

# The Brilliant Club's research and impact consultancy services



With increasing focus on the outcomes and impact of university participation and outreach interventions, it is more important than ever to conduct high-quality and robust evaluation work. At The Brilliant Club, we provide research and impact consultancy services to universities and other third sector organisations to support their work in this area. We specialise in providing support that draws on robust research, but is also practical for organisations to engage with. Our areas of interest include:

- 1. Evaluating university access and effective outreach.**
- 2. Employing science of learning principles to improve teaching and learning practice.**
- 3. Defining and measuring cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes.**

We are pleased to share this case study about a recent research consultancy project that we undertook for Cardiff University. If you would like to find out more about The Brilliant Club's research and impact consultancy services, please contact Dr Katie Jones: [hello@thebrilliantclub.org](mailto:hello@thebrilliantclub.org).

## A case study: Supporting a new approach to impact evaluation

Cardiff University's widening participation and outreach team are implementing a new impact evaluation strategy across their widening participation and outreach programmes. Their chosen evaluation framework is the [NERUPI Evaluation Framework](#), which brings together theory and practice to inform the evaluation of widening participation interventions. Many universities across the UK have adopted this framework, as it provides a clear set of aims, objectives, and learning outcomes for different ages groups, and offers a shared language for practitioners in widening participation.

The consultancy project involved the following two phases, which took place between January-May 2020:

- 1. Operationalising the NERUPI Evaluation Framework in the context of the University's widening participation and outreach work.**
- 2. Developing a measurement toolkit which can be used across the University's widening participation and outreach programmes.**

# Phase 1:

## Theory of Change workshop

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The first step was for Cardiff University to come to **a shared understanding of how their current widening participation and outreach programmes mapped on to the objectives from the NERUPI Evaluation Framework**. The Brilliant Club designed and delivered a day-long Theory of Change workshop to support these discussions. The range of existing programmes and activities varied widely and included campus visit days, transition residential summer schools, academic interventions, and community support activities for young people.

Once we had mapped the Theory of Change, we then **considered the measurability of the aims and objectives of the framework and prioritised key measures of success for each programme**. The key measures of success that were identified as particularly important for Cardiff University was building 'Habitus' (a sense of belonging) and developing 'Skills Capital' in the underrepresented groups that they work with.

# Phase 2:

## Impact measurement toolkit

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In phase 2, building on the outcomes of the Theory of Change workshop, we developed an impact measurement toolkit for Cardiff's programmes. The toolkit brought together the theoretical objectives from the framework and empirical measures designed to assess skills and attitudes in young people. To create the toolkit, we **researched and identified existing measures from the research literature, primarily self-report surveys, that related to the framework's objectives** and which aligned with the outcomes that Cardiff University wanted to measure within their programmes.

The self-report surveys measured outcomes related to the 'Habitus' and 'Skills Capital' objectives, such as **study skills, resilience, confidence and communication skills**. Importantly, the development of **the toolkit was carried out in collaboration with key stakeholders at Cardiff University**, so that we created a toolkit that that was both practical and meaningful for their programmes and the young people they support.

Within the toolkit, we created an overview document outlining the measures that we had identified for the toolkit, based on the research literature. We included information about how the measures related to the framework's objectives, how the measures fit within Cardiff's programmes, and what the evidence base was for the chosen measures. The measures themselves were also included in the toolkit and, alongside this, we provided analysis templates so that Cardiff University could easily embed the analysis of the measures into their programmes. **The toolkit, including the measures we have identified, will be used to evaluate Cardiff's widening participation and outreach programmes, which will be delivered to 30,000 young people in 2020/21.**



## Our reflections

Below we have provided some reflections from the organisations involved in the project.

### Scott McKenzie:

Head of widening Participation and Outreach, Cardiff University

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We've worked with The Brilliant Club for a number of years and have been consistently impressed by their annual impact reports. We'd just started embedding the NERUPI Framework across our projects but realised we needed to tap into researcher expertise to really get the most out of it. We approached The Brilliant Club to see if this was something they could help us with, and were put in contact with Katie, Lauren and Richard. They have been so helpful through every step of the process – from initial planning and helping us think about what we wanted to get out of the toolkit to working with my team to embed evaluation into day-to-day practice. Lauren and Katie really made the effort to understand what was needed from the project and took the time to ensure the toolkit worked for everyone in the team. We are extremely pleased with the toolkit and it now forms a central part of our project management process.



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### Dr Lauren Bellaera:

Research and Impact Director, The Brilliant Club

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We thoroughly enjoyed collaborating with Cardiff University on this project. By working with together with Scott and his team, we were able to develop a toolkit that was both empirically robust and practical for their programmes to use. This project also enabled us as a charity to think more deeply about how the NERUPI Evaluation Framework can be applied to the evaluation of widening participation programmes.



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