The Careers Leader Handbook

Second edition

How to create an outstanding careers programme for your school or college

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Resources: Approaches to evaluation

There are lots of useful books and resources that you can access to help you with evaluation. The following are particularly useful.

Lena Dahlberg and Colin McCraig's (2010) book *Practical Research and Evaluation: A Start-to-Finish Guide for Practitioners*, published by Sage, offers an accessible introduction to evaluation.

Rob Coe, Stuart Kime, Camilla Nevill and Robbie Coleman (2013) have produced *The DIY Evaluation Guide* for the Educational Endowment Foundation, which is available to download for free from **https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Evaluation_Guide/EEF_Evaluation_DIY_Evaluation_Guide.pdf**.

Stage 1: Plan

Reviewing existing evidence

We have drawn on a lot of evidence throughout this book. We've done this because we believe that evidence is critical to ensuring that careers interventions are effective and because it offers a shortcut to the collective wisdom of generations. Bernard of Chartres' famous maxim, often misattributed to Isaac Newton, that '*if I have seen further than others it is by standing on the shoulders of giants*' is well worth remembering.[1] Evidence allows us to stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us to create better careers programmes.

Before you start any evaluation, you should look for existing evidence that might inform what you do and ask yourself the following questions.

- Has anyone already evaluated a similar programme anywhere else in the world?
- Does any of the existing literature give you any ideas about how best to deliver the programme or activity?
- Does any of the existing literature give you any ideas about how to approach your evaluation?
- Has any research been done that might underpin your thinking about what should work or why it should work?
- Can you use any existing research to give you baseline data?

If you turn to the back of the book, the endnotes will direct you to sources of evidence that you can use to support your careers programme and inform your evaluations. We've also made the point that the Gatsby Benchmarks do a pretty good job of pulling the existing evidence together and turning it into a practical framework that you can implement. But the Gatsby Benchmarks aren't the final word on what works in careers and it is valuable for you to review the evidence periodically.

Evidence is likely to be particularly useful when you are introducing something new into your programme. For example, if you are going to build employer mentoring into your careers programme you might find it useful to consult Tristram's publication *Effective Employer Mentoring*.[2] Once you have reviewed the evidence you can start to build, develop or change your programme to bring it into line with what the evidence suggests.

Resources: Evidence

There are lots of places to start if you are looking for evidence to inform your careers programme.

Google Scholar (**https://scholar.google.co.uk**) is a research-specific version of the Google search engine. It is a good place to start with any enquiry that you have about evidence.

The **Education Endowment Foundation** teaching and learning toolkit (**https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit**) provides an entry point to the wider literature on what works in education, and can be applied to many aspects of your careers programme.

Education & Employers is a charity which, unsurprisingly, focuses on bringing education and employers together. It offers an excellent research section at **www.educationandemployers.org/research-main**.

The Careers & Enterprise Company has published a lot of useful research including a series of 'what works?' papers focusing on different kinds of interventions. The organisation provides an archive of its research at **www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/our-evidence/evidence-and-reports/archive**.

The **International Centre for Guidance Studies** is an international research centre based at the University of Derby which publishes a lot of useful research in this area. The centre's website is at **www.derby.ac.uk/research/centres-groups/icegs**.

International reflections: Finding local experts

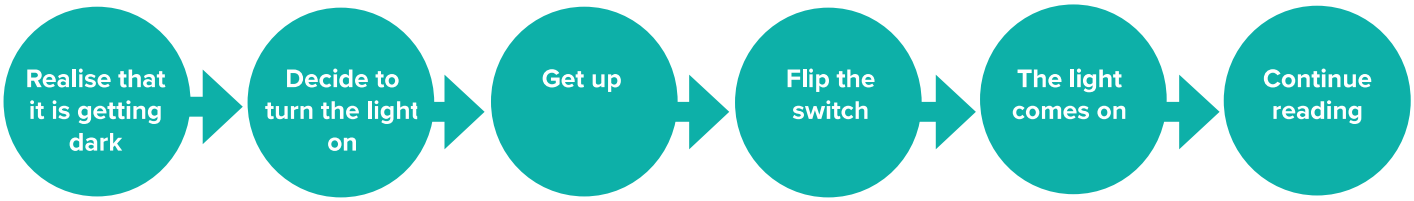
Career guidance is an international field of study and there is lots of research that we can draw on from around the world. However, nothing beats having access to local experts who understand your context. As a careers leader, it is important to find out who the key researchers, academics and thought leaders are in your country. Once you have identified them, keep up to date with their latest publications and reach out to them if you have questions. If you are undertaking a systematic evaluation of your programme they may be interested in what you find.

Developing a theory of change

The most important work that you do in evaluation is thinking about what you are doing, how you are doing it and what you hope will happen as a result. You probably thought about a lot of these things when you were first planning your programme (see Chapter 2.1), but we are going to ask you to revisit this from an evaluation perspective. To do this we are going to introduce you to a key tool that evaluators use called a 'theory of change'.

A theory of change describes the steps that you have to take to make something happen. So, if you are reading this book and it gets too dark you will probably get up, turn the light on and carry on reading. In this case the outcome that you are trying to achieve is being able to read the book in the dark. To achieve this you will need to go through a series of steps.

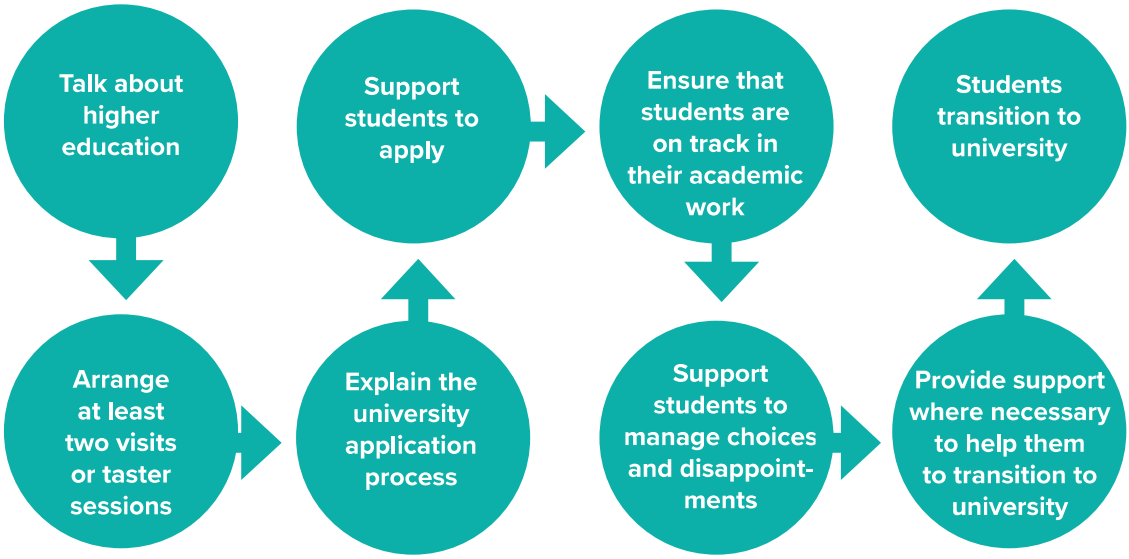
A theory of change for reading this book in the dark



This diagram sets out a basic theory of change. It is only because you implicitly understand this theory of change that you know how to achieve your objective (to keep reading this book even when it gets dark). The theory of change also helps you to see when things go wrong. So, if for example you can't find the light switch, you know what the obstacle is and how to change it (look for the switch).

If we apply a theory of change to an aspect of your careers programme like helping students to transition to university we end up with a theory of change that looks like this.

A theory of change for supporting transition to university



Inevitably, developing theories of change for careers interventions is a bit more complicated than the one that we created for turning the light on and reading a book. One of the complexities is defining the outcomes that you want to achieve. The example above is straightforward because it is about helping a student to access a choice that they are already interested in (going on to HE). But, when you are thinking about your whole programme it gets more difficult to define the outcome.

An example of a theory of change for your whole programme might therefore look something like this.

A sample theory of change for a whole careers programme

Obviously, many of the links in this theory of change are easier to describe than they are to achieve or measure. None the less, it is important to start with a strong theory because it helps you to think about what you are trying to do and therefore about what you are evaluating against. So, in this case we have three ultimate aims.

1. Students achieve their career aspirations.
2. Students build successful lives.
3. Students make good use of their education.

As you start to think about these things you might want to refine them and consider how they might be measured.

If we take the outcome of students achieving their aspirations, we can see that if we are going to measure this, it is going to require a school or college to record students' aspirations while they are in education. It is also going to require some way of following up with these students to find out how far they have realised these aspirations a few years later. This might be difficult to do in practice, but just because it is challenging to measure doesn't mean that the aim isn't worthwhile. What is more, you might also want to reflect on whether it is OK for individuals to change their aspirations as they learn and develop. In this case you might want to adjust the aim to be something like 'students achieve their career aspirations or are happy with the way that their career develops'.

As this example shows, building a theory of change can be challenging. It is likely to be something that you continue to develop and iterate as you learn more and think about your programme and what you are trying to achieve. But, even if it changes, it is still

critical to define your theory of change if you want to evaluate your programme. A theory of change creates a road map for what you are trying to do and allows you to see if you are on track.

Spend some time developing your theory of change and thinking about how you are going to communicate it to others.

Deciding on your evaluation approach

Once you have developed your theory of change you need to think about what kind of evaluation you are trying to do. There are two main types of evaluation.

1. **A process evaluation** (sometimes called a formative evaluation). This focuses on whether things are working in the way that you hoped and asks you to think about what is going wrong and how you might do things differently. A process evaluation is developmental and will help you to improve the quality of your programme.
2. **An outcome evaluation** (sometimes called a **summative evaluation**). This focuses on what has happened because of the intervention that you have put in place. This type of evaluation asks you to think about whether anything different has happened because of what you have done. It also enables you to think about whether the impact that you've had has been worth the effort.

At this stage you should also be thinking about what you are going to evaluate. It might be tempting to decide that you want to evaluate everything to do with your programme, but really understanding what is going on with every element is likely to be difficult and time consuming. While you might try to capture the overall effectiveness of your programme, you will probably want to focus in on one or two elements, usually new things that you have just introduced or older things that you are considering getting rid of or changing.

To give you the focus that you need you should define your **evaluation question** (or questions) before you start. An evaluation question should be specific rather than general and should be designed to be something that you can answer through your evaluation.

So don't ask: *Does our programme have an impact?*

Do ask: *Does providing students with labour market information result in them having broader ideas about possible careers?*

As the example above shows, setting an evaluation question is an important part of designing your evaluation. It will work alongside your theory of change and guide the analysis and reporting of your evaluation.

As you plan your evaluation you should be realistic about how much capacity and resource you have with which to evaluate your programme. You are the careers leader and have a lot on your plate! Evaluation is important, but you also need to organise the programme. In general, it is better to be less ambitious in your evaluation plans

and complete your evaluation successfully than it is to plan to do everything and end up with a lot of half-finished projects.

Finally, you should think about the ethics and legality of your evaluation. The British Educational Research Association provides a code of ethics that you can use to guide your evaluation.[3] The key thing is to treat all participants with respect, ensure that they understand what they are involved in and consent to participate, and to think about any possible harm that may occur through your evaluation (e.g. by breaching anonymity), and manage these risks.

Link to Gatsby Benchmark 1

Evaluation is a key part of meeting Gatsby Benchmark 1. Evaluation should be integrated into the planning and management of your careers programme. See Chapter 2.1 for further discussion of Gatsby Benchmark 1.

Stage 2: Do

Collecting data

As you move into the 'doing' stage of your evaluation one of the key things is to collect data to help you to understand what is happening.

'Data' is a term that is bandied about a lot. Sometimes it can be difficult to know what people are talking about when they say that they are 'data-driven' or 'data-led'. In fact, data just means information that can be recorded or written down. It includes all sorts of information that might be useful to you in helping you to understand your programme.

Data includes notes that you have written on conversations, reflections, letters from parents, photos and recordings. It also includes numbers and statistics, but it is important to recognise that numbers are not the only valid form of data.

There are lots of tools that you can use to collect evaluation data. There are a few basic rules that should guide your thinking about data collection.

- **Make use of what you are already collecting.** Schools and colleges collect vast amounts of data from students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders. Your organisation will already be collecting information on student behaviour, absenteeism, academic attainment and immediate post-school or college destinations. Your students will also produce written work and presentations as part of the careers programme. You should get familiar with this data and think about how it might be useful in evaluating the careers programme. For example, you may believe that if your careers programme

is working, students will be more engaged and less likely to have unexplained absences. Given the data that you are already collecting, you probably won't need to collect any new information to find out if this is true.

- **Don't collect anything that you won't analyse or use.** Inexperienced evaluators often try to collect every piece of data that they can. This leads to feedback forms after every session and surveys with hundreds of questions on them. The basic principle should always be don't collect anything that you aren't likely to use. So, if you aren't going to analyse your data by ethnicity, don't ask questions about it. Similarly, if you haven't got time to analyse thousands of feedback forms, don't collect them.
- **Don't reinvent the wheel.** If you want to collect data try to find someone else who has collected data already on a similar subject. If you can borrow the approach that they used (e.g. using the same survey questions) it is likely to improve the quality of what you do. It will also have the benefit of making your data comparable with theirs.

Resources: Assessing students' career learning

It can be really useful to have a way of measuring what has been learnt by students through a careers programme. You can do this by assessing students against the learning outcomes that you have defined, using a framework such as the CDI's Career Development Framework for example (see section 2.4), and then using marks and feedback to help you to measure student learning and progress.

It can also be useful to have a quicker process to measure student learning. A common way to do this is using a standard set of questions which ask students to self-assess their own learning. The Careers & Enterprise Company have developed a tool called the Future Skills Questionnaire which is designed for this purpose.[4] This tool is integrated into Compass+ (**https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/compass**).

Tristram has been involved in developing an alternative questionnaire that is also freely available for use. This tool is called the Student Career Readiness Index (SCRI) and uses nine questions to measure how ready students feel to start their careers.[5] The SCRI is included as tool 4.1A at **https://indigo.careers/clh**.

- **Link your data together.** We all hate being asked the same thing repeatedly. If you already know a pupil's address, age or the subjects that they are studying, don't ask it again. This can be tricky, as it requires you to find a way to link all the data that you collect. All students have a unique pupil number or learner number that can be very useful for this purpose – but most students won't know this number, so you will have to find a way to connect the individual to their number. Often a combination of their name, date of birth and address will allow you to do this.

- **Collect once, analyse repeatedly.** If you store data well, you will find that it becomes more and more useful. If you collect information about a student's career aspirations one year it provides you with intelligence which you can use to shape your programme and improve the quality of the advice that you give to that student. If you collect this data over several years you can start to see how their aspirations develop and consider whether your programme is having an influence on these aspirations.

Link to Gatsby Benchmark 3

In Chapter 2.3 we talked about keeping good records on students' participation in your careers programme. If you have managed to do this, this will give you another valuable source of data for your evaluation.

If you follow these rules you should be able to avoid generating masses of unusable data. Of course, sometimes you do want to collect new data. We can't take you through every possible approach that you could use but the following should give you some starting points.

- **Your reflections.** If you get into the habit of keeping regular notes, you will generate a valuable source of data. For example, if every week in the year you summarised what you had done on the careers programme and identified two or three things that had gone well and two or three things that you would like to improve, you would have a lot of data about how to improve your programme.
- **Staff reflections.** We have talked about the importance of engaging other staff in your organisation in the careers programme (see Chapter 3.3). The colleagues who participate in the careers programme will have experiences, ideas and complaints that could help you to improve your programme. The challenge is to capture this kind of reflection in a way that you can analyse. This can be as simple as emailing people and asking them to send you their thoughts after an event, or even just taking notes at meetings. Alternatively, you could try running focus groups or even small surveys to gather this information.
- **Interviews.** These are usually one-to-one conversations where you ask someone a series of relevant questions about how they experienced your programme. Interviews can be very structured or more conversational in nature – there are pros and cons to different approaches and you should think about what works best for what you are trying to find out. You might want to interview students, employers, staff or any of your other stakeholders. Take detailed notes or record your interviews.
- **Focus groups.** These are similar to interviews but involve talking to groups rather than individuals. Focus groups allow you to gather more perspectives

and to hear where people agree or disagree and why. However, people can sometimes be reticent to share more personal experiences and reflections in a focus group context.

- **Surveys.** These are structured sets of questions that are usually (but not always) administered to larger groups of people either on paper or via the internet. You can structure surveys in a variety of ways. An important choice that you need to make is how much you are going to structure people's answers by giving them a number of pre-set choices and to what extent you are going to allow them to write what they want.

Resources: Research and evaluations methods

This book isn't the place to teach the basics of research methods, but thankfully there are a lot of other resources that you can use to help you with this.

Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Morrison (2017) have produced the definitive *Research Methods in Education* book, which is published by Routledge.

Robert Coe, Michael Waring, Larry Hedges and James Arthur's (2017) *Research Methods and Methodologies in Education*, published by Sage, offers an equally useful alternative.

Monitoring against your theory of change

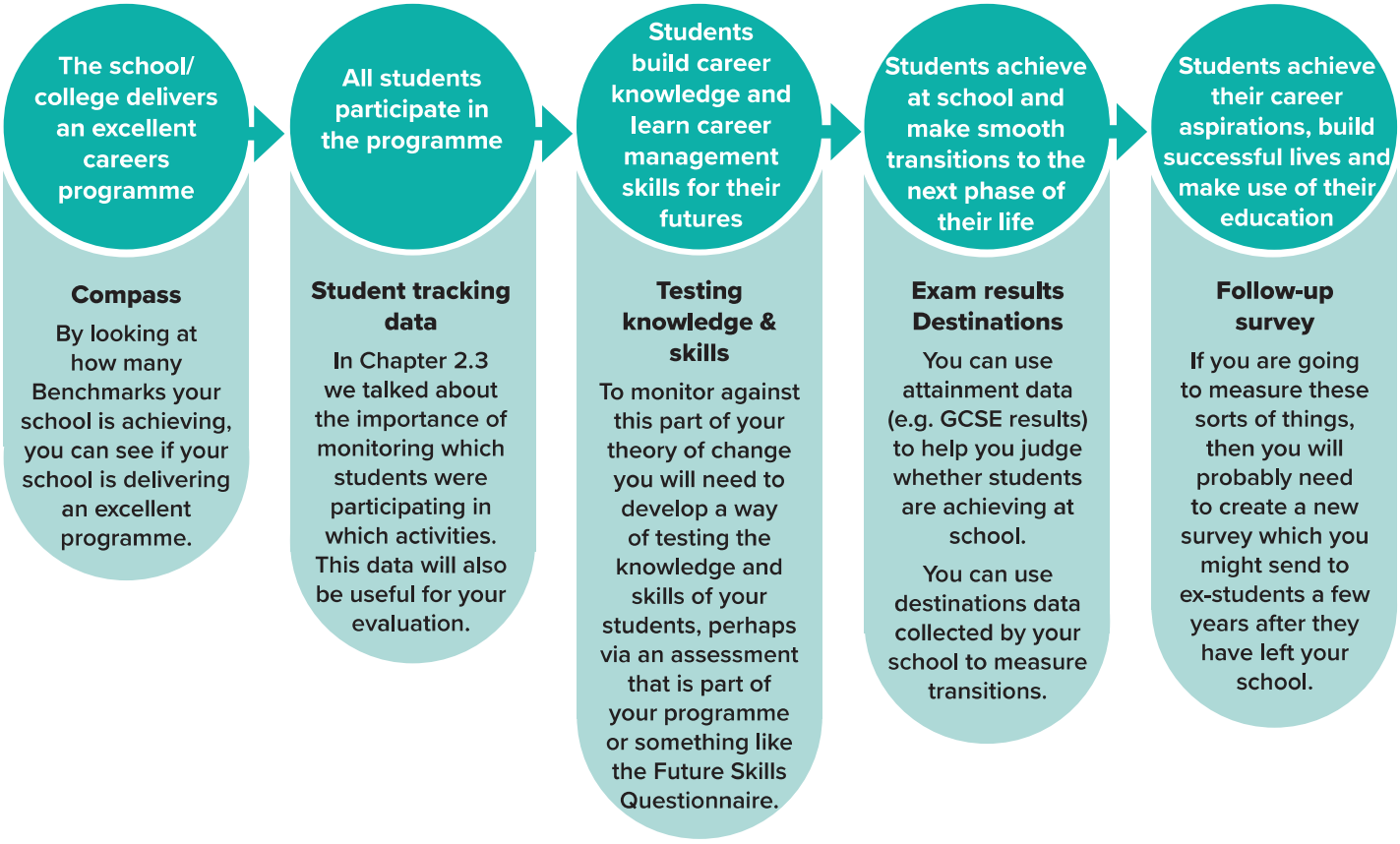
The previous segment of this chapter talked about the different ways in which you could find and collect data. But, it didn't discuss what you are collecting data for or how to decide what is the best thing to collect. To decide that you need to go back to your theory of change.

In your theory of change you set out a series of things that you felt were important to take place if you were going to achieve your aims. When you get to this stage it is important to think about what information you need to monitor whether each of these stages has taken place in the way that you hoped.

If we review the example theory of change it suggests a number of things that we might monitor. The example on page 206 shows how you can use a theory of change to guide you on what to monitor. Collecting all of this data and relating it to your theory of change will give you a lot of the information that you need to evaluate your provision. However, you should also think about what else might be useful. Your evaluation questions will help to guide you on what else you might need – as will things that you notice in the monitoring data as you go along. For example, most of the information below is quantitative. It will tell you what is happening and how much of it is happening, but it won't tell you much about why. So, if you find out that 10% of

your students are regularly ducking out of your careers programme you might want to run some focus groups with them to figure out why this is.

Monitoring against a theory of change



Stage 3: Check

Analysing data

As you develop your evaluation approach, you will need to focus the questions that you are hoping to address. You can't do everything – so ask yourself what this evaluation is really trying to find out. Both your evaluation questions and your theory of change provide you with a guide to this, but you might find that as your evaluation progresses you will want to refine these.

As you have been developing your evaluation you will have started to draw together lots of data. Every article that you have read, every data source you've discovered and every interview conducted will have produced new insights. The challenge in an evaluation is making sense of these insights, understanding the contradictions, and giving appropriate weighting to different perspectives. This process of disentangling the evaluation findings and making sense of them is what is meant by analysis.

Regardless of what you are researching, you should be systematic in the analysis of data. By systematic we mean that you should make sure that you attend to all the data that you collect and that you consider how to review all of it without giving undue weight to

things which are very positive, very negative or just happen to be the last thing that you read. A range of software tools exist to support the analysis of both quantitative data (such as Excel, SPSS) and qualitative data (such as NVivo). Depending on how much data you have and how formal you want it to be, it can be useful to invest some time in learning how to use such tools because they can greatly increase the speed and accuracy of analysis. However, the tools will not, in and of themselves, analyse data.

A systematic approach to data analysis allows the evaluator to describe what the data are revealing, to quantify the different perspectives that emerge and to make connections and spot patterns. The process of analysing evaluation data is likely to be an ongoing process. It is not advisable to leave it until the end of a project, but rather to see analysis as a process that informs all stages of an evaluation.

The process of analysis needs to achieve the following tasks.

- **Quantification.** The process of assigning values and importance to elements of the data that you have collected. For example, some people might report that an intervention made them more positive about apprenticeships, while others might report the opposite. By identifying the size of these two groups it is possible to understand their relative importance.
- **Description and coding.** Understanding the patterns that exist within data. For example, in answer to a question about whom they see as a role model young people might give a long list of names. The process of describing and coding these answers would organise them into a limited number of codes, such as parent, friend, celebrity, teacher. Coding transforms data from just being many items of information into patterns that can be quantified and understood.
- **Making connections.** Identifying connections between different aspects of the data and between the data and other information that you have. For example, it might be the case that most people who answered 'yes' to a question are female and this might therefore be a relationship worthy of comment. It is also useful to note where the patterns that you spot are similar to those observed in previous research.

When analysing data it is important to consider all possible explanations for the findings. Evaluation should not be about confirming what the evaluator thinks already.

Useful questions to guide your analysis.

- What have we found?
- Why have we found it?
- What does it tell us about what we are evaluating?
- Could there be any other explanation?
- Is there anything that we don't understand or can't explain?
- How does this link to other research?
- How does this link to policy?

Develop recommendations

Once you have done your analysis you are in a position to think about what you want to change and develop in response to what you have found. The process of developing recommendations is a creative one – data will never tell you what to do, it will only give you information on what has already happened.

CASE STUDY

In her second year as careers leader Rita has put a lot of effort into evaluating the careers programme. One of the centrepieces of the programme is a day for Year 10 students when employers review student CVs, feedback on student presentations and give short talks to students. In her first year this was one of the activities that Rita enjoyed the most and she is confident that the evaluation will show that it was a huge success.

On the day Rita distributes short feedback forms to students, employers and teachers to capture their perspectives on the day. The initial feedback is really positive. Everyone enjoyed the day and would recommend it to others. However, when Rita digs further into the data the picture is less positive. Students tended not to agree with the statement 'I feel more prepared for my career', employers tended not to agree with the statement 'I would be likely to recruit a student from this school' and teachers tended not to agree with the statement 'I will be able to use some of the information from employers in my lessons'.

Rita isn't sure what to do. Should she cancel the day, rework it, spend more time briefing all the participants or do something else?

Reflective questions: What aspects of your careers programme would you identify for an in-depth evaluation? How would this feed into your career guidance development plan and the overall improvement plan for the school or college?

As the example above shows, evaluation can be really useful as a way to surface problems and give you ideas about what is working well or badly. It is important to state these problems clearly before you start trying to develop solutions to them. Once you have identified the problems you might want to suggest some possible solutions or recommendations, but you should also try to share these ideas with colleagues, students and other stakeholders and test them out before you solidify them.

Reporting

An evaluation should result in a report. This might be a brief summary of what you have found and the recommendations that you have generated in response to it. It

could be a set of slides for a presentation. Or it could be a detailed written report. Regardless of the format, it is important to spend some time working through your evaluation data and thinking about what it all means. Producing a report provides a focus to your work and forces you to finish your analysis and put it together in a meaningful way.

When you are thinking about how to report on the work that you have done you should work through the following questions.

Who is this for? If you are going to write up what you have done you need to start by thinking about whom you are talking to. Putting yourself into the place of your reader will immediately make you a much better writer.

What do you have to say? A report should not just be about writing down everything that you've found out through your evaluation. You will always have a lot more information than you should put in a report. Focus on the big findings and the things that will be most meaningful to your audience.

What are you trying to achieve? You are writing a report for a reason. Maybe you want the governors to agree some radical changes that you have planned? Perhaps you want more resources to improve your programme? Or maybe you just want to convince everyone that you are doing a good job? Think about your rationales for reporting and use these to inform the way that you write it up.

How are you going to say it? There are lots of different ways to produce a report. It could be a one-page infographic or a 100-page report. You should think about these questions of genre and format before you start writing.

Finally, remember that most people don't read reports in full. The overwhelming majority of people will read only a couple of pages or even a few bullet points. Therefore, if you produce any report that is over four pages long, make sure that you include **a one- to two-page *executive summary*** and a **one- to two-paragraph *abstract***.

Stage 4: Act

Disseminating your findings

The final stage of the evaluation cycle is 'acting'. In this stage you need to take all the work that you've been doing and use it to make a difference.

Before your evaluation can make any difference at all people need to hear about it. It is your job to get people to engage with it and to think about the issues that it raises. There are lots of ways to do this, including the following.

- **Send it to people.** In most cases the audience for your evaluation will be small. You should be able to get it to most of the people that need to see it with an email. Your email should include a summary of what the report says and explain why they should take the time to open the attachment and read it.
- **Put it on the agenda of a meeting.** An evaluation is far more likely to get read and discussed if you create some time for it to be discussed. For example, getting it to a school/college SLT will guarantee that at least some key decision makers hear about it.
- **Set up a meeting.** Who is it critical to get to engage with the evaluation? Once you've figured this out, set up a meeting with them to make sure they put the time aside. If there is a group, e.g. all of the careers teachers in your school, then call a meeting and invite them along.
- **Publish it.** Making it available for the world to see will increase its impact enormously. This can be as simple as turning your MS Word document or PowerPoint slides into a PDF and putting it on your website. If you are feeling a bit braver (and have a bit more time) you might want to try to publish a version of it in a newsletter, blog, professional magazine or journal. Most magazines and journals are desperate for content and so they will be keen to feature what you've done, as long as you can adopt their style guide and connect it to their interests.
- **Produce bespoke summaries.** Careers programmes engage a wide range of stakeholders. Each of them is likely to find something different in your evaluation report. One way to handle this is to produce a bespoke summary for employers, another one for teachers and so on. Each of these can pull out the key relevant findings for the group that you are interested in talking to.

Implementing your recommendations

Finally, you need to implement your recommendations. Evaluation serves no purpose if you do it and then ignore what you have found. In practice this is incredibly difficult because time moves on quickly. A few things make it more likely that your evaluation will have an impact.

- **Act quickly.** Start implementing as soon as you have completed the evaluation.
- **Remember that evaluation is a process.** If findings and recommendations emerge as you are going through the year, start acting on them as soon as you can.
- **Allocate responsibilities.** Try to ensure that all recommendations are specific and allocated to an individual or group where possible. If something is everyone's responsibility, it is no one's responsibility.
- **Create an implementation structure.** Set up meetings and identify an implementation group to carry through the recommendations.
- **Tell people what you are planning to do.** Making your plans public will make you stick to them.

Development planning

All schools and colleges have an annual cycle of development planning. This should include all aspects of their work, and if the careers department is not asked for a development plan you should prepare one anyway. The contents will be informed by the results of your monitoring, review and evaluation. The plan should set out what developments you wish to make to your programme and any implications for staff development (CPD) and organisational changes. You should then list the actions needed in chronological order, clearly indicating who is to be responsible for each one and what the target dates are.

It is a good idea also to assess the climate for change, by identifying what factors may help, or hinder, the implementation of your plans. Finally, you should discuss the plan with your line manager, as you are likely to need their endorsement and support to put the proposals into practice.

Tools: Item 4.1B. Development plan.
A template for preparing a career development plan is provided in the online resources accompanying this book: **https://indigo.careers/clh**. You may find that your school or college has its own format, in which case you should use that, but if not, then this one should help you to present your proposals in a structured way.

In a nutshell

This chapter has looked at how you can evaluate your programme and use this evaluation to drive your programme. Key things to bear in mind include the following points.

- Evaluation is a process. It is something that you should be doing all the time rather than a one-off event.
- You should make sure that your evaluation plans are realistic and that you follow through on them.
- Developing a theory of change and some good evaluation questions is at the heart of effective evaluation.
- Effective evaluators make good use of existing data before they start trying to collect new data.
- There are lots of different ways to collect data. It can be useful to use a range of approaches to allow you to gather different kinds of data.
- Make sure that you analyse your data and write up and share your evaluation report.
- Evaluation is pointless if you don't act on what you find out.
- Use your evaluation findings to inform your development plan.