Behaviour (behavioural changes as a result of programme)

Level 4: Results (impact of programme on societal factors).

Approaches to evaluation?

Level 1 evaluation (reaction)

Lots of examples of this (i.e. participant feedback forms). Used for formative purposes.

Level 2 evaluation (learning).

Lots of examples of this. Commonly, pre and post evaluation forms used to assess changes in attitudes, confidence and awareness of HE.

Approaches to evaluation

Level 3 evaluation (behaviour)

Some limited examples of this (for example, tracking students progression following Summer University.)

Level 4 evaluation (results)

None.

What is impact?

- ‘Impact’ interpreted in different ways.
- Mostly ‘impact’ is taken to mean impact on aspirations, confidence and awareness of HE.
- Measured through pre and post activity evaluation forms.
- Very little measurement of ‘impact’ on progression on to HE.

Challenges to measuring impact

- Lack of control group.
- Separating out impact of activity from other influences difficult.
- ‘Impact’ (i.e. on HE participation) may not be immediate.
- Data protection issues.
- Not able to access the right kinds of data.

Conclusion

- Different approaches to widening access
- To *what* and to *whom* widening access is aimed at?
- Implications for social justice.

Conclusion

- Evaluation and impact is being interpreted in different ways.
- Little measurement of impact in terms of progression to HE
- Why is this?

multiple challenges to demonstrating impact.

Future directions

Need for greater direction from HEFCW in terms of:

- What it wants HEIs and RWPs to measure? (i.e. impact in terms of progression to HE)
- How to do this
- Resources that will support evaluation.

Thank you.