# Applying a Theory of Change approach to evaluate Edge Hill University's Student Advisory Panel

## 01. Introduction

Edge Hill University's Student Advisory Panel (SAP) gives students from underrepresented backgrounds the opportunity to inform the design and delivery of a wide range of university policies, programmes and initiatives. The SAP allows students to share their lived experience with teams from across the university, providing ideas and opinions on how we could improve our practices to break down the barriers that they may be facing. The panels aim to improve student experience, to positively impact on access, continuation, completion attainment and progression gaps.

Using a Theory of Change (ToC) approach allowed us to understand what the desired outcomes and impacts of the panel is. In turn we then established effective evidence informed evaluation methods to test each of these, ensuring a thorough evaluation takes place.

### **03. Theory of Change Workshop**

To create the SAP Theory of Change, a workshop is held with key stakeholders. This is led by the Evaluation Coordinator with the support of the Student Success Officer responsible for running the initiative.

The workshop begins with an overview of the previous years delivery and a chance to reflect on findings from the evaluation.

We hold a collaborative, interactive session using relevant discussion questions and postit notes to capture ideas and map out each section of the ToC. This gives everyone the opportunity to contribute to the evaluation and make sure that all possible outcomes and impacts are considered.

#### 04. Evaluation Methods

A detailed evaluation plan is created following the Theory of Change workshop outlining timelines and responsibilities. in 2023/24 the following evaluation methods were decided on and utilised to enable us to assess the programmes impact:

- Pre and post surveys with SAP members including TASO's validated sense of belonging question scale
- Thematic analysis of agenda items at meetings
- Student engagement data
- Action tracking

For 2024/25 we have also included a focus group and celebration event with an evaluation focus, to enhance both our impact and implementation and process evaluation.

#### **Regulatory Literature**

The OfS advises that universities should "include student representatives on decision making panels so that student opinions can be taken on board when making university processes, procedures and strategies.[1]

The OfS also highlights that "student engagement helps providers to understand the experiences of specific groups at different stages in the student lifecycle. This can be helpful in informing and developing effective practice in access and participation. [2]

1 Office for Students, "Student engagement and consultation, effective practice advise," Office for Students website, July 27, 2020. https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-andguidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/student-engagement-and-consultation/advice/ 2 Office for Students, "Student engagement and consultation, The issue," Office for Students website, July 27, 2020. https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promotingequal-opportunities/effective-practice/student-engagement-and-consultation/.

# **02. Evaluation Framework**

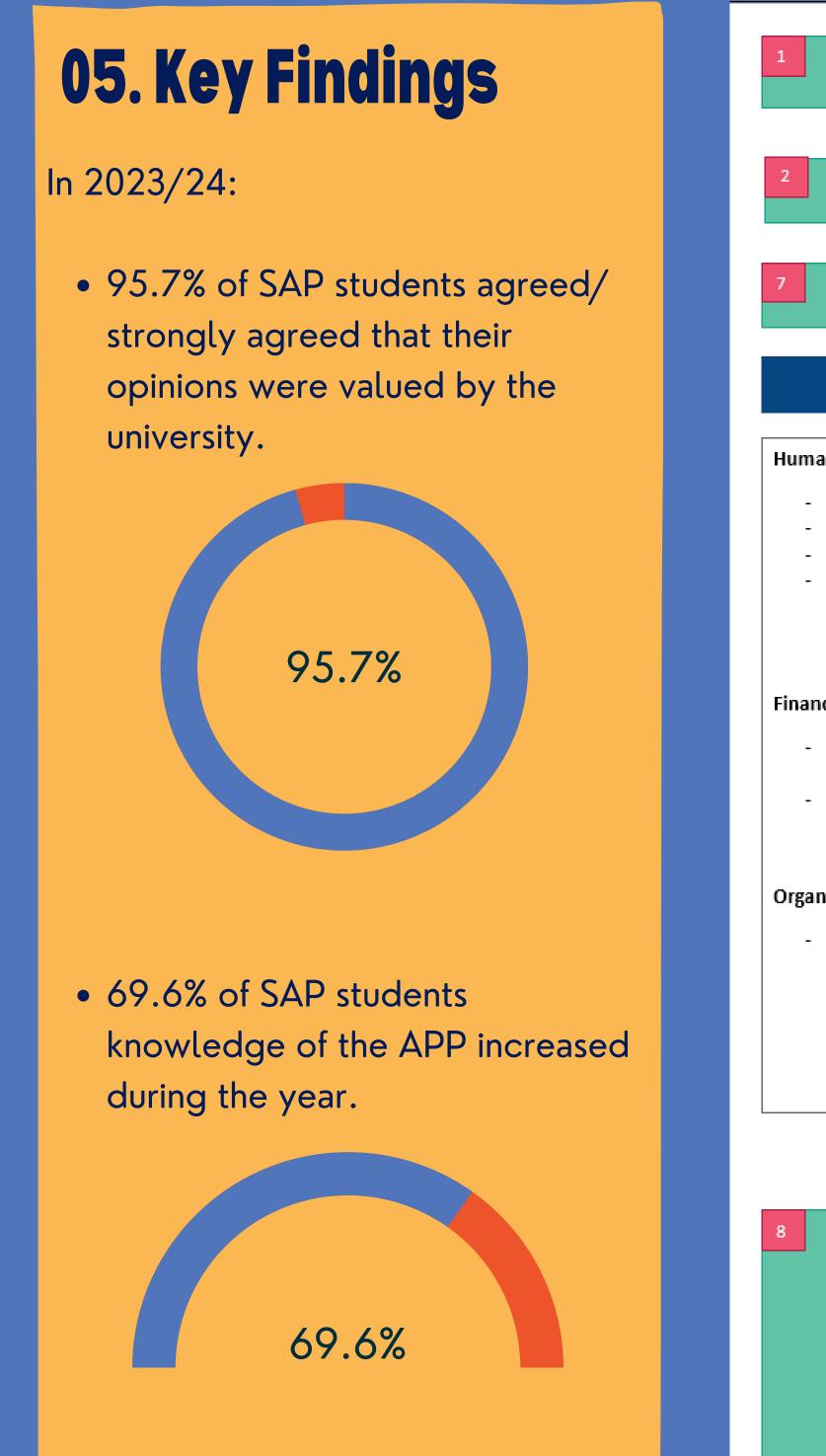
Our new Widening Access and Student Success Evaluation Framework is used to evaluate all of our APP extended programmes, and ensures that we are using a Theory of Change approach.

Our framework has 6 steps; Research, Design, Deliver, Evaluate, Share and Review and Reflect.

It's cyclical nature means the ToC is reviewed and updated annually to reflect any changes and to inform our evaluation plans for the year ahead.

We have created a number of resources to compliment the framework to ensure that all of this work is captured and that the evaluation plan created can easily be followed. This includes an Programme Proposal Document where programme leads can capture their research (literature review, student and stakeholder engagement, quantitative analysis) and note down any initial ideas for the content of the programme. It also houses a detailed evaluation plan which is completed once the Theory of Change model is agreed and finalised.

This framework provides structure to APP evaluation work at Edge Hill and keeps us in line with Office for Students (OfS) regulation and Transforming Access and Student Outcomes Higher Education (TASO) recommendations. This approach has informed the design and delivery of the SAP and helps us to evaluate it's impact.



Situation Aims	recommended that mechanisms are put in passionate about students being at the hea	le APP will <i>"include students from a diverse r</i> place <i>to "seek a representative view from di<u>f</u> irt of what we deliver, and wants to have a st ith specific WP characteristics (most relevant mes and initiatives.</i>
Inputs	5 Activities	6 Outputs
	Process	
an: Student Success Officer Student Success Manager Evaluation Coordinator A range of university staff from support services, academic departments etc. ntial: Payment for students at £12.03 per hour Catering for celebration event nisational: Suitable accessible meeting rooms on campus.	<ul> <li>Two 2-hour Student Advisory panel held each month.</li> <li>Bespoke individual panels to be held on an ad-hoc basis.</li> <li>Completed actions communicated to students via the Edge Hill website and newsletter.</li> <li>Panel actions to be taken to APP Steering Group.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Students will have the opportunity to provide their feedback on university policies, programmes and initiatives.</li> <li>Students will have the opportunity to speak to staff from a wide range of university departments.</li> <li>Students will have the opportunity to network with their WP peers.</li> <li>Staff will have the opportunity to gain valuable student insights and feedback to inform their delivery.</li> </ul>
Rationale & Assumptions	<ul> <li>experiences of our Black, Asian and Minority Eth further four groups were convened in 2021/202 be the only panel taking place with bespoke par popular for students and staff to attend.</li> <li>Our SAPs contribute to all of our APP targets as voice when designing projects.</li> <li>This initiative should increase students' sense or should be a real mechanism for change and students.</li> <li>To be successful, this initiative relies on particip recruitment and training process that this know that are relevant to WP students, at an appropriate the students of the students.</li> </ul>	n first convened a Student Advisory Panel (SAP) for B hnic students, and to collaborate with our students to 22, all 5 panels have continued to run successfully. In nels taking place on an ad-hoc basis. We theorise that students are consulted on any new initiatives before of belonging as involving them in decision processes a dents' thoughts should be acted upon, leading to the pants having some knowledge of the APP, so that the vledge is developed. The initiative also relies on univer riate time that will mean students contributions can mpact as the SAPs ensure work being done to meet of

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#### **06. Panel Achievements**

Our Student Advisory Panel continues to create real change at the university, a selection of some key achievements are:

- Care Experienced and Estranged Students feedback was included in our successful reapplication for the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers Quality Mark.
- Students helped to develop a Race, Ethnicity and Religion staff training toolkit.
- Co-created and continue to provide feedback on our on course support programme; Thrive.
- Following feedback from members, the accessibility of recruitment events e.g. open days is advertised in all main communications.
- Shared insight to develop our access programmes, including our new Free School Meals programme; Ignite.
- Provided feedback on the launch of our new Student Assistance Programme, as part of this students will be able to request to speak to a councillor with similar lived experience.

range of backgrounds in the design, implementation and evaluation." The OfS fferent sections of the student body" on APP activities. Edge Hill University is udent led approach when making decisions about WP/APP policy and practice.

for our APP) to provide input, reflecting on their lived experience, to inform a

Impact		
<ul> <li>Students:</li> <li>Good levels of engagement with the SAP's</li> <li>Increased sense of belonging for WP students at Edge Hill</li> <li>Enhanced understanding of the APP amongst panel members.</li> <li>Increased knowledge of support services available at Edge Hill.</li> <li>Students feel they were listened to and their opinions were valued.</li> <li>Improved policies and procedures for WP students at Edge Hill.</li> <li>Students develop skills for their CV such as debating, networking and communication.</li> <li>Students receive a financial benefit for taking part in the panels.</li> <li>Positive engagement and attendance at the panels</li> <li>Increased engagement and involvement in other work i.e. student guide work.</li> <li>Staff:</li> <li>Increased knowledge of WP student groups and the APP.</li> <li>Increased knowledge of WP student groups and the APP.</li> <li>Increased confidence in the creation and delivery of impactful student facing activities.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>The Student Advisory Panel allow WP students to share their lived experience with the university, providing ideas and opinions on how we could improve our practices to break down the barriers that they face, with the ultimate goal of reducing access, continuation, completion, attainment and progression gaps amongst these studen groups.</li> <li>Increase in positive NSS feedback surrounding feeling valued and listened to.</li> <li>Students are able to use the experience and skills gained as a panel member when thinking about future careers.</li> </ul>	

lack, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students in 2020/21. The purpose was to learn about the to co-design and review services across the University. This SAP proved successful, and a n 2023/24 an intersectional panel was introduced as a permanent fixture, for 24/25 this will hat this will work better as in 2023/24, our intersectional panels have proven to be the most

re, they are implemented. This ensures that we meet the OfS requirement to include student at university should make Edge Hill more inclusive and accessible for WP students. The panels

em feeling listened to and valued. ey can provide insight that will lead to meaningful change. It is therefore essential in the versity staff to engage well with the panels, by bringing policies, programmes and initiatives

be implemented. our APP targets is done in collaboration with students.