



**EVALUATION SERVICES:
INSIGHTS
YOU CAN TRUST**



University of Essex

Contents

- 3** Responding to your evaluation needs
- 4-5** Our expert-led evaluation environment
- 6-7** Improving the effectiveness of care
- 8-9** Reducing the risk of high blood pressure
- 10-11** Demonstrating social impact
- 12-13** Revealing the impact of COVID-19 on volunteers
- 14-15** Social scientists supporting public services
- 16-17** Evaluating the impact of technology in the community
- 18-19** Proving the value of the arts



Welcome

Responding to your evaluation needs

At the University of Essex, we're proud to have been making change happen for 60 years.

We believe change has the power to create a brighter future, but we understand that change is only effective if we thoroughly evaluate what we're doing.

Our community of researchers are experts in designing responsive evaluation projects, tailor-made for your needs.

We work with a wide range of organisations, local authority partnerships and the creative and cultural sector to ensure our partners can demonstrate the economic, cultural and social value of what they do.

Increasingly, it's vital to look at project and intervention outcomes and we have the capability and tools to provide objective evaluation of even the most complex project. We provide meaningful insights that you can put into practice to create that brighter future.

Let's work together.

Dr Rob Singh

Director of Research and Enterprise Office

Our expert-led evaluation environment

With academics across the social sciences, science and health, and arts and humanities, we have the expertise to cater for every sector.

Our researchers care about making the world a better place, and they care about helping you demonstrate your worth and adapt to the changing needs of your communities.

We have decades of experience working with government departments, public bodies, local authorities, community and voluntary services, charities and private sector organisations.

By partnering with us, you'll have access to everything we have to offer.

Excellence in research

Essex is a powerhouse for social science research. In the latest Research Excellence Framework:

- three subjects were ranked in the UK top ten for research power.
- 83% of our research output was recognized as world-leading or internationally excellent.

Leaders in knowledge exchange

Essex is one of the very best universities in the UK for working with businesses, charities and public services according to the latest Knowledge Exchange Framework, which reviews impact at 139 UK universities:

4th in the country for working with the public and third sector.

Breadth of expertise

We have over 700 academic researchers ready to evaluate your project including:

- Behavioural scientists
- Business analysts
- Data scientists
- Economists
- Environmental scientists
- Exercise scientists
- Filmmakers
- Health experts
- Historians
- Lawyers
- Linguists
- Mathematicians
- Political scientists
- Philosophers
- Psychologists
- Sociologists
- Theatre experts

Our evaluation services

- We match your needs with the right academic team.
- We'll help you design initiatives with evaluation built in.
- We'll gather evidence of the impact of your initiatives and analyse the results.
- We'll help you respond to the results.



We know evaluation has the power to lead to innovation. Partnering with us helps the health sector enable prevention and earlier diagnosis, provide better treatment options, aid recovery and reduce health inequalities.

Professor Mariachiara Di Cesare
Director, Institute of Public Health and Wellbeing



Improving the effectiveness of care

“The health sector is a complex environment: the range of professionals from various disciplines, the different types of interventions, the quality and availability of data, the multi-partner initiatives, the ethical implications and the availability of resources all make it challenging.

“Understanding how to unpack this complexity is essential to support decision making, build an empowered community and enhance healthcare for all.

“Successful evaluation requires co-production, innovation, robust methodologies, interdisciplinary teams, sensitivity, a focus on continual improvement and above all, engagement with people who use health services.

“At Essex, we have experts with the experience to do just that.

“Our range of world-leading research institutes and centres have experts in artificial intelligence and machine learning, data visualisation and data governance; social injustice and health rights; understanding human behaviour; evaluating physical

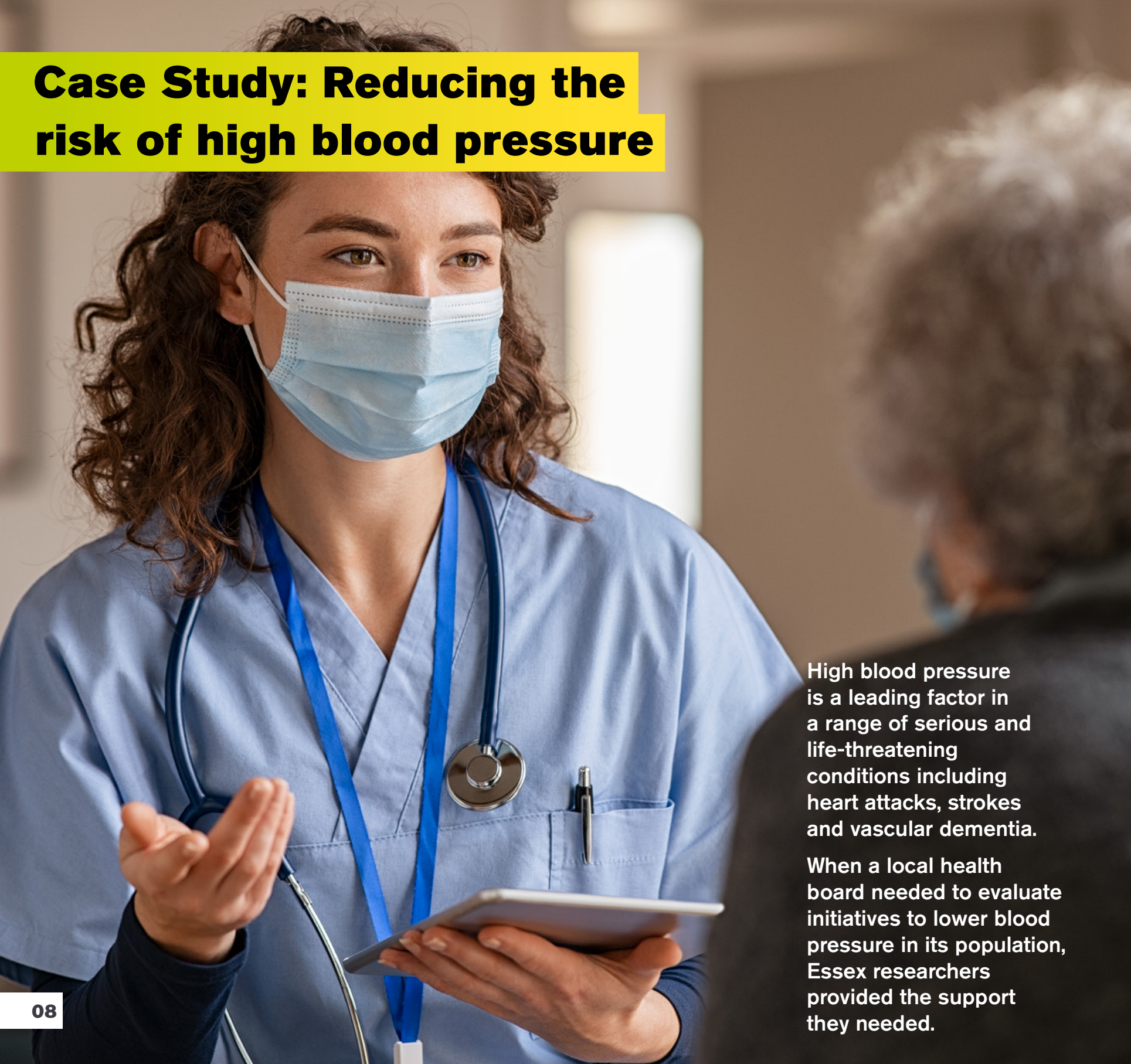
activity, sports-based and nature-based interventions; and survey methodology, data modelling and policy analysis.

“At the Institute of Public Health and Wellbeing we have a network of partners at local, regional and national levels. We provide evaluation services for key health and care organisations including NHS services, integrated care boards, the National Institute for Health and Care Research’s social care programme, and national bodies such as Public Health England.

“From the outset, we plan evaluation projects jointly with the commissioning organisation, making sure they understand the purpose and aims of each aspect of data collection. We provide interim reports and as projects progress, we ensure emerging issues with data collection and reliability are discussed and strategies changed.

“With the right evaluation, that identifies areas for improvement and implements necessary enhancements, we can improve short- and long-term health outcomes, resource allocation, and ultimately the standard and effectiveness of care.”

Case Study: Reducing the risk of high blood pressure



High blood pressure is a leading factor in a range of serious and life-threatening conditions including heart attacks, strokes and vascular dementia.

When a local health board needed to evaluate initiatives to lower blood pressure in its population, Essex researchers provided the support they needed.

The NHS Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board (MSE ICB) had already collected data from its BP@ Home project, which encouraged local people to monitor their blood pressure at home.

Led by Professor Mariachiara Di Cesare, a team of researchers from the Institute of Public Health and Wellbeing stepped in to interpret the data, evaluate the effectiveness of the scheme and make recommendations for the future.

Using a variety of research methods, they assessed online surveys and one-to-one interviews, finding that home blood pressure kits had empowered patients and led them to play a more active role in decision-making around their healthcare.

They showed that in some cases, monitoring led to new diagnoses, and had the potential to improve doctor-patient relations.

The researchers' report revealed that there was a clear appetite for using health technology in the home but recommended that more work was needed to help people use the equipment and interpret their results.

The results have been invaluable to the MSE ICB team who have commissioned a series of video case studies to showcase the success of the project and used the findings to bid for further funding.



We want communities to thrive. We are experts in listening to community voices and we can provide the independent expertise that the voluntary and community sector needs to give the work it does legitimacy.

Dr Rebecca Warren
Essex Business School



Demonstrating social impact

For charities and organisations that fall into the ‘third sector’ impact means measuring the social return on projects they deliver. Dr Rebecca Warren, from Essex Business School, explains.

“Demonstrating what is being achieved in the voluntary and community sector is more important than ever as these organisations are on the ground supporting communities through crises. However, systems and structures work against them in many ways, and funding is often short term, so sustainability and legitimacy are considerable challenges.

“Traditional and dominant notions of accountability focus on profit maximisation, efficiency and resource allocation but in the voluntary and community sector, we need to take a different approach.

“We need to measure the lived experience and evaluate what these organisations do for the common good.

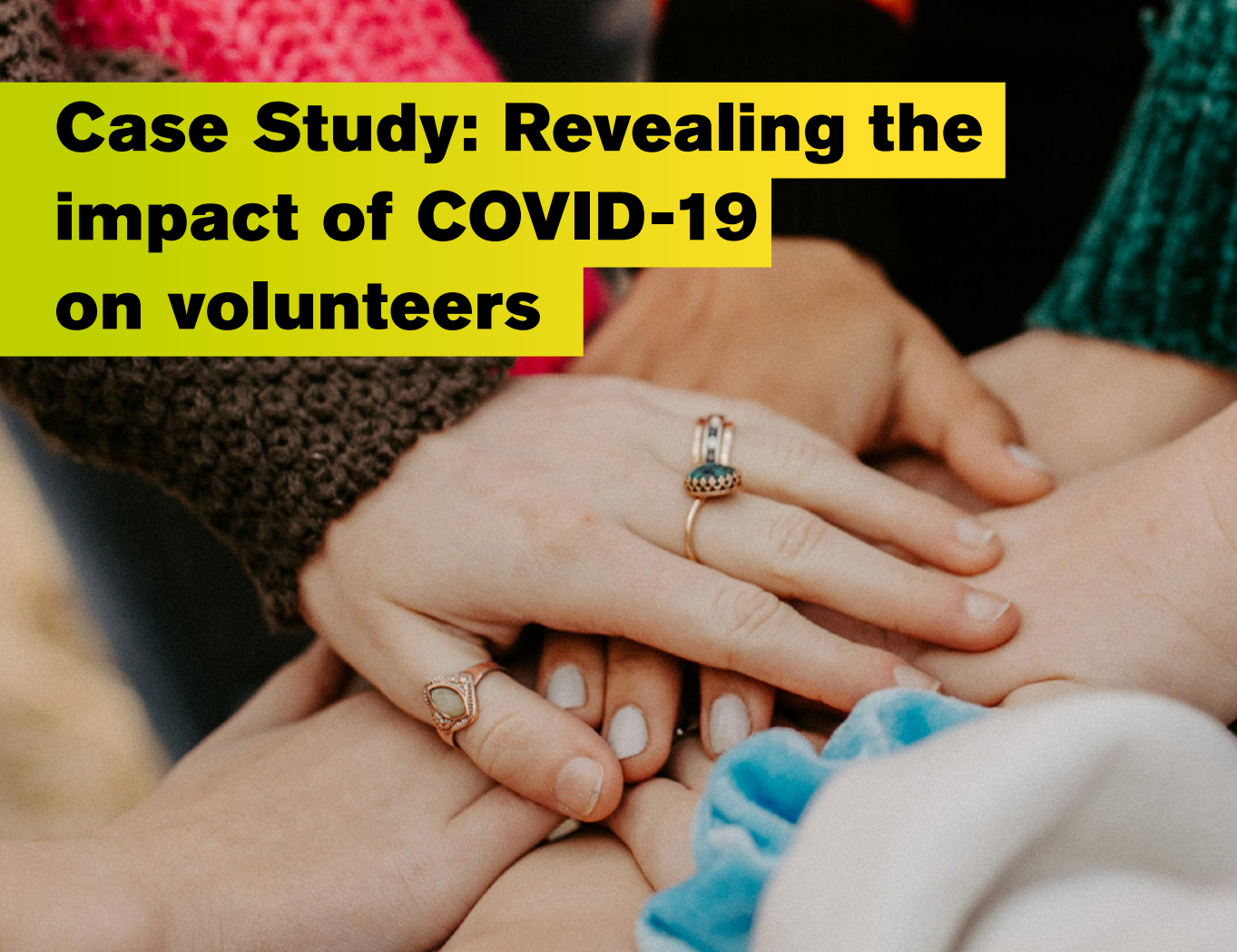
“At Essex, we understand these challenges because social justice is important to us too.

“We know that people working in this sector need a partner who will listen, be flexible and has the experience to co-produce an evaluation project that best reflects their work and its transformative impact.

“We take a multidisciplinary approach, building teams that can apply different expertise and perspectives and we’re always willing to take risks and push boundaries; not only challenging the dominant narratives of what ‘value’ is, but also challenging our clients to see the areas that need improvement.

“Most importantly, this sector needs partners who care about the lived experience and who are willing to immerse themselves in the project. That’s exactly what you get if you partner with us because we always strive to put people first.”

Case Study: Revealing the impact of COVID-19 on volunteers



I would encourage other community and voluntary organisations to participate in knowledge exchange. It provides a safe place to explore the potential of what you'd like to achieve and gives you the opportunity to draw in expertise from a range of skilled academics.



Louise Willsher
Strategic Head of Innovation and Growth, Community360

The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges for every sector.

When one Essex-based independent charity needed to understand how it was impacting their staff and service users, an oral history project provided the evaluation solution it needed.

With a team of researchers, Dr Alix Green, from the Department of Philosophical, Historical and Interdisciplinary Studies, and Dr Rebecca Warren, from Essex Business School, collected over 20 testimonies from people working to support communities in Colchester and north east Essex.

Commissioned by umbrella organisation Community360, their interviews revealed a complex picture of how the pandemic had impacted staff morale and the wellbeing of service users, funding and fundraising, and the development of partnerships.

The final report showed how new groups formed in response to community needs and how

others, adapting in response, would change the way they work forever.

Community360 supports over 500 voluntary and community groups to access the resources they need and Dr Green and Dr Warren have become their go-to partner for evaluation of their projects.

They have helped its team develop a framework to independently evaluate their time banking activities and demonstrate their social impact in a holistic way. They have also consulted on a community asset mapping project to support resource management and the distribution of funding at a grassroots level.

Working with us has given Community360 the evidence it needs to demonstrate its impact.

Louise Willsher, Strategic Head of Innovation and Growth at Community360, said: "By working with the University, we've been able to ask questions about ourselves and what we want to learn about the sector."

Social scientists supporting public services



We are experts in objectively assessing projects and we have the skills to measure concepts like happiness, wellbeing and loneliness. We can analyse quantitative data with tools like stats and qualitative data with tools like interviews and stories.



Professor Gina Yannitell Reinhardt

Department of Government



Local authority partnerships face unique challenges when evaluating the public services and initiatives they deliver. Professor Gina Yannitell Reinhardt, from the Department of Government, explains what makes Essex's community of social scientists the perfect match for your evaluation needs.

"In the 1980s a government review of local authority impact found that no one was properly evaluating the impact of public services and, despite recommendations that impact evaluation needed to be properly resourced, 30 years later little has changed.

"Local authorities have people experienced in delivering specialties, like public health, child services or business support, but what they often don't have are people trained in how to evaluate the impact of the services and initiatives they deliver.

"It's easy to report on outputs, but what is more challenging is

reporting on the outcomes and the impact.

"What we offer, is a community of social scientists committed to the improvement of public services. Social scientists who really care about people.

"We have the right skills to determine what data should be collected, how it should be collected, and how to assess it so that local authorities can use those evaluations to legitimise what they do. Crucially, we also have the people skills needed to connect with communities and work with local residents.

"We know that evaluation needs to be built in from the start, so that you have a baseline understanding and you can adapt the delivery of a project as you learn how it is performing.

"Evaluation is incredibly important because it makes those authorities accountable to the people they serve, to their stakeholders and funders, and to themselves. It helps them build cases for future funding and refine the programmes they offer so that they are as efficient as possible. Ultimately, it helps improve lives."

Case Study: Evaluating the impact of technology in the community

The 'internet of things', which connects and exchanges data from multiple devices, has the potential to help local authority partnerships deliver better public services for the communities they serve.

But how do they know those services are delivering the right outcomes?

When the South London Partnership (SLP) deployed technologies to monitor a

range of things like fly tipping prevention, flood monitoring and the safeguarding of residents living in supported housing, they turned to Professor Gina Yannitell Reinhardt, from the Department of Government, to evaluate the project.

The ambitious InnOvaTe Project connected various 'internet of things' enabled sensors across council boundaries, harnessing the power of big data to improve service delivery and contribute to economic growth.

Professor Reinhardt built in evaluation from the very start, so that the programme could adapt as data was collected and assessed.

Evaluation updates were provided monthly, with full quarterly reports, allowing the SLP team to change the way services were delivered in response, not only improving efficiency but also improving the wellbeing of residents.

Such findings are vital to local authority professionals, practitioners and the public. They can inform decision-making at all levels and reveal what resources are needed to make the most out of the 'internet of things' and to inform smarter and more targeted spending.

“

We are constantly looking at ways to improve the quality and effectiveness of the services we provide, so this is a fantastic opportunity to have an impartial expert assess the work we are doing and to give feedback on how things are going and how things could be changed for future trials.

”

David Grasty
Corporate Head
of Digital Strategy
for Sutton and Kingston

Proving the value of the arts

Our Faculty of Arts and Humanities has a research community committed to understanding how innovative art is formed, performed, produced, consumed and valued.

Our industry engagement and professional practice help us understand how to measure and demonstrate the value of theatre and the arts.

Professor Rosemary Klich, from East 15 Acting School, explains;

“In the creative and cultural sectors, evaluation can require a more holistic perspective and consideration of the social, cultural, creative and educational dimensions of a project.

“It might involve showing changes over time, revealing attitudes, capturing responses, or developing new and nuanced ways to show benefit to participants and communities.

“In this context, ‘value’ can mean more than economic worth.

It’s about enriching people’s lives and experiences.

“Our researchers co-create bespoke research packages that respond to an organisation’s specific needs and finances. We can use combinations of methods – qualitative, quantitative and creative – to provide insight into user-bases, evidence the impact of specific initiatives or projects, and show value to funders.

“We understand that funding is often tight for arts organisations and that the sector moves swiftly, requiring innovative and efficient evaluation and research support.”

Case studies

The 99 by 19 project, developed by Southend-on-Sea’s Cultural Education Partnership and led by **Focal Point Gallery**, aims to get children and young people involved in the arts. Professor Klich helped to demonstrate the benefit of engaging young people in the arts and evidence the project’s impact in increasing participation in cultural activities.

Working with **Norwich Theatre**, she used qualitative research methods to reveal insights about the theatre’s audience, measuring their

expectations, priorities, perceptions and preferences.

Alongside Professor Holly Maples of East 15, Professor Melissa Tyler and Professor Philip Hancock of Essex Business School, she carried out a study for **Arts Council England**, which explored the conditions and experiences of freelancers. They launched the largest survey of its kind, completed by over 5,000 freelancers, and conducted focus groups and interviews. The results provide a vital baseline for further studies.



Speak to us today

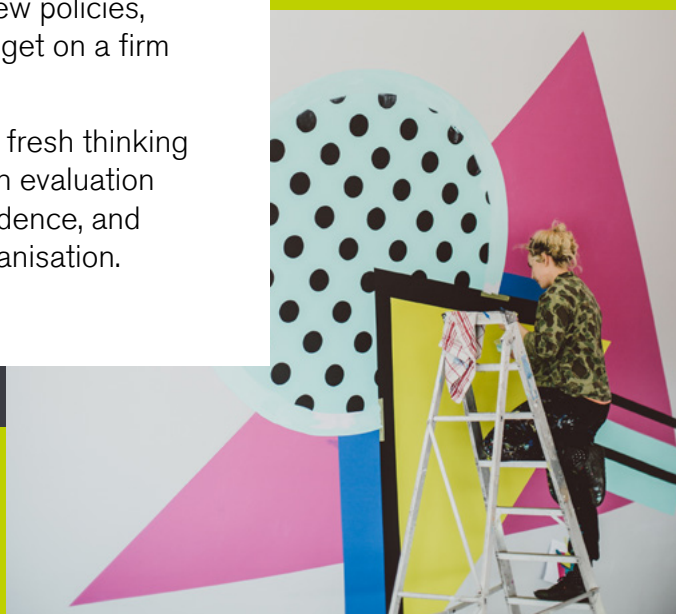
How to get in touch

Our range of evaluation and assurance services, available across the public sector and to the private and third sectors, draws on years of expertise that can help your senior decision-makers plan and spend with confidence.

We can guide you into making the right decisions, so that your new policies, strategies and initiatives get on a firm footing, from the outset.

Talk to us about how our fresh thinking and expert consultancy in evaluation can inject assurance, evidence, and confidence into your organisation.

evaluate@essex.ac.uk



Search evaluation services at: essex.ac.uk

essex.ac.uk



This booklet is
printed on FSC
carbon-neutral paper