STUDY HIGHER

CREATING, MONITORING, & EVALUATING ONLINE ACTIVITY

Study Higher
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Context

Developments in the response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the closure of schools have necessitated swift exploration of alternative delivery models for WP outreach, with online approaches featuring as a significant platform for engagement and delivery of AIG, resources, workshops, and mentoring.

In a recent update OfS set out how our regulatory requirements are changing during the period of the coronavirus outbreak. OfS also asks Uni Connect partnerships to identify how our approach could support broader groups of underrepresented students, not just those in our target schools and wards. Although OfS will not be holding partnerships to account for their delivery targets during this period it will be important to continue to capture as much information as possible to enable us to quantify engagement, and to understand what works in online delivery.

Although the current situation poses unprecedented challenges and limitations to some aspects of our work as it was, it also provides us with manifest opportunities to embrace new modes of delivery and to try new and innovative approaches to activity delivery and evaluation. This document aims to set out how we might approach activity design, monitoring and evaluation of online activity, and how we can use evaluation to develop, improve and sustain our online delivery and approaches in the longer term.

Online resource and activity development

School progression plans

In preparation for Stage 2 of the Uni Connect programme Study Higher staff created bespoke progression plans for each of their schools to ensure that activity could be delivered in accordance with individual school and learner need. This process took in to account local context, previous provision, and feedback from school staff about their learners' needs. Where feasible, activity and resources can continue to be supplied in accordance with these progression frameworks, all of which sit within the broader NERUPI Framework.

However, the uncertain context in which schools and learners are currently operating in has inevitably brought with it new support needs for teachers, parents, and learners, as well as accompanying challenges. Study Higher are well-placed to be flexible and responsive to these needs, and to support with the development of new resources, activity, and modes of communicating. Where schools request support, progression frameworks can be updated accordingly to reflect these new needs and challenges.

Adapting existing activity:

Adapting existing resources is an excellent way to save time and energy on researching and developing new materials and activities. As a consortia we are fortunate to have access to a variety of collaborative activities and resources which can be effectively adapted for new modes of delivery. Prior to beginning to adapt existing activities or resources, consider the following points:

- **What is/are the objective(s) of the original activity?**
  If you're adapting an existing activity it's possible that the objectives won't have changed, but the way(s) you can go about demonstrating that these have been met might need tweaking. If you're stripping activities back or removing elements to make them easier to access via distance learning or provision, you'll likely need one or two objectives per activity at the most. Objectives for online activity and resources should be articulated simply to participants, and re-visited at the end of activity.

- **Is delivering this activity in its current form the best way to realise the objective(s)?** What adaptations need to be made to best fulfil the activity/resource objective(s)?
  For example, an hour-long workshop on HE finance does not necessarily need to be repurposed as a like-for-like activity online; it is possible that a printable resource, quick pre-recorded video, or shorter live finance IAG/Q&A session would better suit the objective of such a session.

- **Who might be included/excluded by the activity (re)design?**
  How can you adapt exclusive or hard-to-access content? Can any of the content be updated, improved, or made more appealing or interactive?

- **How does technology change the dynamics of the activity?**
  It is possible that reconfiguring an activity to an online format might improve that activity, particularly where hosting an activity online facilitates new possibilities which wouldn't be possible in person.

  However, some elements will be altered which might impact the effectiveness of the activity; for example, where interactive or discursive elements feature predominantly. How might such elements either be effectively incorporated or trialled? Or, if it is not possible to facilitate such elements in their current form, how might negative impacts of excluding these be mitigated?

Creating new online activity / resources:

Where it is not possible to adapt existing materials and activity, or where activities have been demonstrated to be less effective in their current form, it will be necessary to create and develop new activity. Good project design leads to good evaluation design, so before starting the activity design process, consider the following points:

- **What is the purpose of the intended activity? And what is/are the objective(s)?**
  Make a note of these at the activity design stage, and make sure you clearly state what the resource or activity is intended to do to your intended participant or beneficiary.

- **What provision in this area or on this subject already exists**?
  Consider what activities or resources already exist both within and outside of our consortia to avoid the potential duplication of effort and energy.

- **Light-touch activity or provision of IAG and resources can contribute to a 'small steps' approach to change.**
  We all know it's unlikely for a handout or very short activity or online video will change overall intentions or outcomes - but as part of a sustained and progressive engagement, these interventions and IAG can contribute to learner progression. To effectively outline how your activity contributes to the 'bigger picture', create a very simple Theory of Change model which demonstrates exactly how your activity will impact your target learner(s). An example is included below for you, and additional resources to create your own Theory of Change is available in Study Higher's Team folder. A member of the Monitoring and Evaluation Team can also support you to create your Theory of Change.

- **Consider dialogue over delivery**
  The situation we all find ourselves in at present means that engaging with others is more challenging, and usual channels of communication and discussion are frustrated. Is it possible to design or develop your activity in such a way that doesn't require you to (virtually) 'speak at' your cohort, but to facilitate discussion, conversation, and learner input instead?

- **Engagements don't have to be 'live'**
  These could be pre-recorded instead, or have interactive or follow-up elements built in to their design.

- **Remain mindful of the 'digital divide' and the effects of digital exclusion on some of the learners and communities we work with.**
  At a time when digital communication has become even more important, lack of access to digital resources, information, and online platforms perpetuates exclusion and exclusivity of content. When developing an activity, ask yourself whether you are already aware of any challenges for learners in your cohort with accessing online content? Is there a way to adapt or supplement your activity for learners/parents who are unable to access the internet? A combination of online material supplanted by actual hard copy material is a possible solution here.

Activity-level Theory of Change

Programme context	Programme efficiency			Programme effectiveness	
What needs are you trying to address? Why? What activity/resource can address this?	Inputs	Activity	Outcomes	Outcomes	Impacts
			Immediate/ short term	Medium-term	Long-term
e.g. Data from students in class 11b shows a lack of knowledge about HE finance. Further exploration reveals students' feel this to be a significant barrier to accessing HE. *Specific elements learners want to know more about:* • *Cost of study at Uni* • *Student loans & repayment* • *How much it costs to live at Uni and in halls of residence* • *How much postgrads might earn* *An in-house interactive workshop could effectively address these topics.*	*Materials and resources (finance booklets, website and resource list, HEI partner resources)* *Delivery staff time* *PowerPoint presentation* *Interactive handsets*	*1hr workshop delivered to Y11 students in class groups (approx. 20-30 participants)* *To cover funding options, repayment approaches, cost of living at Uni, and postgrad salaries*	• *Increased knowledge of funding options* • *Increased understanding of student loans and how to apply* • *Specific awareness of where to find more info*	• *Increased confidence in ability to overcome financial barriers to accessing HE* • *Empowered to make more informed choices about their future*	• *More students from target wards apply to HE* • *HE becomes seen as a positive and realistic choice for young people from all backgrounds*

Capturing Impact

NERUPI objectives(s)	Outcome indicators	Data collection		Sharing results
Select objective(s) from the NERUPI progression framework	**How you will know your activity had the desired impact**	**What tools / methods you will use**	**Persons responsible for collecting data, and when**	**How will you share your data and feedback with the rest of the team/elsewhere?**
K2: Explore academic, social, economic and personal benefits of progressing to Higher Education **B3:** Anticipate challenges students will face in HE	Participants will be able to: Explain how HE can support career aspirations; Describe 3 ways to finance HE study	Interactive handsets to quiz participants in real-time about what they have learned and their perspectives. Follow-up conversation with teacher for their insight in to impact Self-reflexive feedback from me	HELO to collect initially at end of session (10 mins approx.) HELO notes observations and feedback throughout, as well as own insights immediately after session. Follow up with teacher after 2 weeks.	Compile short feedback report, to include all feedback and basic data analysis. Submit to M&E Team to supplement with any additional analysis. Share final (anonymised) report with school. contact Compile short blog, submit to Comms. Manager

Additional considerations

Online safety and safeguarding

Online activities and interactions raise concerns and questions about safeguarding for students, parents, and facilitators.

If you are considering using an online platform to engage with students, spend some time exploring the information available regarding how secure they are, whether there is a minimum age requirement to use the platform, and data privacy and usage. **This link** may be helpful.

Remember it is essential that you report any concerns you may have about students and their wellbeing or safety to your manager, who will support you to ensure that safeguarding processes are implemented.

Ethical Practice

The move to online and distanced WP delivery raises additional ethical considerations, and perhaps particularly in relation to the young people we work with. For example, at this time of great uncertainty on a micro (personal) and macro (national and international) scale, it is possible that continuing to press young people to consider their future options will be unsettling for some and could possibly instigate or perpetuate anxiety.

Teachers and school/college staff are also operating in an uncertain environment and may be experiencing additional stress and concern for their young people, as well as their own health and wellbeing, at this time.

It will be important for all involved in WP and outreach to remain mindful in this regard, and to engage in reflexive practice about whether activities and offers of support may cause harm and how any risk in this regard might be mitigated. It is advisable to consider risk assessment and mitigation in this regard in good time ahead of any delivery and provision.

Which online platforms can I use?

There are many online platforms available, although these come with additional considerations. For example, platforms like Zoom are useful for hosting conference calls, but stipulates a minimum user age of 16 years.

Over the forthcoming days and weeks Study Higher's Monitoring and Evaluation Team will continue to add to our **index of online platforms and their functionality**. The index outlines useful platforms for delivering activity and facilitating evaluation approaches such as quizzes, games, and surveys. We will update this guidance accordingly and invite you to add anything we may have missed which may be useful. In the meantime, we will be happy to support you to explore suitable platforms for activity on an ad-hoc basis.

GDPR and data collection

As with usual activity delivery, we are still required to ensure that students understand when and how we will collect and use their personal or sensitive data, how this will be stored, and that they can opt out or request their information to be permanently removed at any time.

All students should be signposted to Study Higher's Data Privacy Policy on the website **here** and will need to indicate their agreement with the terms via a checkbox or provision of their signature prior to providing any personal data. If you need any guidance with regards to data protection statements or processes please contact Study Higher's Monitoring and Evaluation Manager.

Accessibility of online materials

In September 2019 the government stipulated accessibility for all public sector websites, and it naturally follows that resources hosted on the website need to be accessible and created with the needs of those seeking to access content in mind. Oxford Brookes University have created a helpful **Brookes Accessibility Checklist** outlining simple instructions on how to prepare teaching and learning materials to meet the regulations, and is certainly worth referring to as you create online resources and content.

Monitoring online activity

We need to continue to collect monitoring data to understand who has accessed online activity and resources. Where possible, please endeavour to collect the following:

- **Online resources, videos, booklets, etc.:**
  Metric data (e.g. website 'hits', clicks on specific resources, no. of students or schools these have been sent/provided/signposted to). It is possible that Claudia may be able to provide some support or guidance with gathering online metric data. In some instances it may also be workable to include a link on the platform or within the resource to a separate form for the person accessing this to provide some basic demographic information.

- **Real-time interactions (e.g. workshops, talks, etc.)**
  Usual monitoring data, ideally full name, DOB, postcode, school as a minimum. This could be captured by online sign-up forms, and should be accompanied by a link to the full Data Protection policy.

- **Where we are directly supporting an online cohort from a SH school or college:**
  Collection of basic monitoring data, ideally full name, DOB, postcode, school, will enable us to update existing student records on HEAT. This could be captured by online sign-up forms, or if facilitated by a school staff member, a register of students intended to receive the activity/ resource.

Where this isn't possible, HELOs and delivery staff should keep a record of the schools they have supported and the activity/resource provided, and any other information which may help to contextualise how resources are used.

- **Swift return of data about engagement and impact remains a priority.**
  Policy and priorities continue to change quickly at the moment, and the entire Education sector remains very much at the forefront of this. To make sure that we can respond quickly to updated requirements and to understand what is working in our approaches to socially-distanced outreach and activity, it is essential that monitoring and impact data is returned to the Monitoring and Evaluation Team quickly and regularly.

  Any monitoring data should continue to be sent securely to Study Higher's Monitoring and Evaluation Officer to be added to HEAT. Please endeavour to supply this within 2-3 days of the activity taking place.

  Impact data should be provided with an accompanying cover sheet. A new cover sheet designed for capturing monitoring information for online and socially-distanced activity can be downloaded from the Google Drive.

Evaluating online activity

Evaluating online activity poses a number of practical challenges, but the principles of application remain the same: all activities and resources should have intended aims and outcomes which sit within Study Higher's broader progression framework.

For light-touch activity and online resources, including downloadable info sheets and 'handouts' and IAG which can be embedded online/on our website - please include a link to the online monitoring and light-touch feedback capture form

For some more intensive and longer-term activities (such as those developed with our schools and delivered in real-time or virtually) it may be possible to implement a bespoke evaluation approach. In these instances please consider the following, and follow up with one of Study Higher's Monitoring and Evaluation Team to explore further.

Considerations at the design stage:

- **When developing an online activity/resource, or adapting an existing resource to be hosted online, consider the aims and objectives first.**
  What do you want your activity to do / what do you want your learners to gain, know, or be able to do?

  It is likely that your objectives will still fit within broader NERUPI aims as the remit of our broader programme aims and objectives has not changed. However, you may wish to adapt these, or simplify them, to suit the context and specific challenges learners are currently facing.

- **How do you expect your activity to make an impact?**
  You can outline this in a simple Theory of Change to demonstrate the logical process by which your learner(s) will benefit from the activity and how this meets the activity aims. Guidance for creating a theory of change can be located in the Study Higher Google Drive. You can also reach out to the Monitoring and Evaluation Team for support with this.

- **Is it actually possible to evaluate this activity?**
  Online content and delivery does pose some challenges for evaluation; for example, where we are not directly communicating with learners or working through schools. Realistically, we can acknowledge that some people who access our materials may choose not to provide feedback.

- **Consider the variety of evaluation opportunities which may be available to you at the activity or resource design stage.**
  How might you be able to demonstrate – even in a light-touch way – that your resource has been helpful for the person(s) accessing it?

- **Don't overlook teachers!**
  Where activity is being provided through or in collaboration with a school contact, it would be helpful to ask them for their thoughts about whether the resources or activity is being accessed and if this is useful.

  Similarly, where we are contacting teachers to share resources and updates with them, it would be wise to communicate with them semi-regularly - possibly every week or two - to ask whether they are using our resources, and if they think they're useful. A template can be developed centrally.

- **A note on incentives**
  In some instances it is possible that offering incentives for feedback may encourage learners to share their insights. However, there is an ethical dimension to incentivising feedback; if you are considering incentivising provision of feedback for an activity please contact a member of Study Higher's Evaluation Team to discuss in more detail.

- **Think creatively!**
  Take a risk, try something new, ask for feedback for activities, and don't be afraid to make changes to your activities as a result of feedback you receive.

  For example:
  - To test or validate the extent to which your activity has impacted specific subject knowledge, how about asking the learner to complete a quiz to test what they've learned? A pre- and post-quiz to test subject knowledge gives a good indication of how much information has been taken on by the learner.

  - If you're hosting a live discussion or workshop, the facilitator can engage individually and with the group to assess whether or not learning occurred or whether an impact - whether positive or negative - was made. Being able to ask direct questions about any changes in thought processes, perceptions, or intentions is also a good indicator of impact.

  - For online workshops, why not ask them to fill in a text box at the end of the resource with their thoughts about the activity or resource?

- How about other ways of gathering feedback? For example, can you use live Discussion Boards, Blogs, or e-Mail to gather feedback or proof that your activity's objectives have been met? Can you encourage learners to create some content themselves - a presentation or visual creation, perhaps - to capture what they learned or gained from the intervention?

Considerations during/after activity:

- **Reflective practice on the part of delivery staff is now even more essential to activity evaluation.** Note down anything - positive or negative – you perceive in relation to the new, distanced approach to delivery, and how you perceive the impact of this. Include any comparative insights in relation to face-to-face modes of delivery, such as notable changes to dynamics or elements that worked well / didn't work as well as anticipated. Remember to make notes about what you perceive in terms of impacts from activity, including any apparent changes in perception (including any you perceive to be negative or unintended) or intention.

- **Did you see evidence that students have benefited from the material/activity or resource?** Evidence of learning or benefit is a key evaluation assessment dimension. Can you 'check in' with your learner(s) during or after an activity to subtly 'test' their learning, or canvas them for how their thoughts have changed (or not)?

The Evaluation Cycle: Using evaluation insights to inform practice

As with any evaluation or feedback gathered from an activity, it is important to use this to improve and develop our provision and to maximise the impact of these where possible. However, as Study Higher is relatively new to online delivery approaches and evaluation methods, this in itself will also be a reflective and dynamic process to establish:

- What activities/resources are working
- Which evaluation approaches are most popular/engaged with
- Where evaluation and feedback is harder to gather, or not possible
- If/how website/resource 'clicks' outweigh the amount of learner feedback response rates we receive, and how to reconcile the two

Developments are happening quickly across the sector with insights into impact and what does/doesn't work in distanced outreach bound to emerge at a fast pace. To ensure that Study Higher can contribute to this process and that we are providing impactful and beneficial activities, it is important that staff and activity facilitators participate in reflective practice with regards to what works, what doesn't work, and the outcomes from evaluation data from their activity.

Any outreach practitioner involved in creating or facilitating Study Higher activity should communicate with a member of the Monitoring and Evaluation Team after activity has been delivered to review evaluation outcomes and establish whether any changes are required to maximise effectiveness and impact.

Evaluation from light-touch activity and online resources, including downloadable info sheets and 'handouts' and IAG which can be embedded online/on our website - This can be evaluated and analysed centrally once appropriate mechanisms and processes are in place to facilitate this. Please contact the Monitoring and Evaluation Team / Communications Team to explore further.

Evaluation from intensive and longer-term activities (such as those developed with our schools and delivered in real-time or virtually) or with bespoke evaluation approaches - Please communicate with the Monitoring and Evaluation Team to establish how best to capture evaluation insights after the activity

Teacher evaluation/feedback - This can be collected centrally (if via online form or survey), or shared with the Monitoring and Evaluation Team by HELO/delivery staff via email.

Conclusion

Although the current situation poses unprecedented challenges and limitations to some aspects of our work as it was, the shift to online delivery and evaluation is an exciting change laden with possibilities and potential for innovation, great insight, and to contribute meaningfully to an emerging area of research. Over the forthcoming weeks and months we, as practitioners, are bound to learn a great more – as a consortium, and as a sector - about the many benefits, challenges, impacts, and possibilities intrinsic to distanced and online outreach approaches.