Cabinet Office

Communicating Evidence & Decision Making

Evaluation Task Force Academy 2.0

Hello

ETF Evaluation Academy

Module 1: Introduction to Evaluation

Module 2: Developing a Theory of Change

Module 3: Scoping an Evaluation

Module 4: Process Evaluation

Module 5: Impact Evaluation - Experimental Designs

Module 6: Impact Evaluation - Quasi-Experimental Designs

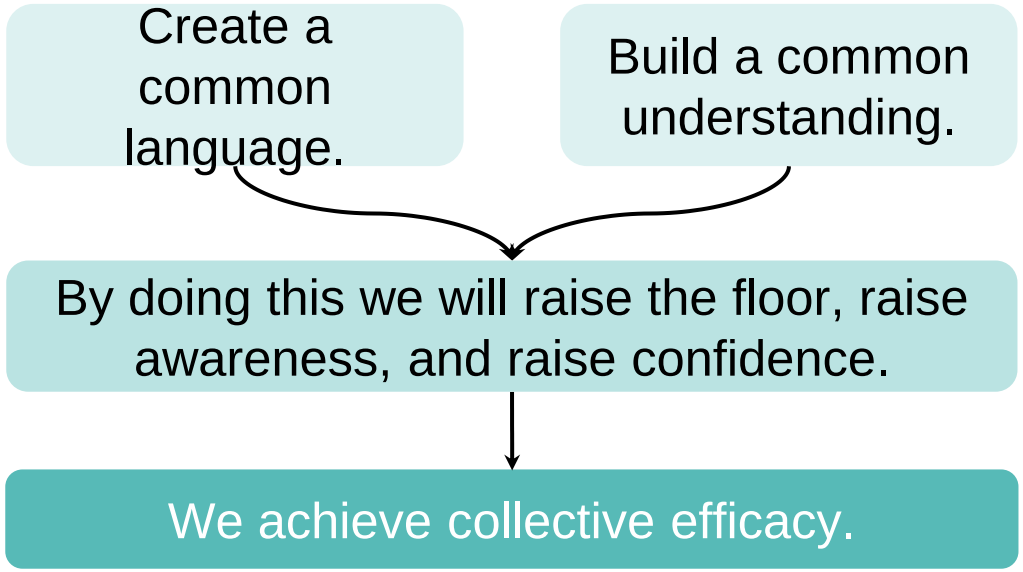
Module 7: Impact Evaluation - Theory-Based Designs

Module 8: Value for Money Evaluation

Module 9: Planning and Managing an Evaluation

Module 10:* *Communicating Evidence and Decision Making

The Evaluation Academy will upskill analysts across HMG departments in key evaluation methodologies and evaluation management techniques and will result in better and more evaluation across HMG.



Module 10: Overview of contents

- Learning outcomes
- Planning your outputs and dissemination strategy (part 1)
- Planning your outputs and dissemination strategy (part 2)
- Interpret your findings and generate recommendations
- Share your results with stakeholders
- Responding to stakeholders concerns
- Advocacy and application of learning

Key

Know/Comprehend: lowest level of complexity

Apply/Analyse: medium level of complexity

Evaluate/Create: highest level of complexity

Learning outcomes

- I can explain findings to a non-technical audience (written and orally)
- I can explain why transparency is critical to ensuring the integrity of evaluation findings and the steps I can take to maximise trust in findings
- I can apply specific communication techniques to engage stakeholders with evidence and evaluation findings
- I can respond to concerns (including ethical) raised by non-expert stakeholders about different evaluation designs in a clear and reassuring way
- I can advocate for why evaluation should be included across the policy cycle
- I can influence policy design to ensure evaluation methods are used

Planning your outputs and dissemination strategy (part 1)

Introduction to communicating evidence

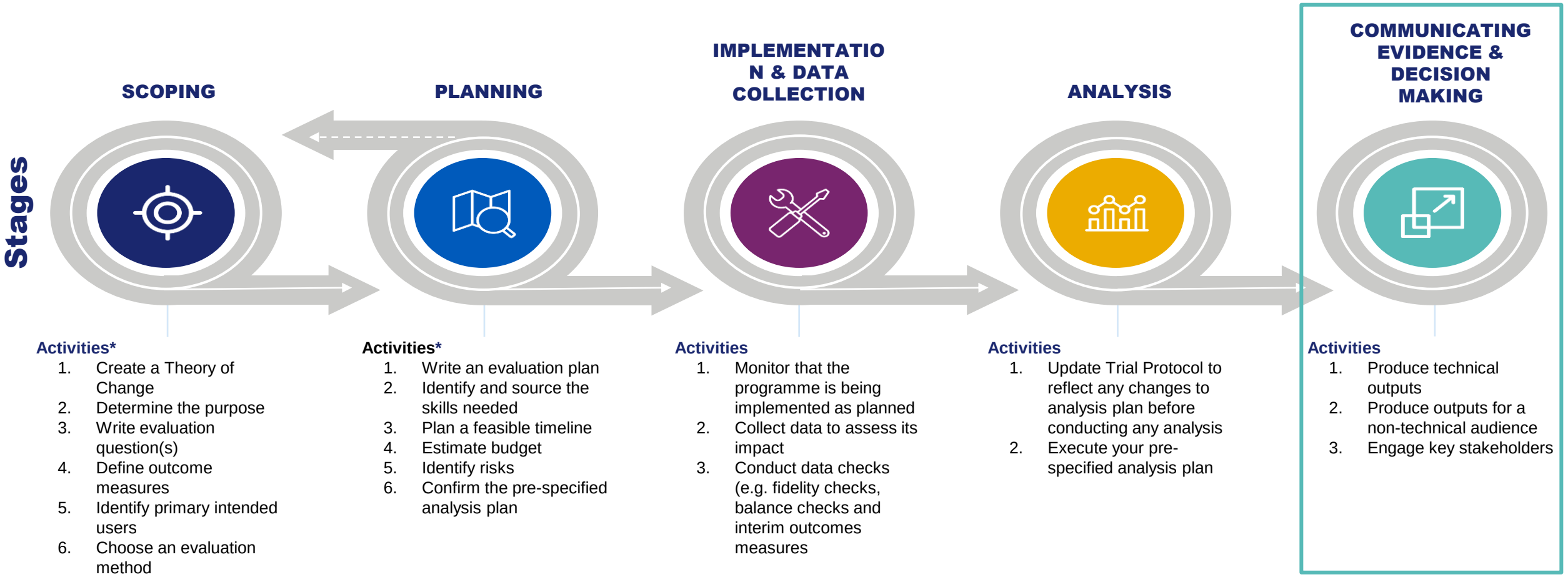
Congratulations, you've run a great evaluation!

To inform decision making you need to:

Plan for dissemination

Communicate the results

Stages of evaluation



Activities*

1. Create a Theory of Change
2. Determine the purpose
3. Write evaluation question(s)
4. Define outcome measures
5. Identify primary intended users
6. Choose an evaluation method

Activities*

1. Write an evaluation plan
2. Identify and source the skills needed
3. Plan a feasible timeline
4. Estimate budget
5. Identify risks
6. Confirm the pre-specified analysis plan

Activities

1. Monitor that the programme is being implemented as planned
2. Collect data to assess its impact
3. Conduct data checks (e.g. fidelity checks, balance checks and interim outcomes measures

Activities

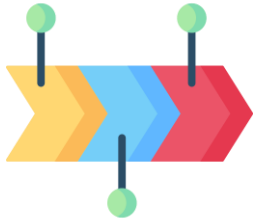
1. Update Trial Protocol to reflect any changes to analysis plan before conducting any analysis
2. Execute your pre-specified analysis plan

Activities

1. Produce technical outputs
2. Produce outputs for a non-technical audience
3. Engage key stakeholders

**Scoping & Planning stages can occur at the same time and support each other.*

Plan outputs and dissemination strategy



During your Scoping stage, you can:

1. Decide on your outputs
2. Log key decisions
3. Prepare for your results

Case study (Covid Job Retention Scheme). "*Before putting pen to paper, make sure you get a detailed bullet-pointed skeleton of the evaluation agreed with seniors.*

Rather than just listing the main components of each chapter, make sure it captures the planned key narrative/takeaway for each chapter, as well as the caveats, risks etc. This will save you a lot of time and pain later on."

Decide on your outputs

Liaise with your stakeholders

Do you need a technical and non-technical write up?

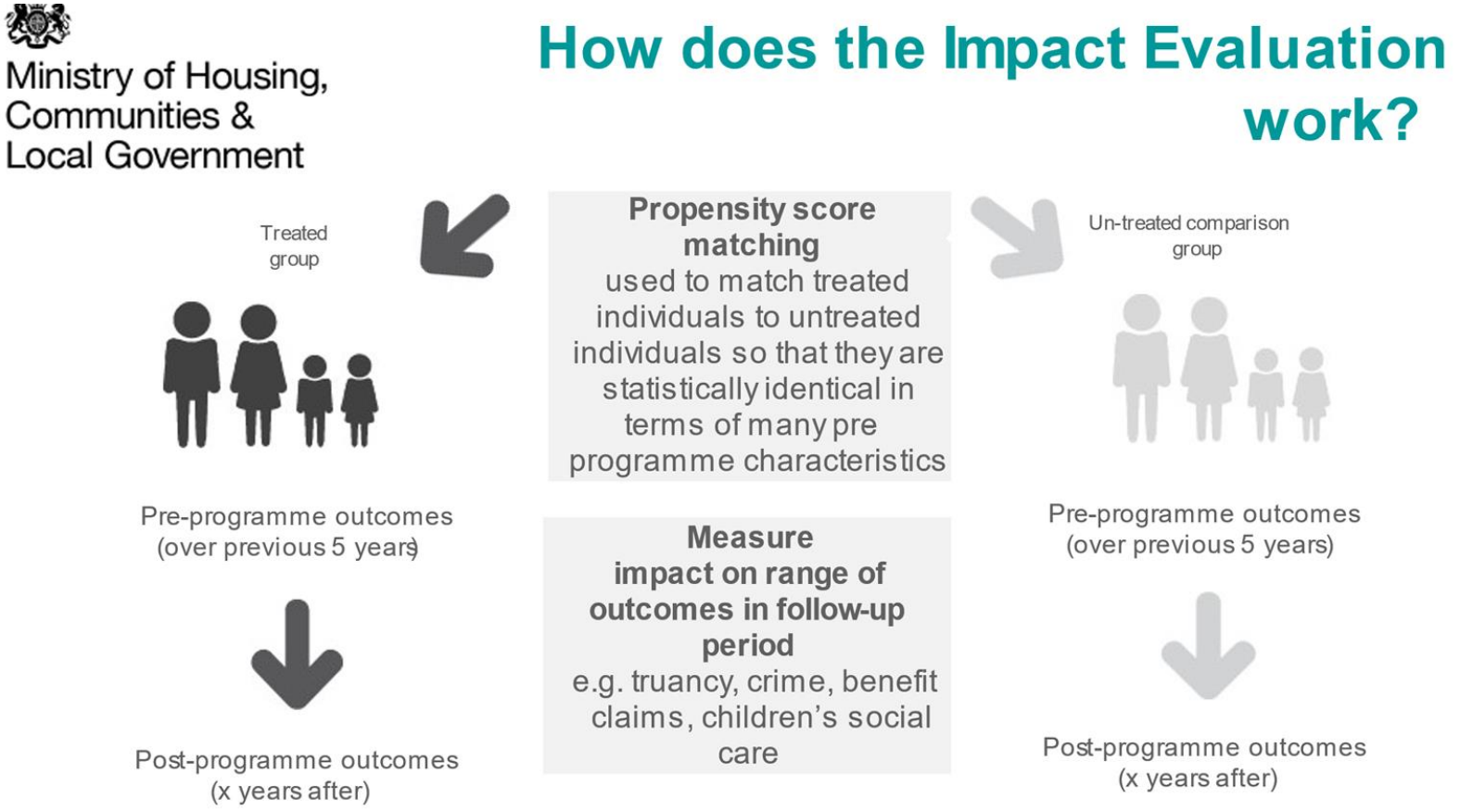
Will you need to write a ministerial submission or business case?

As a **default** you should create:

A short note or slide summary

Infographics or graphs

Explaining technical concepts to a non- technical audience



Explaining technical concepts to a non- technical audience

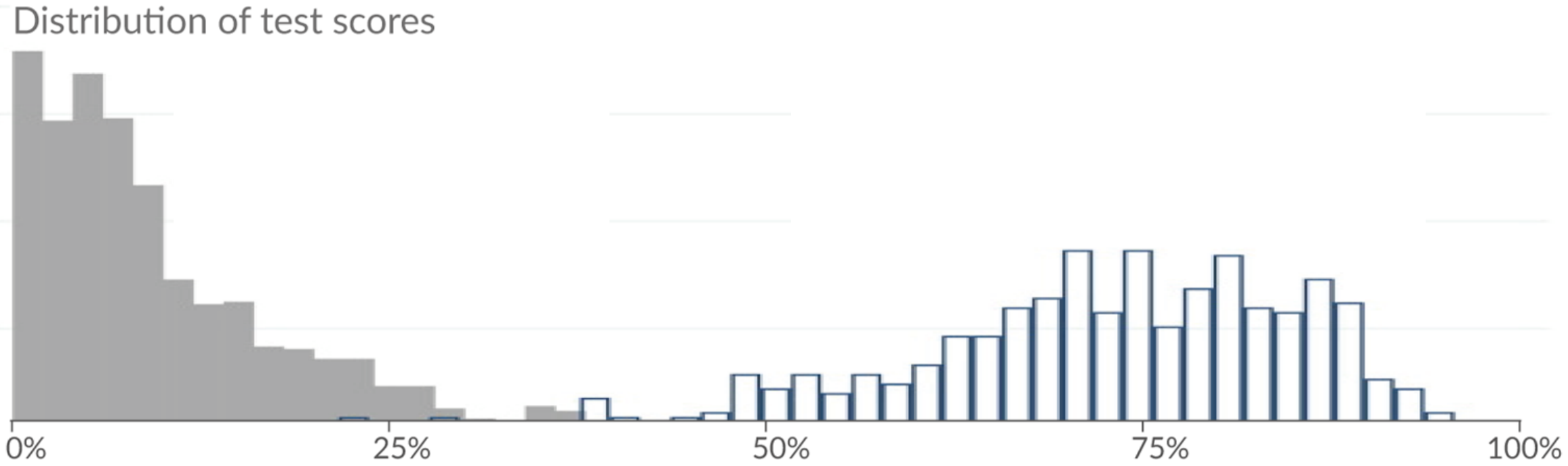
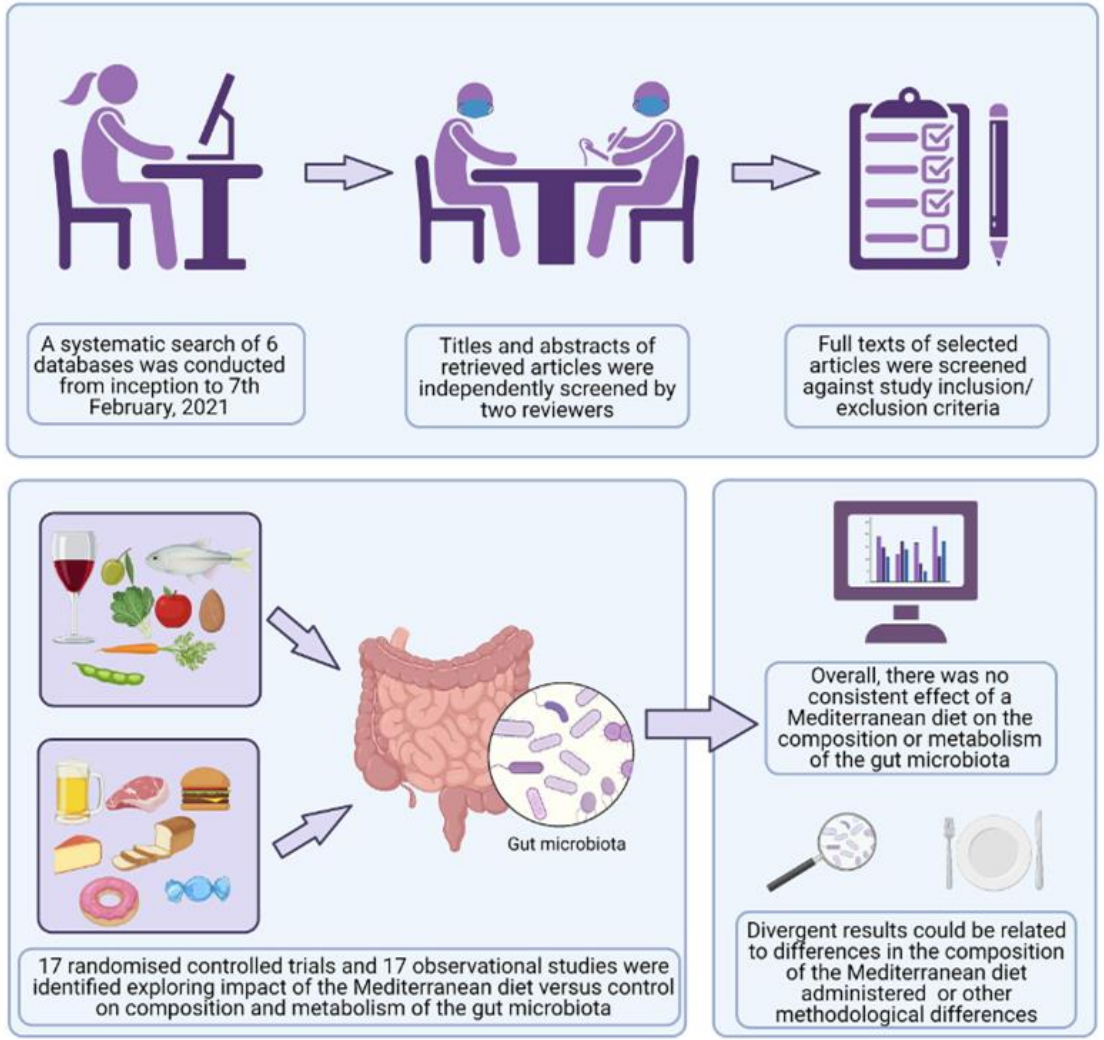
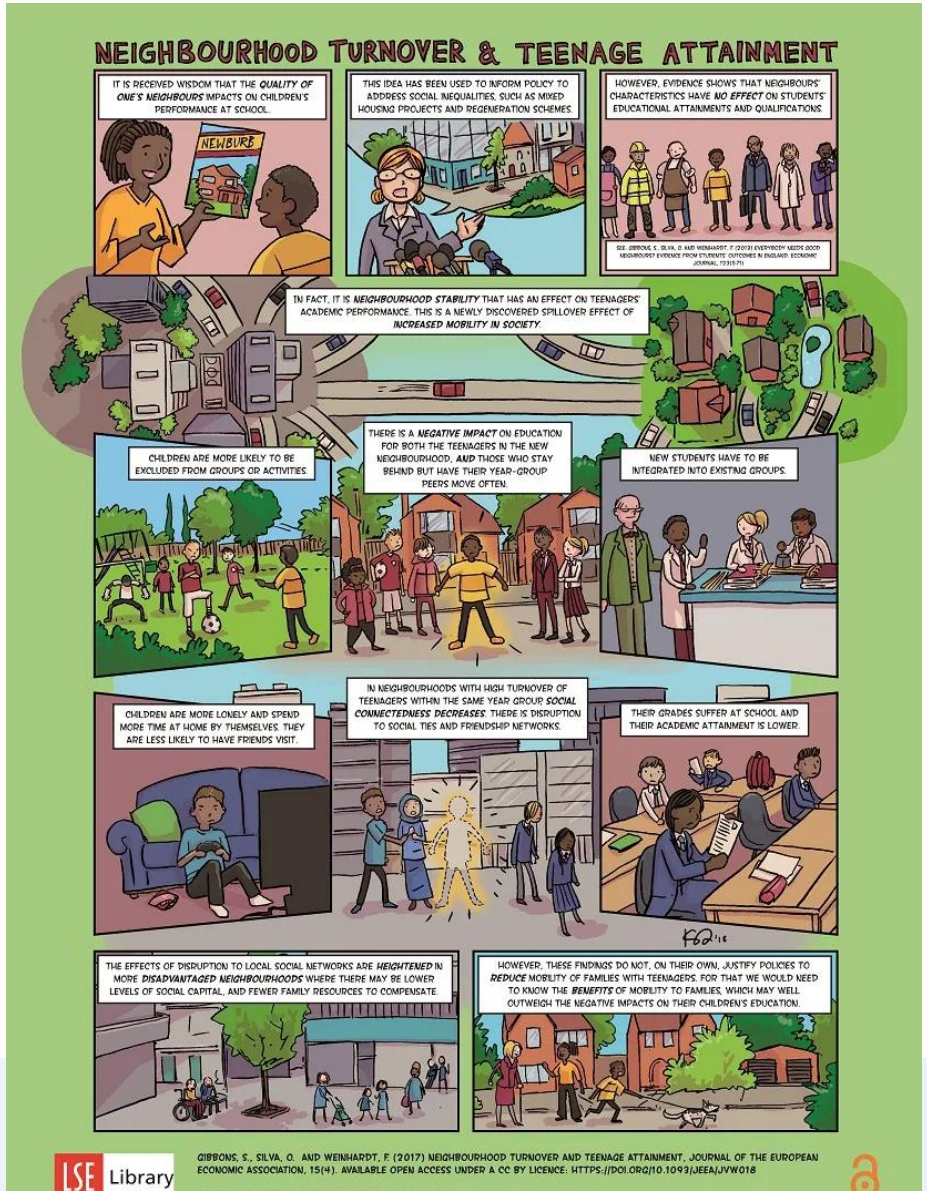


Chart adapted by OurWorldinData.org from Fazzio et al. (2021) – Large learning gains in pockets of extreme poverty

Explaining technical concepts to a non- technical audience



Creative ways to engage your audience



Alternative ways of communicating evidence

Evidence-Based Policy Newsletter #14

October 9, 2023

1. An RCT of **Fostering Healthy Futures mentoring program for teens in the child welfare system** recently reported final results. Quick take: High-quality RCT finds a sizable 14% point decrease in juvenile justice involvement over ~2 years - an encouraging result though not definitive due to lack of statistical significance. (See full summary.)
2. The Baby's First Years RCT, studying the impact of **unconditional cash transfers to low-income US mothers with newborns**, reported new results on 2 primary outcomes: child overall health & sleep over 3 years. Quick take: No impact on either outcome (but effects could emerge in future). (See full summary.)
3. The US Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) published an evidence review of **World of Words preschool program to improve children's vocabulary/language**. Quick take: WWC's finding of "strong evidence" is far overstated; the results are preliminary & not yet reliable. (See full summary.)
4. HHS/ACF reported RCT results for HPOG 2.0, a **major federal demonstration program that trains low-income adults for skilled healthcare jobs**. Quick take: High-quality RCT finds no program impact on participant earnings over 3-4 years, despite increasing completion of training (i.e., % earning any new credential) by 14% points. (See full summary.)

In Sept 2022, Jon Baron launched a newsletter for policymakers, researchers, and others who wish to keep abreast of rigorous evidence on “what works” in social policy. This is a good example of summarising evidence in short bits of text.

https://www.evidencenewsletter.net/

Ben and Mallory in the No10 Data Science team talk about how they use data to inform decision-making and how they’ve taken this a step further with AI to create decision tools.

https://vimeo.com/860891900/6c51b1d56a?share=copy

Planning your outputs and dissemination strategy

Activity: Think about an evaluation, research or analytical project you have worked on. Share your experience of planning / creating outputs and/or a dissemination strategy with the wider group.

- **Have you adopted an innovative approach to communicate findings?**
- **What have you done yourself to map out and choose the best communication options and channels?**
- **Any interesting example you can share?**

A few more things to remember at this stage

- Outputs should avoid jargon and communicate your findings in a simple way (without compromising the ideas) - check out the Plain English website for tips!
- Data visualisation best practice
- Custom-made infographics can be expensive - make sure you account for these
- Accessibility requirements
- Consider a range of active disseminations channels, incl. social media, blogs, webinars, newsletter podcasts, conference papers, academic journals

Planning your outputs and dissemination strategy (part 2)

Log key decisions early

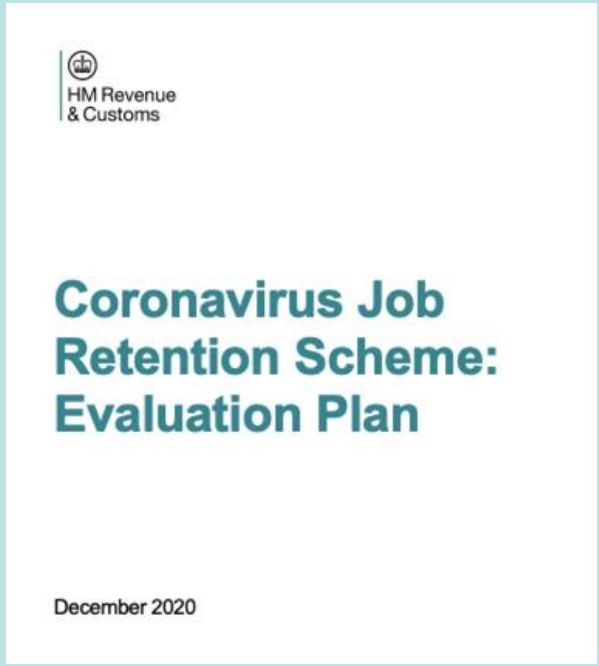
Create and publish an evaluation protocol because:

It fosters transparency

It limits ‘data fishing’

It serves as an aide-memoire

Case study: Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme Plan



Prepare for your results

Possible Result	Decision
Programme has no effect	• Stop implementation • Consider piloting other alternative to shift our outcome of interest
Programme has a backfire effect	• Stop implementation immediately • Assess PE to understand where the backfire may have come from • Consider piloting other alternative to shift our outcome of interest
Programme significantly improves outcome of interest	• Continue implementation • Begin preparations to scale

Prepare for your results

Results will look different depending on your evaluation method:

Impact evaluations answer questions like ***"What are we achieving?"*** or ***"Which is better?"***

Process evaluations answer questions like ***"What's going on?"*** or ***"How was this intervention implemented?"***

Theory-based evaluations (TBEs) answer questions like ***"How confident am I that this outcome was caused, in part, by the programme?"***

Don't wait until you're presenting your results to do this.

Interpret your findings and generate recommendations

Interpret your findings and generate recommendations

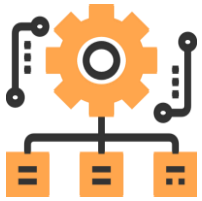
Results require careful interpretation:

1. Combine your sources of evidence
2. Situate your results in the relevant context
3. Report the limitations of the evaluation method you used
4. Distinguish between descriptive results and interpretation
5. Formulate a recommendation

Combine your sources of evidence

Synthesise evidence from different sources

Review your Theory of Change



Consider structuring your reporting using your Theory of Change

Situate your results in the relevant context

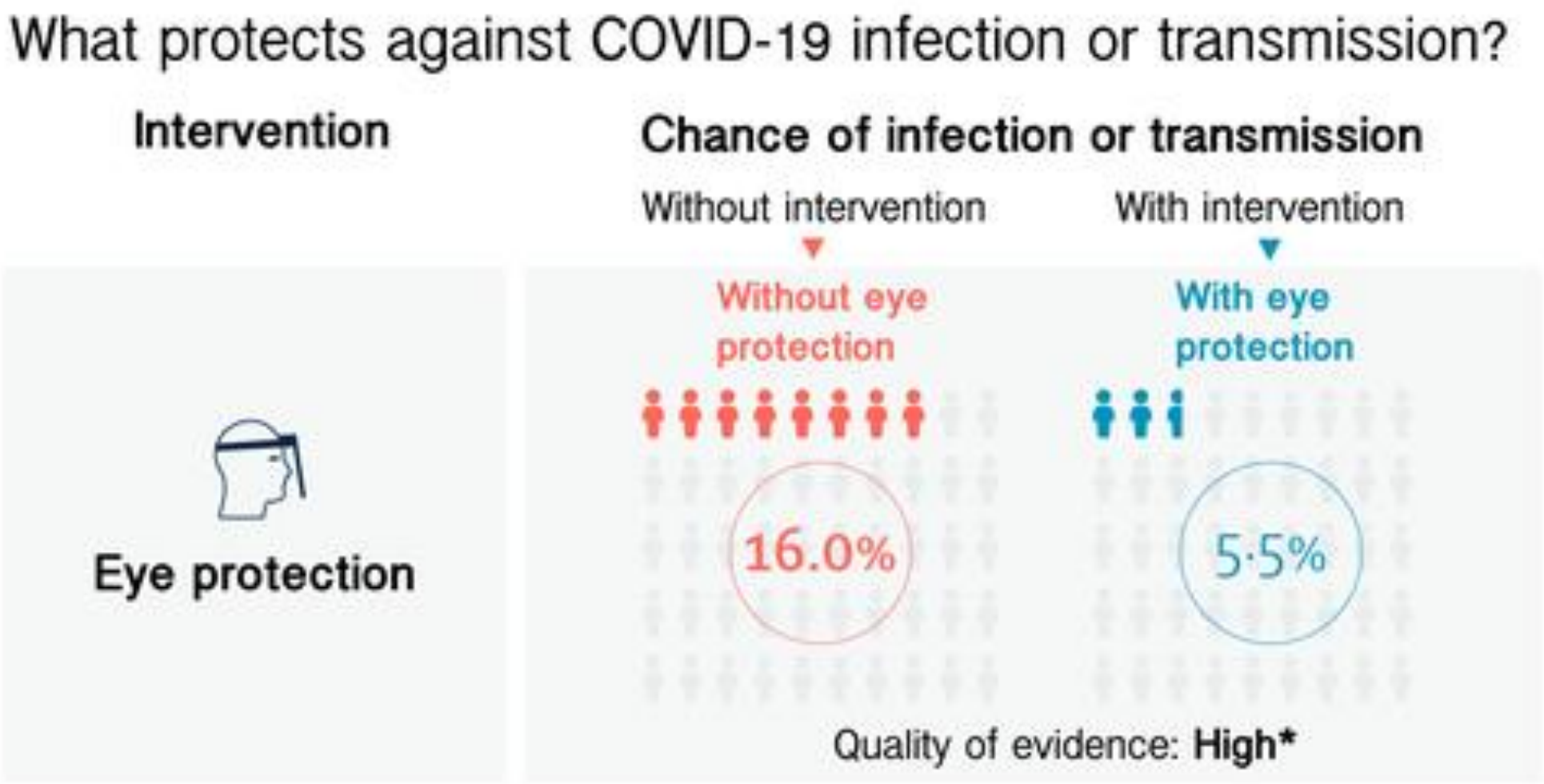
Now that you have your combined results, you need to consider the context of the programme you evaluated:

What do the results mean in practical terms?

For this context, is the change you observed large or small?

Contextualise your results. In terms of how much the intervention cost, was the result worth it?

Situate your results in the relevant context - be clear what the numbers mean in practical terms



* High quality: we are very confident that the true effect lies close to that of the estimate of the effect.
Low quality: our confidence in the effect estimate is limited; the true effect could be substantially different from the estimate of the effect.

Situate your results in the relevant context - be clear what the numbers mean in practical terms

Indeed: Can a timely prompt produce thousands of flexible jobs?

THE BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS TEAM

indeed one search. all jobs.

Government Equalities Office

What is the problem?

9 in 10 people want to **work flexibly** but few jobs are advertised as such.

This lack of flexible working options **disproportionately** impacts women who are currently **3x** more likely to work part-time and **2x** more likely to work flexibly.

New **BIT research** has shown that both men and women prefer jobs that offer **clear flexible options, but few employers remember to include these.**

What did we do?

We ran two **randomised control trials (RCTs)** with Indeed, the global job site, to make it easier for employers to **advertise flexible vacancies**.

Employers in the treatment group were prompted with a screen that **encouraged** them to think about what **flexible working options they could offer** for the role they were advertising.

More than 150,000 employers posted over half a million job ads, and almost 20 million individual job seeker applications passed through this trial making it one of the largest RCTs ever conducted!

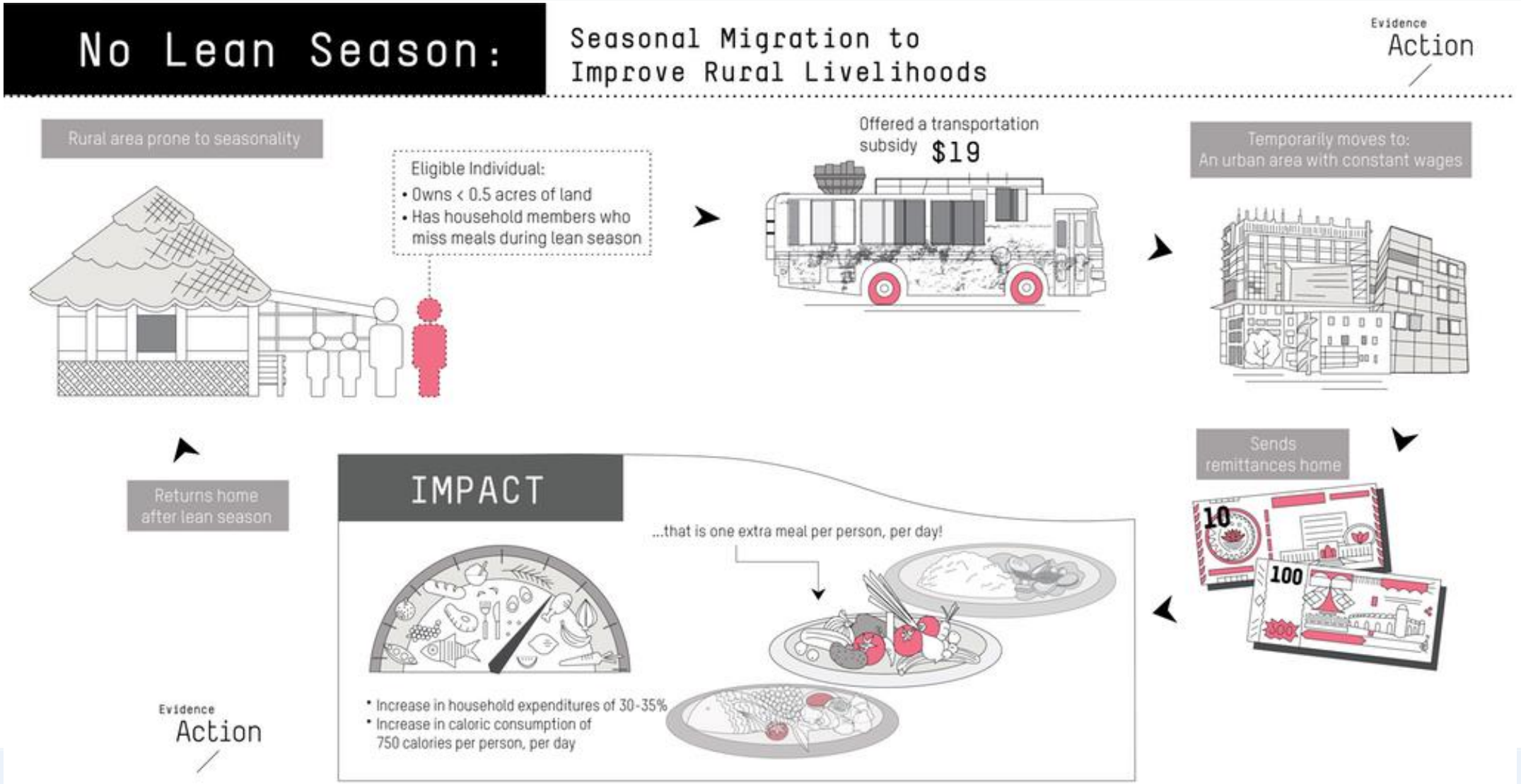
What happened?

These on-screen prompts led to around a **20% increase of the number flexible vacancies being advertised** on the Indeed site.

Jobs that had flexible working on offer attracted up to **30% more candidates** for the role.

Scaled up an intervention like this could add up to 174,000 additional flexible jobs to the UK labour market per year.

Situate your results in the relevant context - be clear what the numbers mean in practical terms



Report the limitations of the evaluation method you used

Don’t make claims you can’t back up with evidence

Interrogate claims from outputs you review carefully

Distinguish between descriptive results and interpretation

There are often *multiple* valid interpretations

Use your judgement

Use correct language: are you *presenting* results or *interpreting* them?

Provide the reasoning behind interpretations and recommendations

Talking about results? Use direct numbers:

X people participated…

Our programme caused people to be X times more likely to ...

Talking about interpretation? Use phrases:

The evidence suggests...

We hypothesise that this is because...

It may be the case that…

Formulate a recommendation

Revisit your results plan

Assign a level of confidence

Avoid being vague

Illustrate the strength and quality of evidence

Toolkit Strands

Arts participation

Moderate impact for very low cost based on moderate evidence.

Aspiration interventions

Unclear impact for very low cost based on insufficient evidence.

Behaviour interventions

Moderate impact for low cost based on limited evidence.

Collaborative learning approaches

High impact for very low cost based on limited evidence.

Interpret your findings and generate recommendations

Activity: Let's imagine that you are evaluating a six month youth internship programme which seeks to increase the likelihood that young people are in full time employment after participating.

You have conducted an RCT and PE of the programme and now the evaluation team is synthesising all of the results you have found.

In groups, discuss how you would interpret the evidence if you found yourself in each of the following three scenarios and what recommendations you would provide for each case.

Interpret your findings and generate recommendations

Scenario A:

- **The RCT analysis finds that the treatment group were significantly more likely to be in employment after receiving the training. However, the treatment and control groups were not balanced - young people with higher GCSE scores were much more likely to be in the treatment group.**
- **On average, young people participating in the programme rated their experience as 'good' in a survey, 20% of young people in the programme responded to the survey.**
- **The majority of young people reported receiving feedback and mentorship during their internship, which were key activities that contributed to the mechanisms of change from your ToC. Only a third of young people reported having a daily work plan, which was an element that your ToC considered essential to the programme functioning.**

What recommendations do you make? Do you recommend this or not?

Interpret your findings and generate recommendations

Scenario B:

- **The RCT analysis finds no impact of the training programme on employment outcomes. You find that the RCT is balanced - young people with higher GCSE scores were equally likely to be in the treatment and control groups. You have no other concerns about the analysis.**
- **Your PE analysis finds that young people and the organisations they worked in reported that they really enjoyed the internship and found it valuable.**
- **You don’t have any data on their attendance at the internship or which components of the programme they followed.**

What recommendations do you make? Do you recommend this or not?

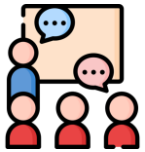
Interpret your findings and generate recommendations

Scenario C:

- **Your RCT analysis finds that your programme significantly increased employment outcomes for the treatment group, and you saw no increase in the control group.**
- **You have no concerns about the RCT.**
- **Your PE finds that, from interviews, interns and employers reported that they did complete each of the three key activities of the internship.**
- **You learn from a survey that 80% of young people who participated would recommend the programme to others.**

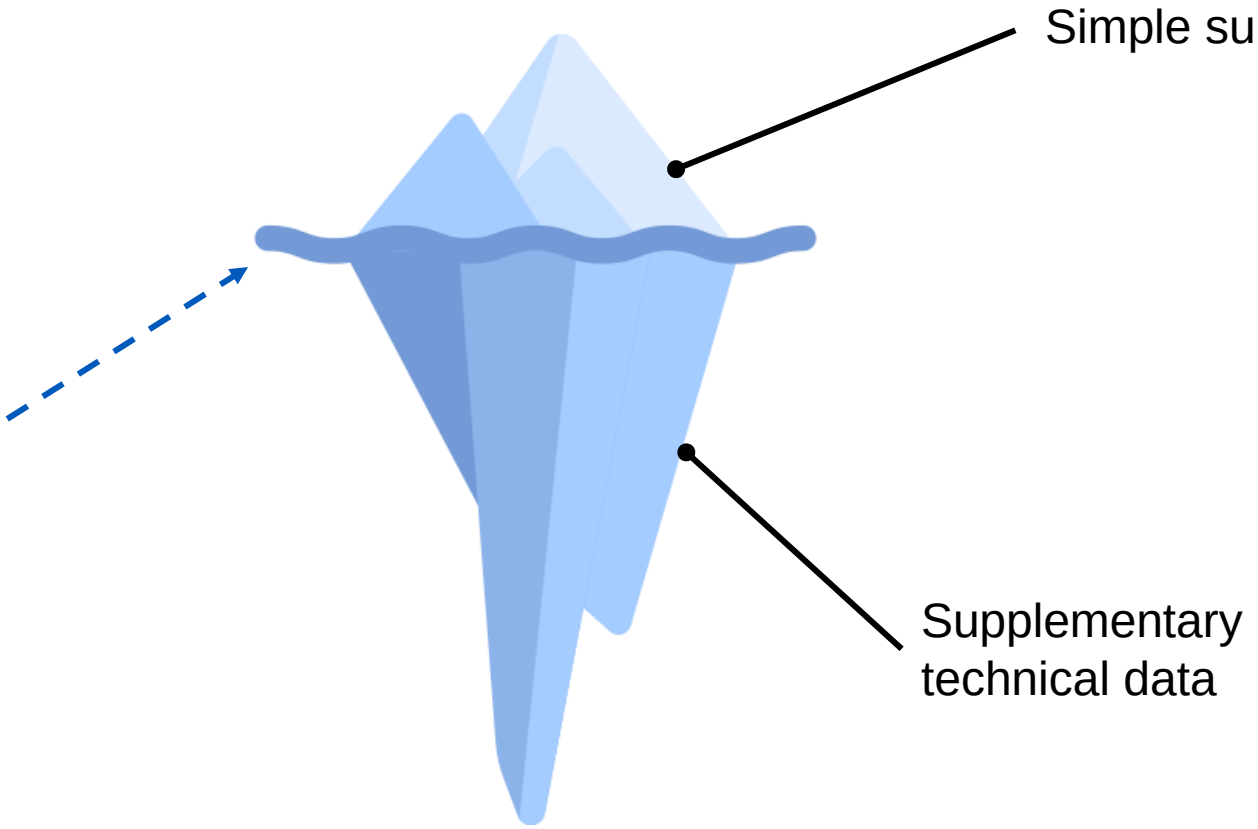
What recommendations do you make? Do you recommend this or not?

Share your results with stakeholders



Share findings publicly

Adopt an iceberg model



Share your results with stakeholders

Focus on the ‘so what’
Case study: ONS Covid Infection Survey

- ***Desk review*** *of existing documents and data relating to the programme as submitted by the ONS in relation to the key lines of enquiry*
- ***Data collection*** *through an ONS staff survey, the SIS schools survey and public perceptions survey*
- ***Qualitative interviews*** *with ONS staff (21), end users (19), headteachers (6), and other programme users (7)*
- ***Thematic analysis*** *of interview notes and transcriptions to highlight commonalities within each key line of enquiry strand*

*‘**Non-technical audiences tended to be more interested in the recommendations of the report than the methodology or approach**, in comparison with technical audiences. While they were interested to hear about the findings, **these stakeholders were often keen to focus on the “so what?”** at the end of the evaluation.*

*This meant that in meetings with non-technical audiences, such as senior leaders and decision-makers, **the team focused discussion more on the recommendations and next steps for implementing the report findings** to improve future performance*.’

ONS Team

Apply the EAST Framework to engage your audience

The Behavioural Insights Team's EAST framework for behaviour change is a helpful tool to use when communicating findings with stakeholders.

It can be applied to encourage stakeholders to:

1. Engage with evaluation findings
2. Apply findings to decision making

EAST principle	Explanation	Recommended techniques
Easy	Minimising the effort it takes to perform a behaviour will vastly improve the likelihood that people do it.	• **Simplify messages** by using straightforward language and focusing on specific actions for readers to take.
Attractive	People are more likely to pay attention to stimuli that are appealing to them and that attract their attention.	• **Use visuals** to bring findings to life. • **Use testimonials** to help readers connect with your work. • **Make findings relatable** by linking them to readers' daily lives.
Social	Humans are social creatures who are influenced by the behaviour of others.	• **Use testimonials** to help readers connect with your work.
Timely	It is important to deliver information at the right moment when people are able to act on it effectively.	• **Make communications timely** so they are relevant to readers.

Responding to stakeholder concerns

Responding to concerns

Log key decisions

Acknowledge uncertainty

Practice responses to common issues with impact evaluations

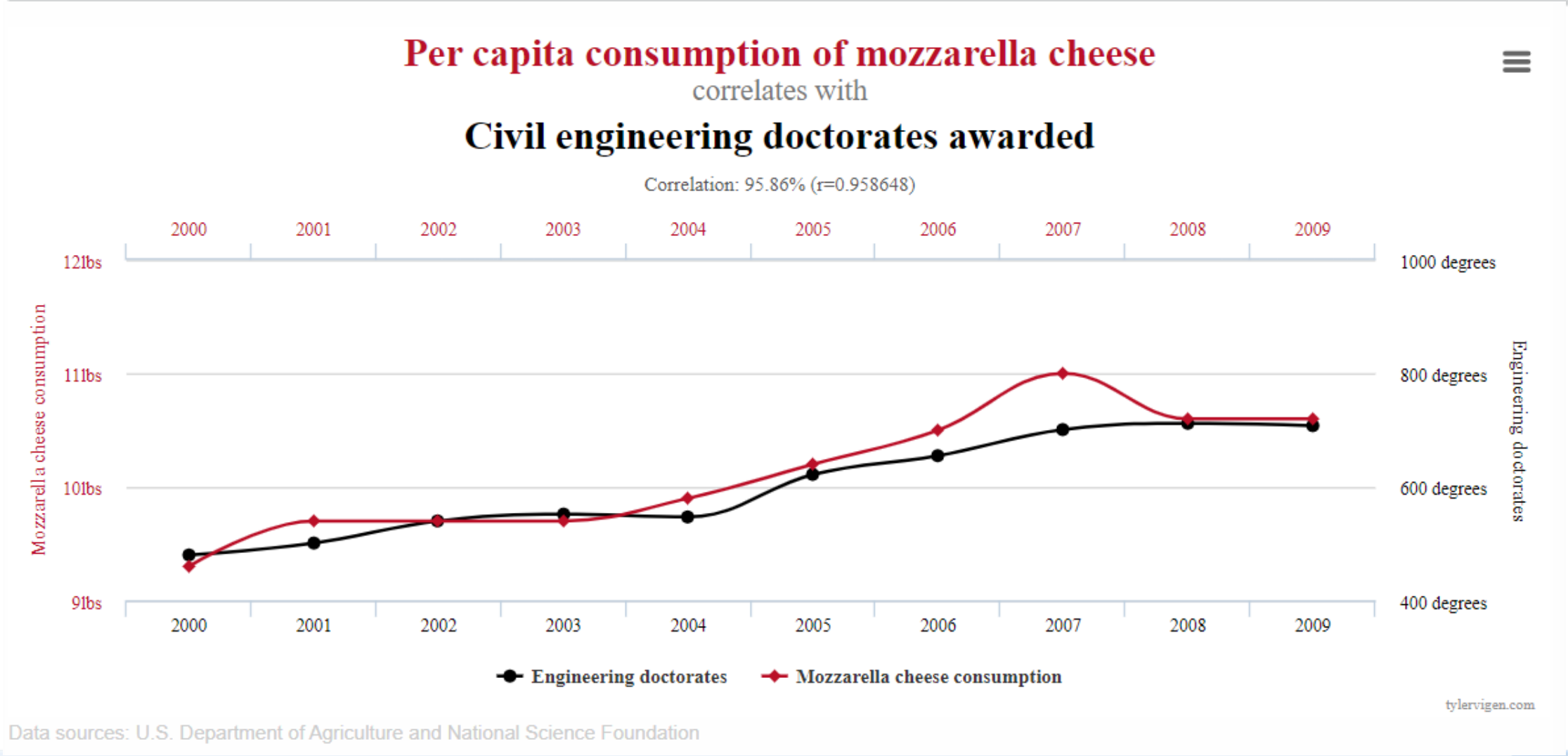
You may be familiar with some common challenges to the results of impact evaluations, especially if you are sharing disappointing results.

In these scenarios:

Point out the strengths of non-causal research, while acknowledging that it cannot answer questions about the impact of a programme

Explain visually why causal evaluations are important

Ensure your audience understands that correlation ≠ causation



Data sources: U.S. Department of Agriculture and National Science Foundation

Activity

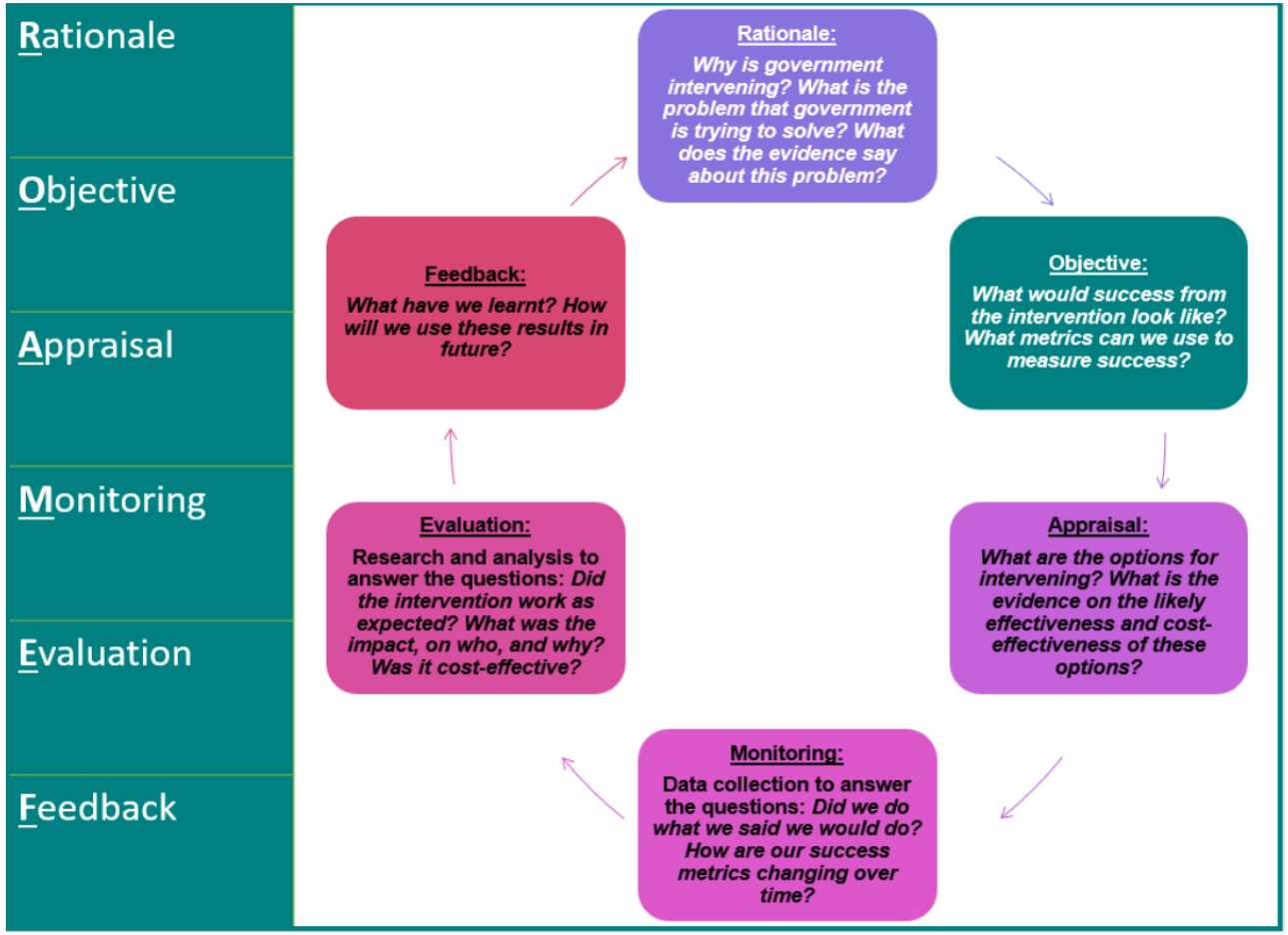
Imagine you are presenting the results of the evaluation you conducted on the youth internship programme we discussed earlier. The RCT analysis finds no impact of the training programme on employment outcomes. You find that the RCT is balanced and you have no other concerns about the analysis. Your PE analysis finds that young people and the organisations they worked in reported that they really enjoyed the internship and found it valuable. In presenting the findings, you get the following questions from:

- **An employer:** *your findings show no results, but I worked every day with our intern and she got a job at the end of our programme. Why are you saying it didn't work?*
- **An internship programme designer:** *Sure your numbers say it didn't work, but I'm much more interested in the responses of the young people who took part and enjoyed the programme. That's more important to me, so I'm concluding the programme worked.*
- **A new civil service team member, not involved with the programme:** *Why is an RCT ethical here? These are vulnerable young people and you withheld an internship programme from them.*

How would you respond?

Advocacy and application of learning

Using communication and decision making across the policy lifecycle



Activity: How does what you have learned today fit into the ROAMEF cycle?

- Think about an upcoming or current evaluation or policy you are involved in. How can you apply your learning from this module to influence that work?
- What barriers exist? How do you push through? What people or resources can support you?
- Write an intention for how you will use this in your work in the next 1-2 months.

Summary

In this module, we have learnt:

- The importance of developing a dissemination strategy early and how you communicate your results to effectively influence decision making.
- The key steps you can take during your scoping stage: i) decide on your outputs; ii) log key decisions; iii) prepare for your results.
- Ways to explain complex findings to a non-technical audience.
- The key steps you should take to interpret findings and generate recommendations.
- Why transparency is critical to ensuring the integrity of evaluation findings and the steps I can take to maximise trust in findings.
- To apply specific communication techniques to engage stakeholders with evidence and evaluation findings.
- How to respond to concerns raised by non-expert stakeholders about different evaluation designs in a clear and reassuring way.

Further resources

Resource
Evaluation and Trial Advice Panel
The Magenta Book: Central Government guidance on evaluation
ETF: Resources for evaluating policy in government
BIT: TESTS
Spurious Correlations generator
Data Visualisation e-learning on Civil Service Learning
Publishing Accessible Documents
Ten Tips to improve the visibility and dissemination of research for policy makers and practitioners
Ted Talks: The Art of Communicating Science / Talk Nerdy to me