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Evaluating the delivery of the OfS investment in the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes: Results of the Mid-term Survey with higher education providers 2021

Report to the OfS by Technopolis

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Report to the OfS by Technopolis

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Glossary

APP   Access and participation plan

FEC   Further education college

HEP   Higher education provider

OfS   Office for Students

TASO   Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes

TEF   Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework

Summary

The Office for Students (OfS) has commissioned Technopolis Ltd. to design, run and analyse a survey of higher education providers (HEPs) in England. The main objective of the Mid-term Survey was to provide further data for the project *"Evaluating the delivery of the OfS investment in the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO)"*[1] currently being implemented by Technopolis Ltd. under a contract with OfS, for which a baseline survey was conducted in 2020 (referred to as the Baseline Survey) and a baseline report was published on the OfS website earlier in 2021.[2]

Main findings

Use of evidence

The Mid-term Survey results indicate that, overall, the use of evidence in access and participation activities in the higher education sector has increased between 2020 and 2021. The increase in the use of evidence has been confirmed across multiple sections of the Mid-term Survey.

A very high share of providers (93.2%) uses narrative evidence (Type 1)[3] to inform their APPs. A vast majority (83%) uses empirical enquiry evidence (Type 2). Around one third (33%) uses causality type evidence (Type 3).

The most significant difference between universities and FECs is in the use of Type 2 evidence. Around 92% of universities and only 63% of FECs use this type of evidence.

Type of evidence	Share of universities using this type of evidence (n=49)	Share of FECs using this type of evidence (n=30)
Type 1: Narrative	96%	87%
Type 2: Empirical enquiry	92%	63%
Type 3: Causality	31%	27%

Source: Mid-term Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis; note: respondents were allowed to select multiple options, therefore the totals do not add up to 100%.

There exist regional differences in the use of various types of evidence. More than 40% of providers from London, North-East, South-East, and West Midlands use Type 3 evidence. However, less than 20% of providers from East Midlands, East of England and Yorkshire and the Humber do so.

A large majority (72%) of providers plan to focus more on evaluation measures in the later stages of implementation their APPs and 70% of them have already implemented the evaluation measures included in their APPs. The majority of universities (92%) and FECs (60%) intend to implement learning from resources produced by TASO in their APPs.

HEPs continue to use evidence in access and participation activities across all stages of the student journey. There has been an increase in the use of evidence across all four stages of

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[1] More information available online at: https://taso.org.uk/.

[2] Available online at: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/8237963b-6121-4c55-b006-30531d2892cb/evaluation-of-taso_baseline-report.pdf.

[3] Based on the OfS types of evidence. More information available online at: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation/standards-of-evidence-and-evaluation-self-assessment-tool/.

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the student journey (access, continuation, attainment, progression) between the Baseline (2020) and Mid-term (2021) Surveys.

The Mid-term Survey results, and their comparison with the Baseline Survey results, highlight in particular a considerable improvement in the way the further education sector (and further education colleges, FECs) approaches evidence in access and participation activities and its use. This is evident across several sections of the survey.

There has been a considerable increase in the use of own evidence (i.e. research and evaluation evidence from HEPs' own specific activities) between the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys. This is particularly important because the use of evidence and research generated by other providers has decreased in the same period.

Overall, sharing of evidence across the higher education sector remains a point of concern. The proportion of universities sharing evidence across the sector has decreased from 59% to 57% between the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys. This further exacerbates the finding from the Baseline Survey pointing to deficits in the degree of sharing of evidence by universities. On the other hand, in the further education sector, the proportions have slightly increased from 34% to 43%.

The perception that evidence is not easily available has fallen significantly for universities, from 42% to 22%, indicating that they no longer see this issue as one of the most significant barriers to using evidence in access and participation. Trying to find explanations why this happened would be speculation at this stage. It could be a combination of TASO reaching out to the sector on numerous occasions over the past year, explaining what the TASO team can offer to the sector, and also the fact that providers have been increasingly using evidence (which, in turn, can strengthen the perception that evidence is more easily available). However, this is not the case in the further education sector, where FECs still see the availability of evidence as a considerable challenge ahead.

The degree of embeddedness of the use of evidence internally within HEPs is growing, especially in the university sector. The most common arrangement for evaluating interventions in access and participation is for access and participation practitioners or officers to conduct evaluations themselves. Specialist evaluators and/or specialist evaluation units are still much less common, which confirms the trend identified in the Baseline phase. In the further education sector, more specifically, evaluations tend to be conducted by officers responsible for access and participation plans (APPs).

The Mid-term Survey confirmed the issue of disconnect between academics and access and participation practitioners, which was identified in the interviews with providers during the Baseline phase of the evaluation of TASO. On the other hand, the Mid-term Survey results did not confirm the Baseline finding (coming from interviews with HEPs) around the high turnover in evaluation and/or access and participation staff.

HEPs and TASO

The level of engagement of the higher education sector with TASO and its work has increased since the Baseline Survey. Nevertheless, there is still a large proportion of FECs that have not engaged with TASO in any way (although this has somewhat improved since the Baseline Survey). This relates to the low level of awareness of TASO in the further education sector.

The levels of awareness of TASO's evaluation guidance and the toolkits and events organised for HEPs are higher than those of specific TASO research themes. This suggests that the more general activities of TASO are more successful at targeting wider audiences than the

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research activities (and their outputs), which might, perhaps, be perceived as too specific by HEPs.

The further education sector remains much less aware of TASO's work than universities, indicating persistence of an issue identified in the Baseline Survey. TASO still needs to focus more on communications targeted towards FECs.

The higher education sector's perceptions of which TASO activities are important has not significantly changed between the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys, which suggests that the priorities of the higher education sector in the area of access and participation remain, in 2021, largely the same as in 2020.

Although the levels of intentions for engaging with TASO's events and mutual learning activities have increased between the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys, future intentions for engaging with other areas of TASO's work have seen a decrease, mainly in the area of TASO research (e.g. submission of evidence and responding to calls for evaluation and research proposals).

1   Introduction

In February 2021 Technopolis Ltd. was commissioned by the Office for Students (OfS) to design, run and analyse a survey of higher education providers (HEPs) in England with the main objective to **provide further data for the project "*Evaluating the delivery of the OfS investment in the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO)*" currently being implemented by Technopolis Ltd, under a contract with OfS** (hereafter referred to as the evaluation study). This Mid-term Survey builds on a previous Baseline Survey that was launched in spring 2020 as part of the evaluation study, and the results were presented in August 2020 as part of the baseline report. As far as possible, the aim of this analysis is to compare the Baseline Survey results with the Mid-term Survey results in order to assess any change within the higher education sector, such as increased use of evidence in access and participation activities and awareness of TASO and its activities.

The report starts with a description of the respondents. It then presents the results by first summarising the overall statistics per survey question, then breaking down those results by respondent characteristics: type of provider (e.g. university, further education college (FEC)) and region (e.g. east of England). In some cases, splitting by certain respondent characteristics is not done where the numbers are too small to compare or present visually. The Baseline Survey report also reviewed differences by size of provider and the amount of fees charged. For reasons explained below in the section on the nature of the survey sample, these differences are not analysed for this report.

2   Methodology

Both the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys were conducted in line with the methodology agreed with the OfS. A number of steps were taken to maximise response rates and ensure the data was robust, such as designing the questionnaire in a user-friendly way such that little preparation was required prior to responding. In addition, reminders were sent to HEPs during the period when the survey was open. The Baseline Survey was open between 1 April 2020 and 31 May 2020. The Mid-term Survey opened one year later, on 28 April 2021, and closed on 9 July 2021. Both surveys used the online platform Survey Monkey.

The majority of the survey questions remained the same in both surveys. However, several questions were modified and/or added/removed in order to: achieve the two objectives above; to reflect on some of the issues highlighted in the Baseline Survey and interviews with providers; and to reflect on the fact that TASO's implementation has advanced since spring 2020 in terms of the selected research themes and produced outputs. Where the questions between the two surveys do not fully align this will be highlighted in the analysis.

In order to minimise the non-response bias,[4] the evaluation team took the following steps, the team used terminology which is as easy to understand as possible, and, where possible, the necessary explanation was included in the question wording. This was to make sure that those respondents who are less engaged feel confident to respond to the survey and understand all the questions. In addition, we formulated the questions in a way that did not require any prior preparation from the respondents (except for situations where they wanted to consult

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[4] The evaluation team was aware that providers who are already engaged with TASO and/or with issues of evaluation of access and participation activities may be more likely to respond to the Mid-term survey than providers who are less engaged.

other colleagues and submit a joint response for the whole provider). This is a standard strategy for minimising the non-response bias.

The evaluation team did not conduct any interviews with providers after the mid-term survey, however, interviews are planned after the next survey round. This will be a combination of follow-up interviews with those who responded to the survey and with those who, for any reason, did not respond to the survey. This will allow us to identify (qualitatively) the reasons why they did not participate in the survey, and whether this could be attributed to their overall lower levels of engagement with TASO and/or evaluation of activities in access and participation.

3 Characteristics of the sample

For the Baseline Survey, a total of 111 HEPs (of 284 invited to respond) fully completed the survey (a 39% response rate). An additional 17 started but did not complete the survey, therefore those responses are not included in the analysis. For the Mid-term Survey, a total of 88 HEPs (of 234 invited to respond[5]) fully completed the survey (a 38% response rate). An additional 28 started but did not complete the survey and are not included in the analysis.

Figure 1 shows the composition of the sample for the Mid-term Survey by type of HEP while Figure 2 compares this with the baseline sample. The Mid-term Survey has a similar number of universities responding (49 compared to 48 in the Baseline Survey) but has a significantly smaller number of FECs (30 compared to 45 in the Baseline Survey), specialist providers (5) and alternative providers (4). Because of the very small number of specialist providers and alternative providers responding to the Mid-term Survey these results are not routinely compared in the analysis below as the sample sizes are too small for meaningful comparative analysis and could be highly misleading due to differences between the two surveys being due to chance.

Figure 1 – Mid-term Survey sample by type of HEP
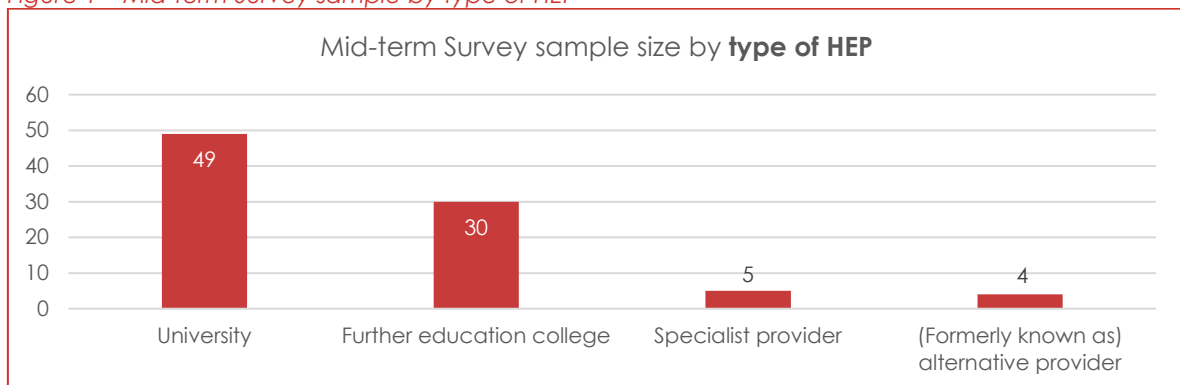
Source: Mid-term Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis; base: 88 responses

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[5] Emails were sent to 234 individual contacts at HEPs, all of which had an APP.

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Figure 2 – Comparison of Baseline and Mid-term Survey respondents by type of HEP

Comparison of Baseline and Mid-term Survey respondents by **type of HEP**,
share of respondents
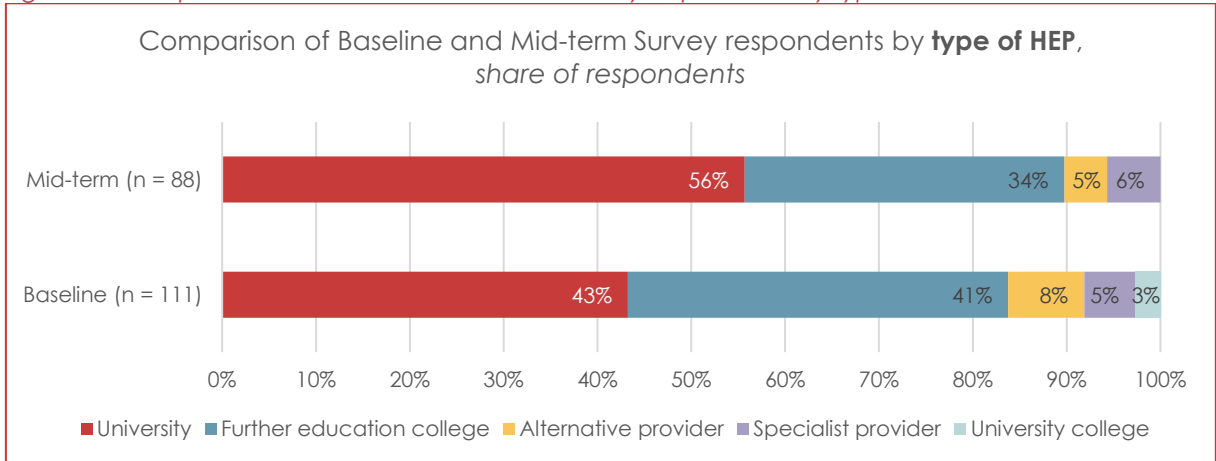
Source: Baseline and Mid-term Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

Figure 3 shows the comparative regional breakdown between the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys. In both surveys, the numbers of responding HEPs from London, the North-West, South-East and South-West were higher than those from other regions. Nevertheless, for both surveys, the samples still have a good distribution of responses from across England.

Figure 3 – Comparison of Baseline and Mid-term Survey respondents by region

Comparison of Baseline and Mid-term Survey respondents by **region**,
number of respondents
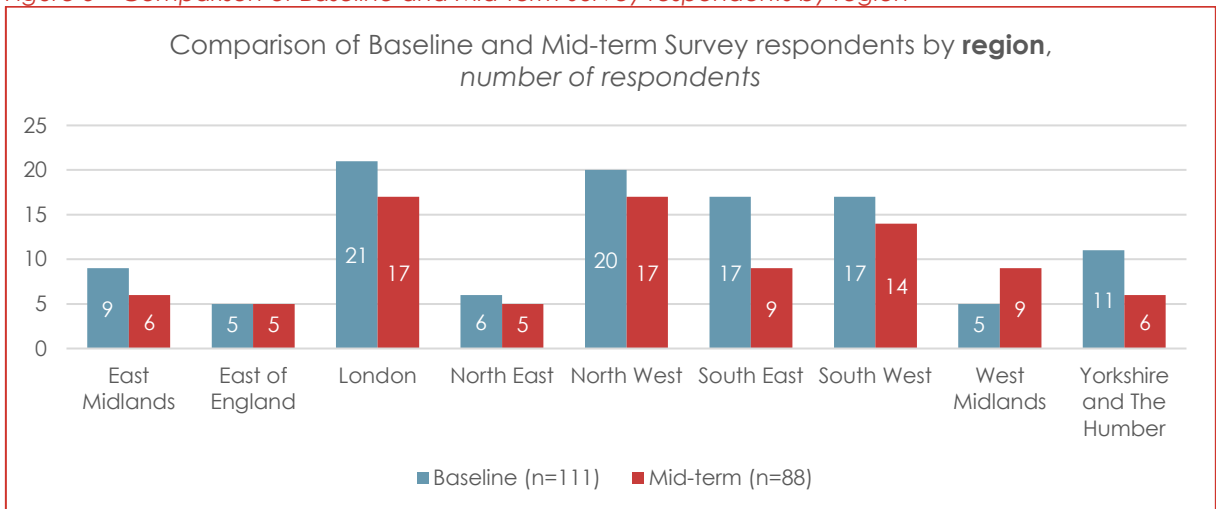
Source: Baseline and Mid-term Surveys of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

Figure 4 compares the samples across fee amounts charged by respondents. In both surveys the overall majority charged the fee cap imposed by the government. Of the lower-fee respondents in the mid-term sample, all were FECs, except for a single university respondent who was charging the £9,000 amount without a Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) award. The nature of the small sample in the Mid-term Survey means that comparisons would not be meaningful and, therefore, these are not presented further in the analysis.

Figure 4 – Comparison of Baseline and Mid-term Survey respondents by fee amount

Comparison of Baseline and Mid-term Survey respondents by fee amount, *number of respondents*

Category	Baseline (n=111)	Mid-term (n=88)
Higher fee amount (provider with a TEF award) (£9,250)	81	74
Higher fee amount (provider without a TEF award) (£9,000)	10	7
Basic fee amount (provider with TEF award) (£6,165)	10	5
Basic fee amount (provider without a TEF award) (£6,000)	10	2
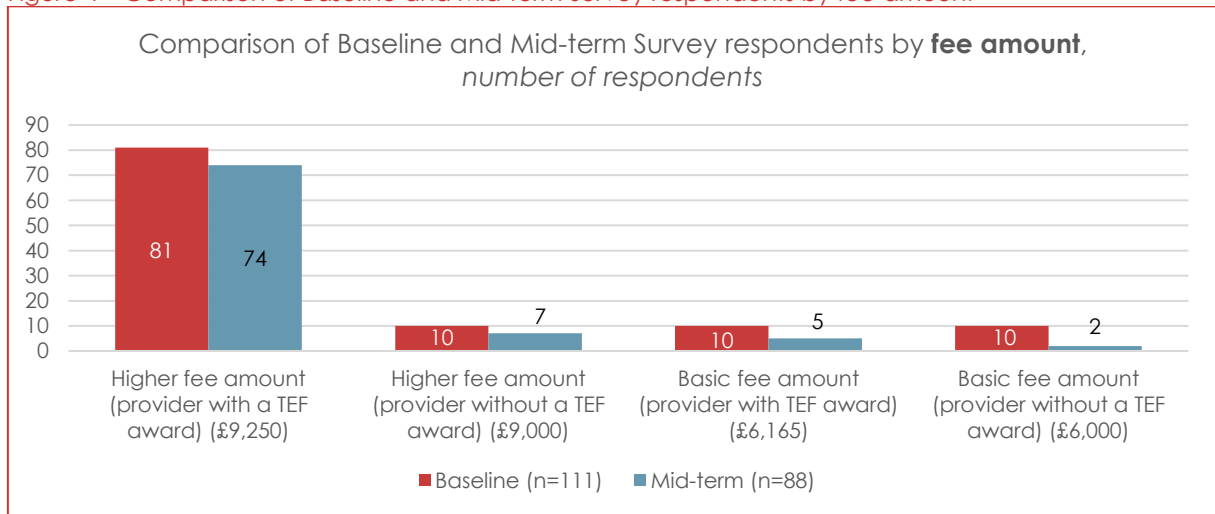
Source: Baseline and Mid-term Surveys of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

Figure 5 shows a comparison of Baseline and Mid-term Survey respondents by HEP size (measured by the number of undergraduate students). The spread of respondents across the two surveys is similar with much higher numbers at the lower and higher ends of the scale.

Figure 5 – Comparison of Baseline and Mid-term Survey respondents by undergraduate numbers

Baseline respondents split by undergraduate numbers, *share of respondents (n=111)*

Category	Share
Less than 500 (n=35)	31.53%
500 to 749 (n=15)	13.51%
750 to 999 (n=8)	7.21%
1,000 to 1,499 (n=5)	4.50%
1,500 to 1,999 (n=2)	1.80%
2,000 to 2,499 (n=3)	2.70%
2,500 to 4,999 (n=1)	0.90%
5,000 to 9,999 (n=10)	9.01%
10,000 to 14,999 (n=14)	12.61%
15,000 and over (n=18)	16.22%

Mid-term respondents by undergraduate numbers, *share of respondents (n=88)*

Category	Share
Less than 500 (n=25)	28.41%
500 to 749 (n=13)	14.77%
750 to 999 (n=4)	4.55%
1,000 to 1,499 (n=2)	2.27%
1,500 to 1,999 (n=1)	1.14%
2,000 to 2,499 (n=1)	1.14%
2,500 to 4,999 (n=5)	5.68%
5,000 to 9,999 (n=8)	9.09%
10,000 to 14,999 (n=15)	17.05%
15,000 and over (n=14)	15.91%

Source: Baseline and Mid-term Surveys of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

Similar to the distribution of respondents by fee amount (Figure 4), the sample sizes for some of the HEP size categories are also too small to conduct a meaningful analysis. Therefore, we do not include an analysis of survey questions broken down by HEP size in this report.

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Figure 6 shows the distribution of HEP type by student numbers. This shows that respondents with 2,000 and more students are all universities. There are a small number of universities that have lower student numbers than this, but, on the whole, comparing higher and lower student numbers is, in effect, too similar to comparing other providers with universities to provide meaningful analysis.

Figure 6 – Mid-term respondents by type of HEP and undergraduate numbers

Mid-term respondents by **type of HEP** and **undergraduate numbers**, *share of respondents*
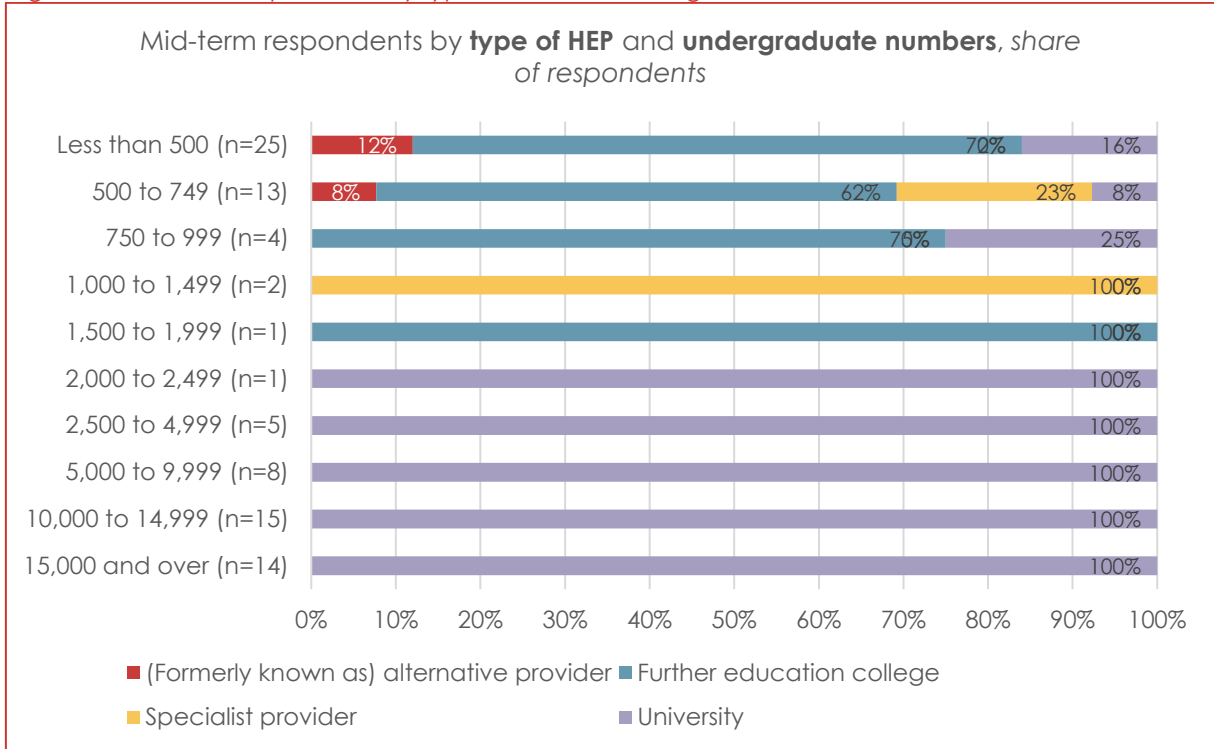
Source: Mid-term Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis; base: 88 responses

4   Findings

4.1   Generation and use of evidence by higher education providers

4.1.1   *Use of evaluation evidence to inform access and participation plans*

The Mid-term Survey asked a new question: Q10 – *'Which type(s) of evaluation evidence in access and participation did you use to inform your latest access and participation plan (or its update) that your provider submitted?'* The types of evidence are defined by the OfS[6] as listed in Figure 7.

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[6] Available online at: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation/standards-of-evidence-and-evaluation-self-assessment-tool/

Figure 7 – OfS types of evidence

	Description	Evidence	Claims you can make
Type 1: Narrative	The impact evaluation provides a narrative or a coherent theory of change to motivate its selection of activities in the context of a coherent strategy	Evidence of impact elsewhere and/or in the research literature on access and participation activity effectiveness or from your existing evaluation results	We have a coherent explanation of what we do and why Our claims are research-based
Type 2: Empirical Enquiry	The impact evaluation collects data on impact and reports evidence that those receiving an intervention have better outcomes, though does not establish any direct causal effect	Quantitative and/or qualitative evidence of a pre/post intervention change or a difference compared to what might otherwise have happened	We can demonstrate that our interventions are associated with beneficial results.
Type 3: Causality	The impact evaluation methodology provides evidence of a causal effect of an intervention	Quantitative and/or qualitative evidence of a pre/post treatment change on participants relative to an appropriate control or comparison group who did not take part in the intervention	We believe our intervention causes improvement and can demonstrate the difference using a control or comparison group

Source: OfS, https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation/standards-of-evidence-and-evaluation-self-assessment-tool/

This question asked the respondents to consider these three types of OfS evidence. Figure 8 shows the absolute number of responses across the whole sample. It shows that almost every HEP said they used narrative evidence in their APPs (93.2%) and the vast majority used empirical enquiry (83%). A much smaller proportion at (33%) used causality type evidence.

Figure 8 – Q10 on types of evidence used to inform APPs

'Which type(s) of evaluation evidence in access and participation did you use to inform your latest access and participation plan (or its update) that your provider submitted?', **Mid-term** (n=88)*, number of respondents indicating use*

Type 1: Narrative	Type 2: Empirical enquiry	Type 3: Causality
82	73	29
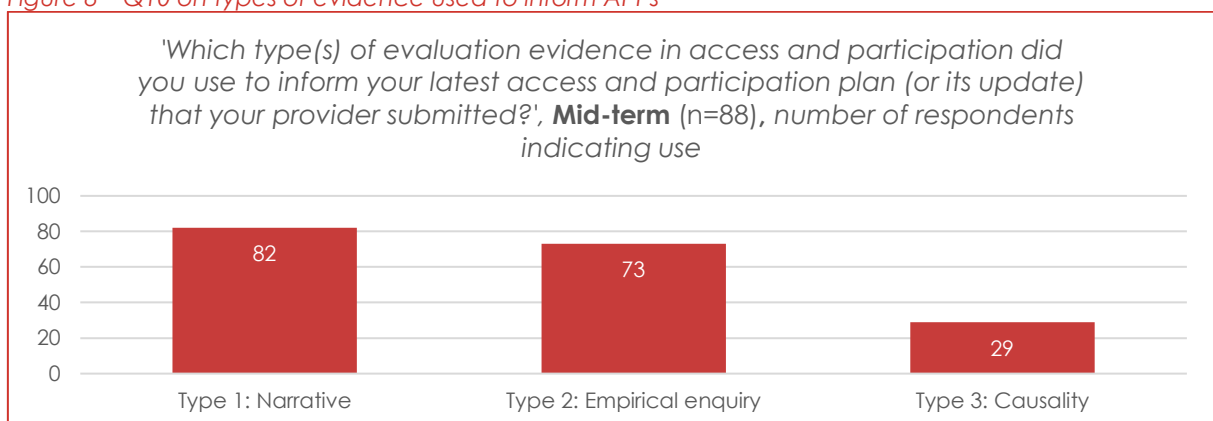
Source: Mid-term Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

Figure 9 looks at this issue by type of provider (university and FEC). The shares of respondents are broadly similar across universities and FECs for narrative and causality evidence. However, overall, a larger share of universities use all three types of evidence, compared to FECs. The major difference is then in relation to the use of Type 2: empirical enquiry. For universities, 92%

indicated use of empirical enquiry compared to 63% for FECs, demonstrating a clear difference in the ability of FECs and universities to use this type of evidence.

Figure 9 – Q10 on types of evidence used to inform APPs by type of HEP
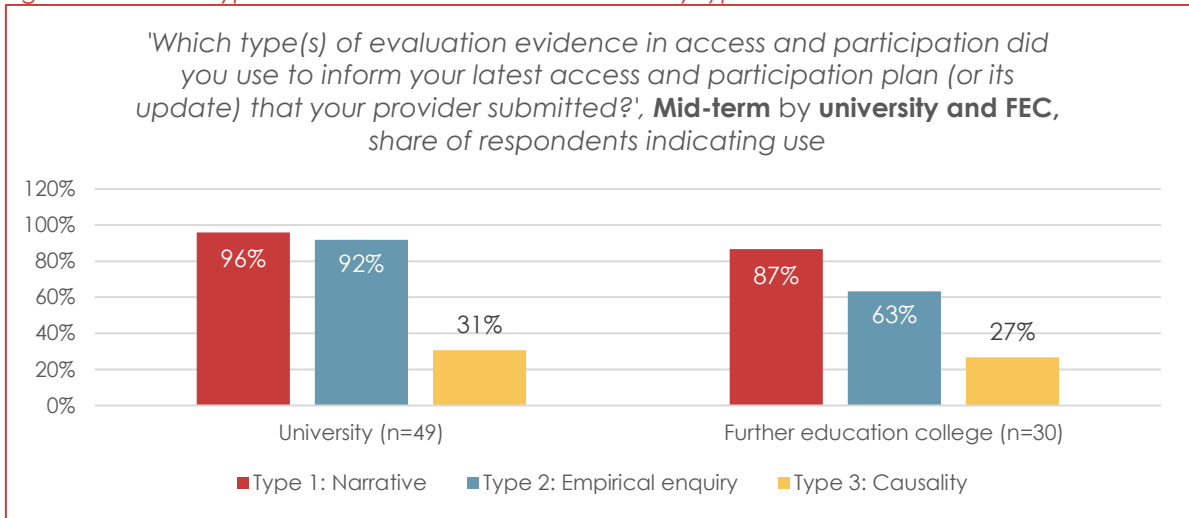
'Which type(s) of evaluation evidence in access and participation did you use to inform your latest access and participation plan (or its update) that your provider submitted?', **Mid-term** by **university and FEC**, *share of respondents indicating use*

Source: Mid-term Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis; note: respondents were allowed to select multiple options, therefore the totals do not add up to 100%.

Figure 10 shows the use of different types of evidence in APPs by region. The greatest difference across the regions is in the proportion of respondents indicating use of causality type evidence. Three tiers of regions can be observed in this regard. In the first tier with 40% or above using causality evidence are London, North East, South East, and West Midlands. In the second tier is North West and South West with 29% each. Then a bottom tier of less than 20% includes East Midlands, East of England, and Yorkshire and the Humber. However, these comparisons should be considered tentative because the sample sizes for each region differed markedly and a number of the regions with very low scores on this point also have very low samples (i.e. East Midlands (n=6) and East of England (n=5)).

Figure 10 – Q10 on types of evidence used to inform APPs by region

'Which type(s) of evaluation evidence in access and participation did you use to inform your latest access and participation plan (or its update) that your provider submitted?', **Mid-term** (n=88) by **region,** *share of respondents indicating use*

Source: Mid-term Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

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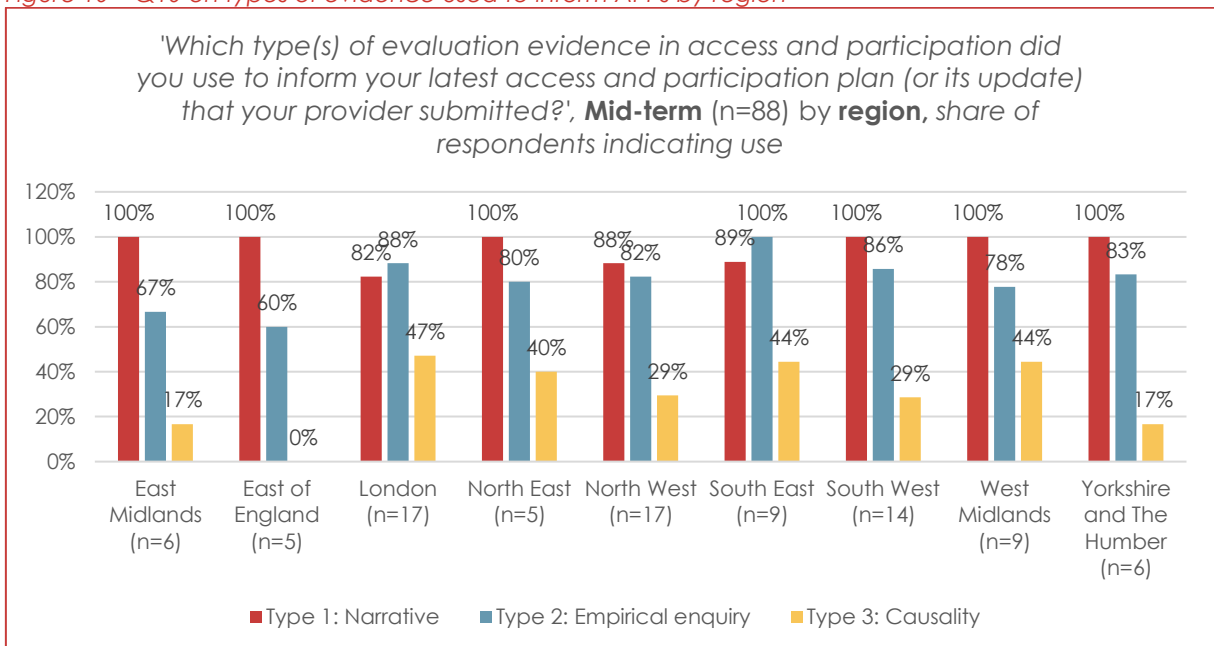
In a separate question, the Mid-term Survey also asked respondents to express their extent of agreement with a number of statements relating to implementation of evaluation measures that are contained in their APPs. Figure 11 shows that roughly the same share of respondents said they strongly agreed or agreed with the two statements 'We plan to focus more on evaluation measures in the later stages of our current access and participation plan' (72%) and 'We have already implemented the evaluation measures included in our plan' (70%).

HEPs strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'we have strong links with academics from our provider who perform research in social mobility, equality in education and similar areas' to a much lesser degree (40%). This confirms one of the findings from the Baseline phase of the evaluation of TASO, where the issue of disconnect between academics and access and participation practitioners transpired from interviews with HEPs.

Figure 11 – Q11 on statements relating to implementation of evaluation measures in APPs
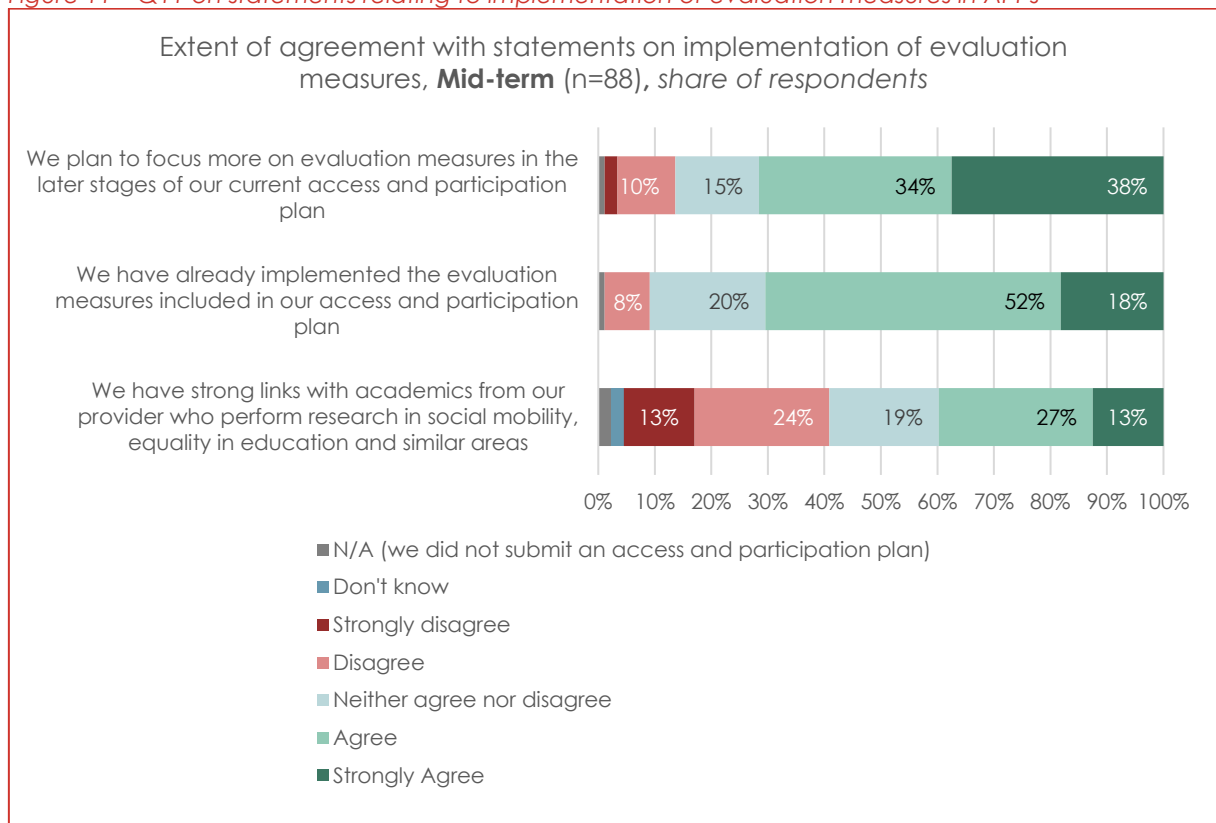
Source: Mid-term Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

We checked for regional differences and differences by type of HEP but did not find any significant variations across these groups for these statements, except in relation to type of HEP for the statement on links with academics.

Figure 12 shows that 57% of universities agreed or strongly agreed whereas for FECs only 13% agreed and none strongly agreed with a statement: 'We have strong links with academics from our provider who perform research in social mobility, equality in education and similar areas'. This result is not surprising considering that universities are often research focused institutions whereas FECs tend to be teaching focused and have fewer academics conducting research.

Figure 12 – Q11 on statement relating to links with academics by type of HEP

'We have strong links with academics from our provider who perform research in social mobility, equality in education and similar areas', **Mid-term** by **university** (n=49) and **FEC** (n=30), *share of respondents*
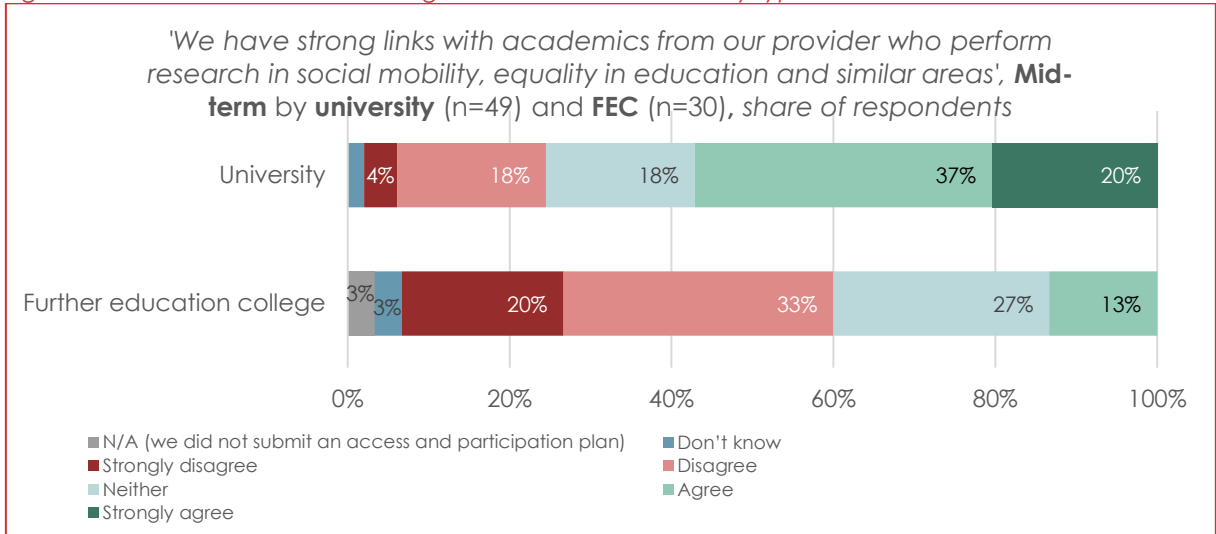
Source: Mid-term Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

4.1.2 Use of evaluation evidence in access and participation activities

Both the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys used a Likert scale to test HEPs responses to a series of statements about their use of evidence. Below, the results are presented for each statement across the general sample and also separately for universities and FECs. Across all statements, the proportions of respondents who either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement has increased between the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys.

Figure 13 presents the results for the statement 'Use of evidence is embedded in our business as usual'. The Baseline results showed that a high proportion (80%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. In the Mid-term Survey a slightly higher share of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that use of evidence was embedded in their business as usual. The share of universities strongly agreeing with the statement in the Mid-term (39%) was higher than in the Baseline (27%). The share of FECs agreeing or strongly agreeing was roughly the same although a higher proportion in the Mid-term Survey reported strongly agreeing (27%) than in the Baseline Survey (11%).

Figure 13 – Q8 on statement related to embeddedness of evidence

'Use of evidence is embedded in our business as usual', comparison of **Mid-term and Baseline** across **whole sample/universities/FECs**, *share of respondents*

Source: Baseline and Mid-term Surveys of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

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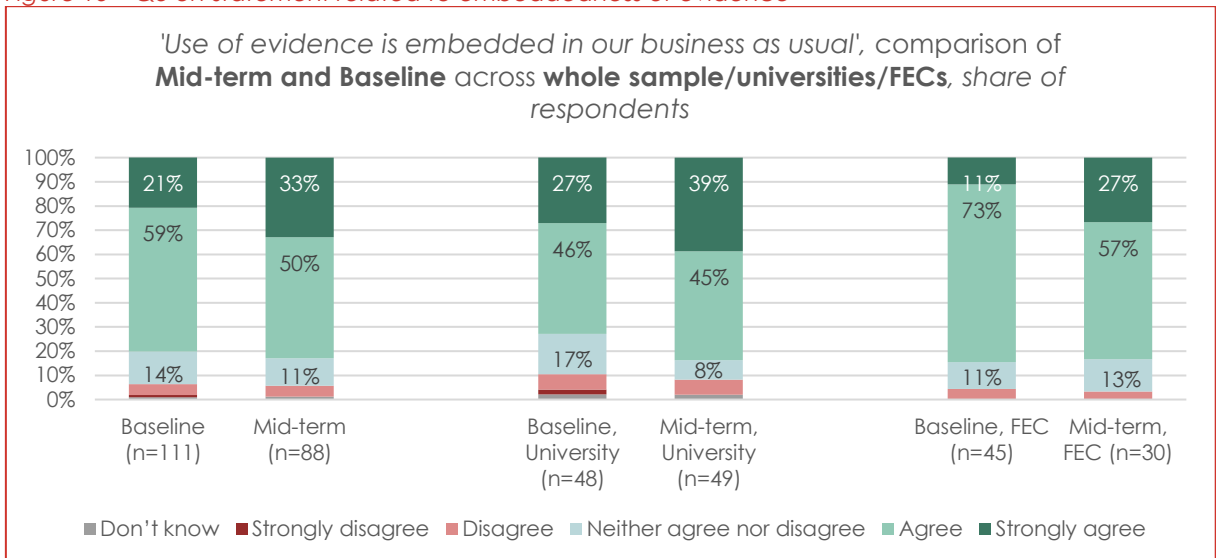
Figure 14 presents the results for the statement 'We invest time and resource in understanding evidence in our context'. The figures for strongly agreeing or agreeing were slightly higher for the Mid-term (88%) than the Baseline (85%). Within this, universities in particular, showed a significant increase in the share of respondents strongly agreeing (45% for the Mid-term compared to 25% for the Baseline).

Figure 14 – Q8 on statement related to investment of time and resources in understanding evidence

'We invest time and resource in understanding evidence in our context', comparison of **Mid-term and Baseline** across **whole sample/universities/FECs**, *share of respondents*
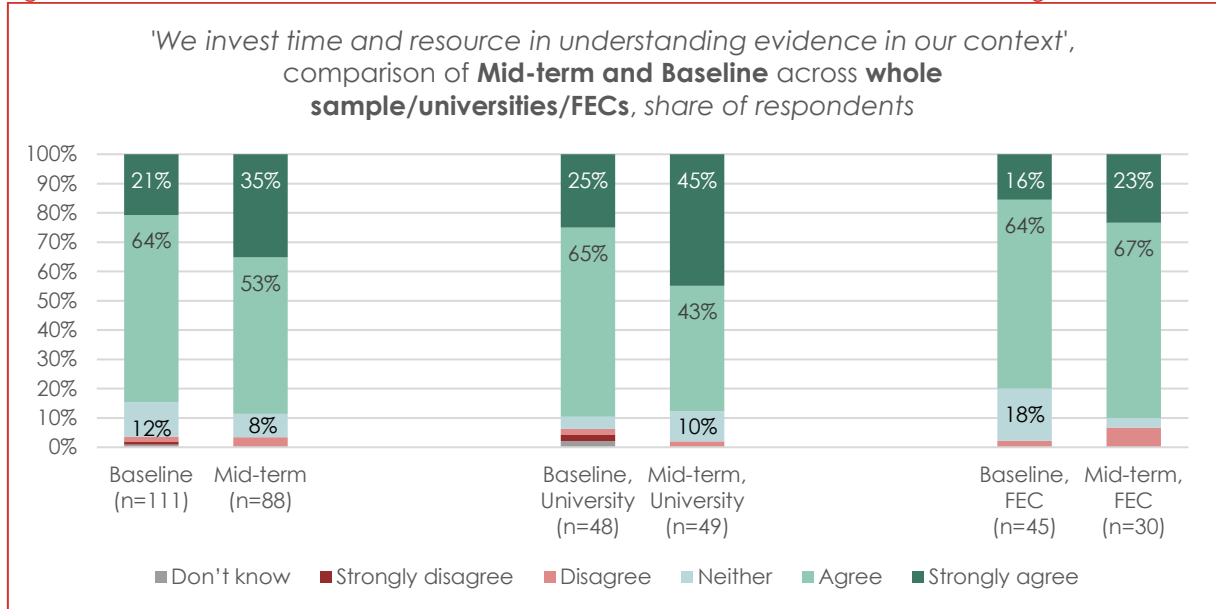
Source: Baseline and Mid-term Surveys of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

Figure 15 presents the results for the statement 'Our strategies, activities and practice use a theory-based approach'. This shows a very similar pattern to Figure 14 above. The figures for strongly agreeing or agreeing were slightly higher for the Mid-term (81%) than the Baseline (78%). Universities showed a significant increase in the share of respondents strongly agreeing (47% for the Mid-term compared to 21% for the Baseline).

Figure 15 – Q8 on statement related to using theory-based approach

'Our strategies, activities and practice use a theory-based approach', comparison of **Mid-term and Baseline** across **whole sample/universities/FECs**, *share of respondents*

Source: Baseline and Mid-term Surveys of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

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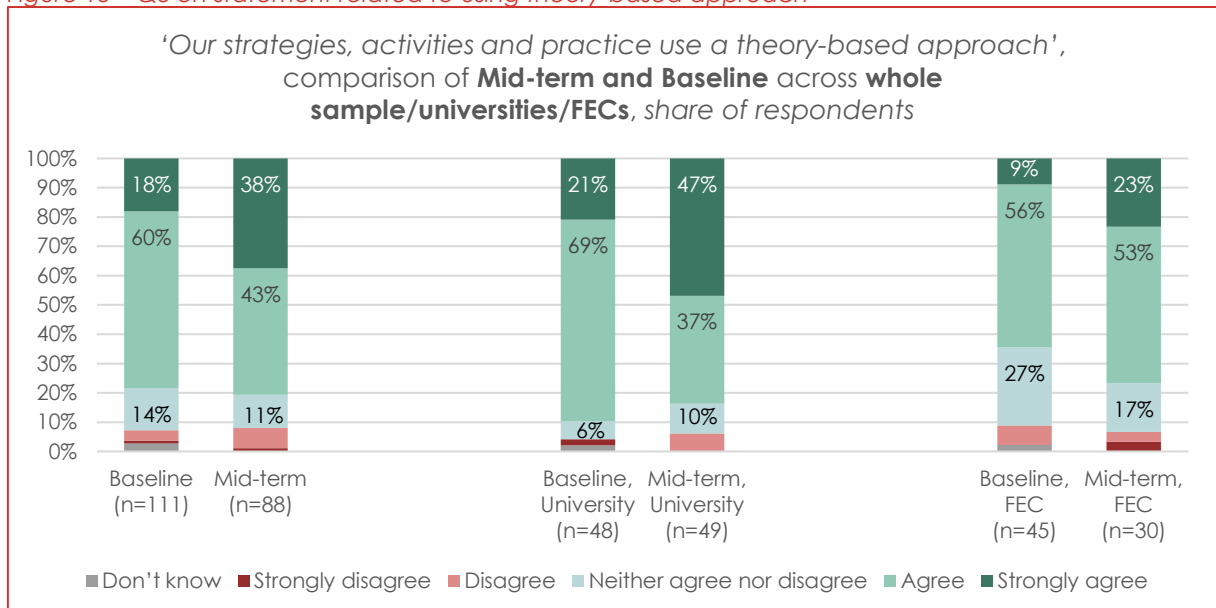
Figure 16 presents the results for the statement 'We share evidence with other higher education providers'. This is the statement that consistently receives the lowest level of support across the Baseline and Mid-term surveys and among universities and FECs. For universities, the share agreeing or strongly agreeing has actually decreased from 59% to 57%. This further exacerbates the finding from the Baseline pointing to deficits in the degree of sharing of evidence across the university sector. On the other hand, in the further education sector, the proportion has slightly increased from 34% to 43%.

Figure 16 – Q8 on statement related to sharing of evidence with other providers
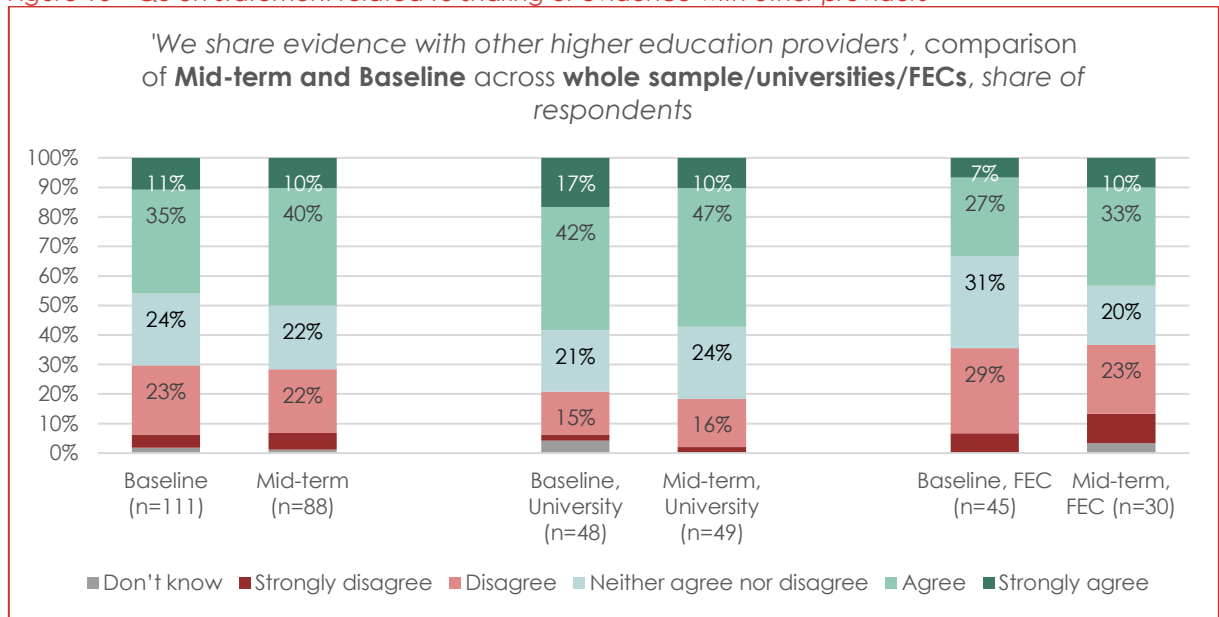
Source: Baseline and Mid-term Surveys of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

Figure 17 to Figure 20 below present the results for statements on whether evidence and best practice should be collated and shared across the higher education sector. The results are similar for all four statements. The share of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with these statements has remained high and stable. For FECs, the number strongly agreeing has increased.

Figure 17 – Q8 on statement related to whether evidence should be shared

Source: Baseline and Mid-term Surveys of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

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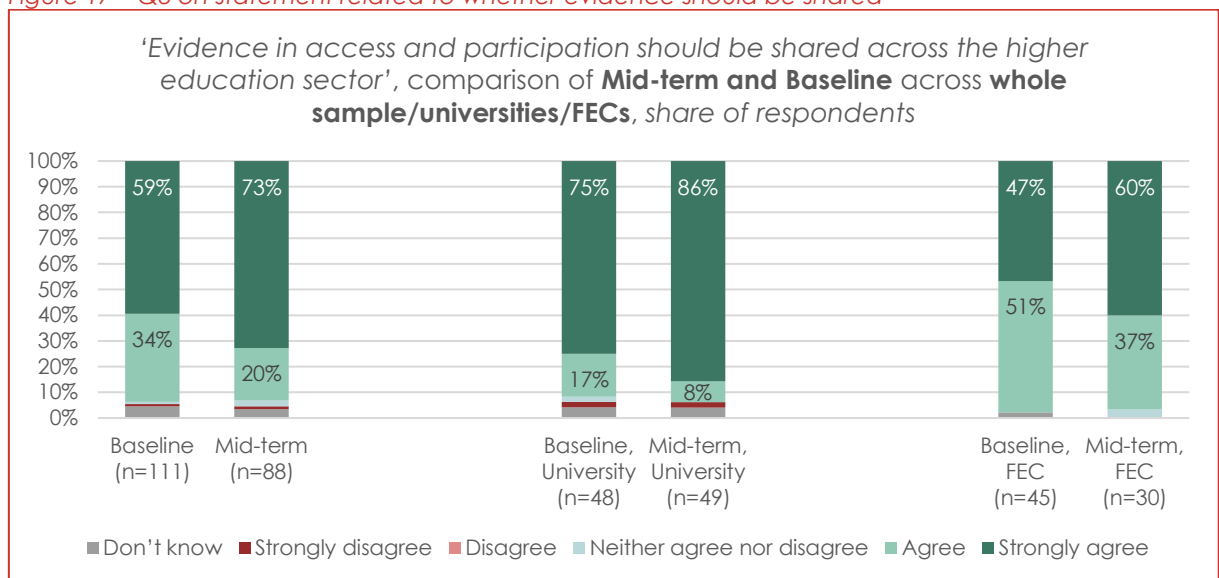
Figure 18 – Q8 on statement related to whether evidence should be collated

'Evidence in access and participation should be collated and researched at the national level', comparison of **Mid-term and Baseline** across **whole sample/universities/FECs**, *share of respondents*
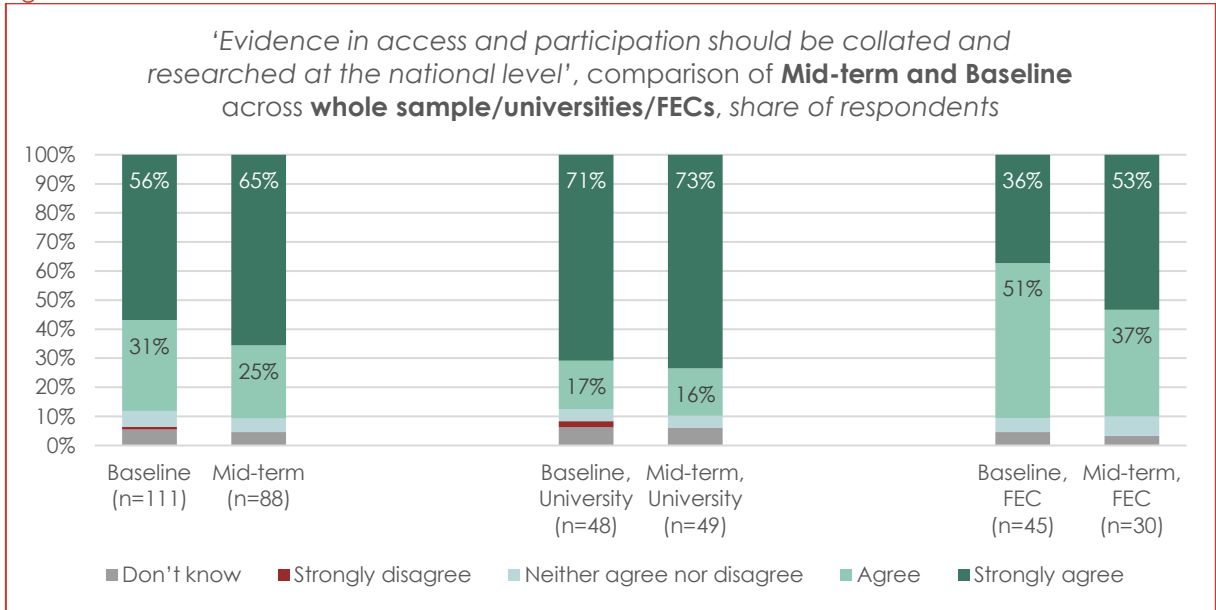
Source: Baseline and Mid-term Surveys of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

Figure 19 – Q8 on statement related to whether lessons and good practice should be shared

'Lessons learnt and good practice in access and participation should be shared across the higher education sector', comparison of **Mid-term and Baseline** across **whole sample/universities/FECs**, *share of respondents*

Source: Baseline and Mid-term Surveys of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

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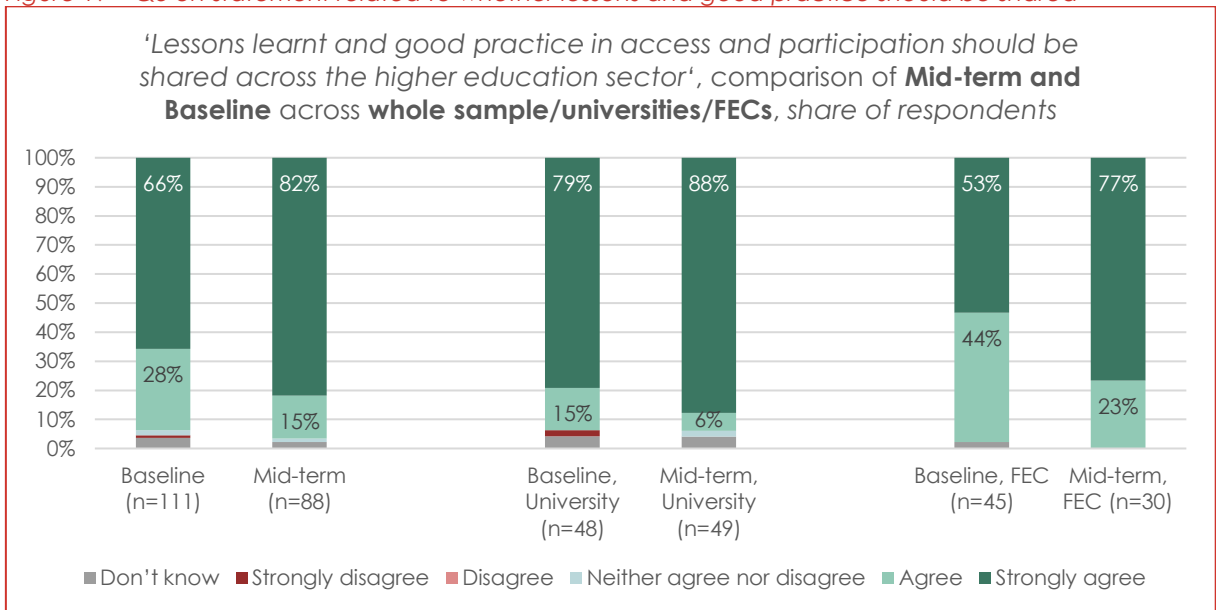
Figure 20 – Q8 on statement related to whether lessons and good practice should be collated

*'Lessons learnt and good practice in access and participation should be collated and researched at the national level', comparison of **Mid-term and Baseline** across **whole sample/universities/FECs**, share of respondents*
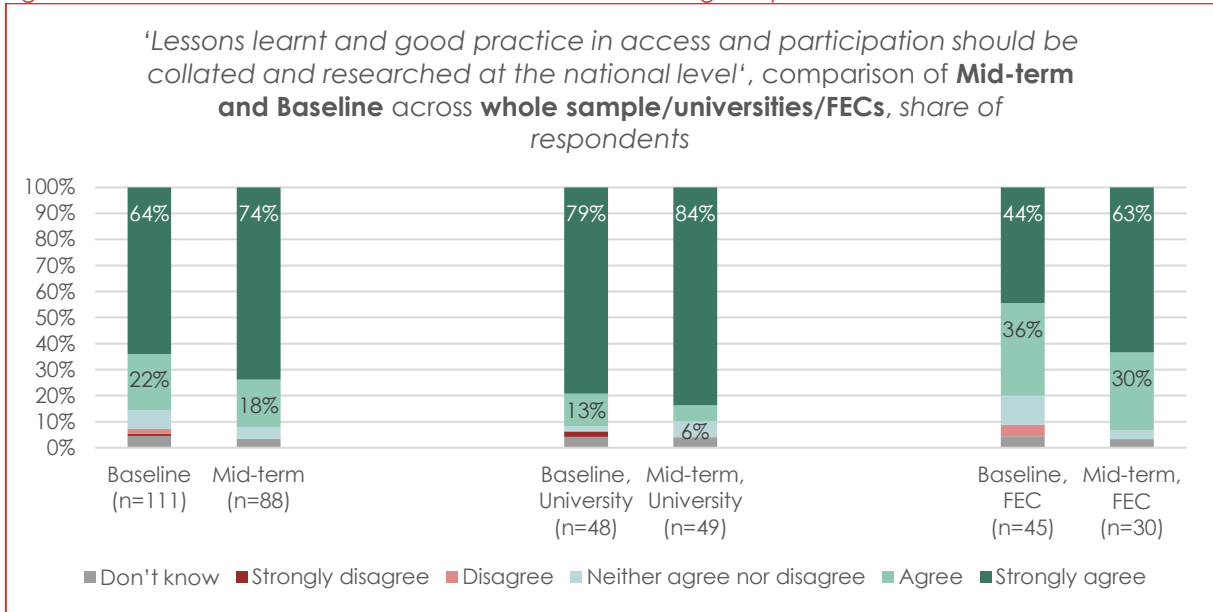
Source: Baseline and Mid-term Surveys of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

4.1.3   Generation of evaluation evidence in access and participation

The Mid-term Survey introduced a new question on the generation of evidence. HEPs were asked *'As a provider how often do you generate the different types of evaluation evidence in access and participation (as defined by the OfS)?'* The findings are presented in Figure 21. Narrative evidence is generated 'practically always' or 'quite often' by the vast majority of respondents (84%). The figure is significantly less for empirical enquiry (65%). And for Causality type evidence it falls to a small minority of respondents (22%).

Figure 21 – Q9 on HEPs' generation of types of evaluation evidence in access and participation

How often do you generate the different types of evaluation evidence? Mid-term survey, *share of respondents (n=88)*
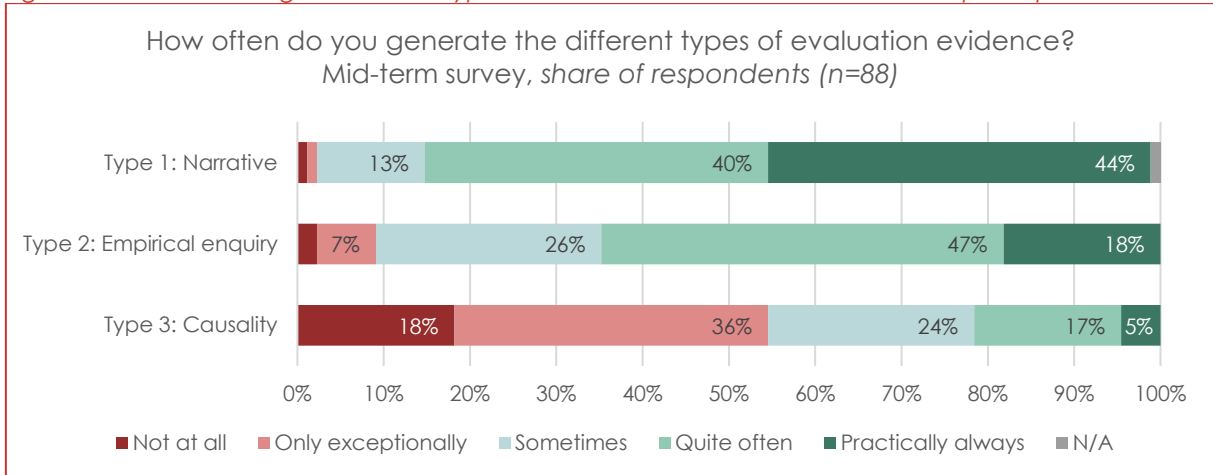
Source: Mid-term Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

Figure 22 presents the results on evidence generation broken down by type of provider. Universities show a higher generation of narrative and empirical enquiry type evidence than FECs. However, interestingly, FECs reported slightly higher degrees of generation of causality type evidence than universities. Currently, no explanation for this can be provided, however, this is a point that we will focus on in the later stages of evaluation, and can be further explored, for example, in the analysis of the APPs, and through TASO's engagement with the sector.

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Differences across regions were tested for but no significant differences were identified.

Figure 22 – Q9 on HEPs' generation of types of evaluation evidence in access and participation by type of HEP
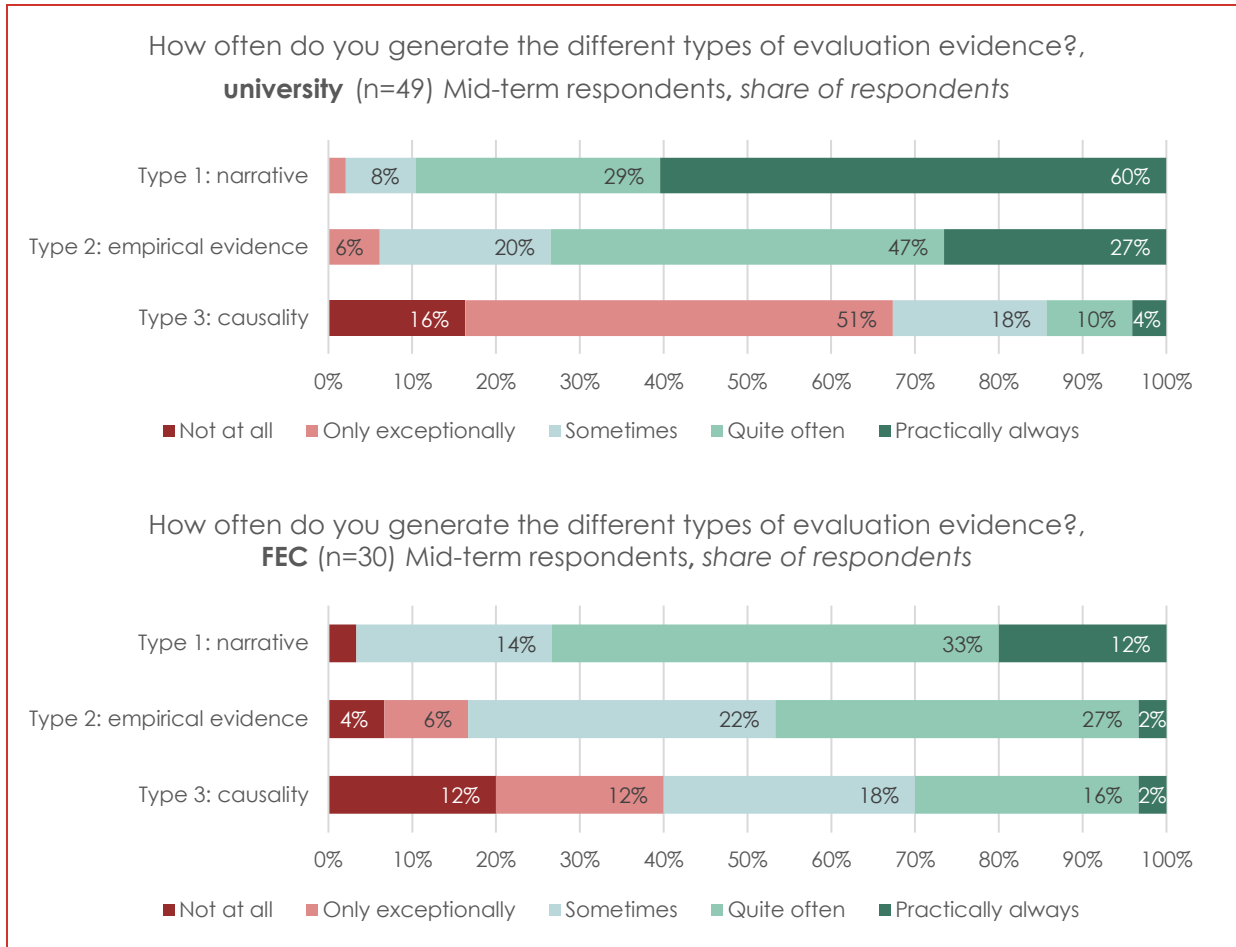
Source: Mid-term Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

4.1.4 Evaluation structures in place

The Mid-term Survey introduced a new question asking respondents to pick the descriptions which best apply to how evaluation is carried out in their institution. The results show that the most common situation is that practitioners and officers evaluate interventions, with 51% of respondents indicating that this applies to them. Just under 39% of the respondents indicated that it was the official responsible for the APP who undertook the evaluation. The other options were less prevalent ranging between 11% and 18%. Only 2% said they do not generally evaluate their interventions in access and participation.

Figure 23 – Q12 on options describing evaluation situation at HEP

'Which options below best describes the situation at your provider (select all that apply)', **Mid-term,** share of respondents selecting option
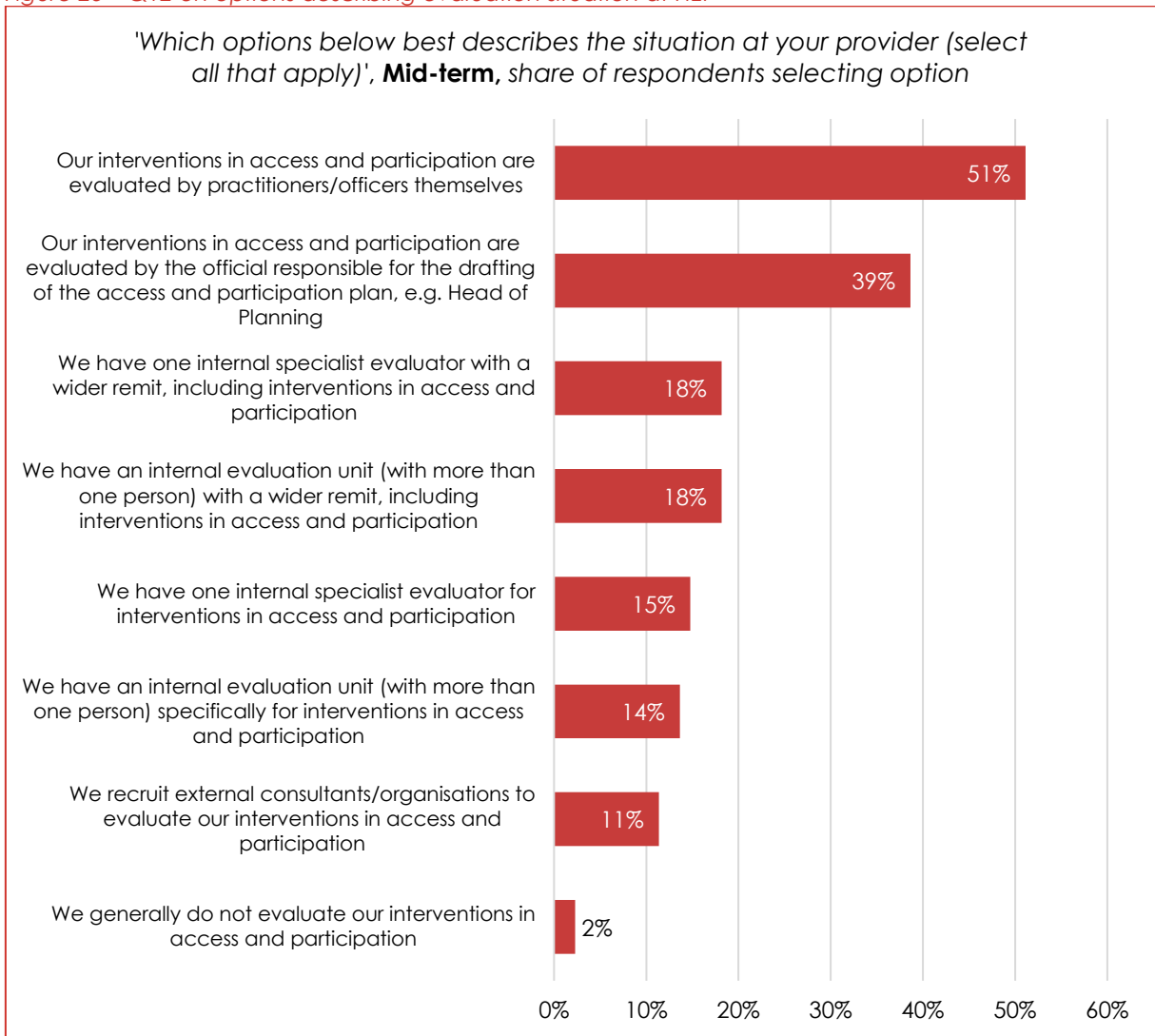
There were very significant differences identified between universities and FECs across their replies to the statements. The most common situation at FECs is that interventions are evaluated by the official responsible for the drafting of the APP (63%). For universities, it is more likely to be done by practitioners/officers themselves (40%). Universities are more likely to have specialist evaluators and units. However, it is notable that around one third of FECs reported having one internal specialist evaluator with a wider remit, including interventions in access and participation (Figure 24).

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Figure 24 – Q12 on options describing evaluation situation at HEP by type of HEP

'Which option below best describes the situation at your provider (tick all that apply)', **Mid-term** by **university** and **FEC,** *share of respondents ticking option*
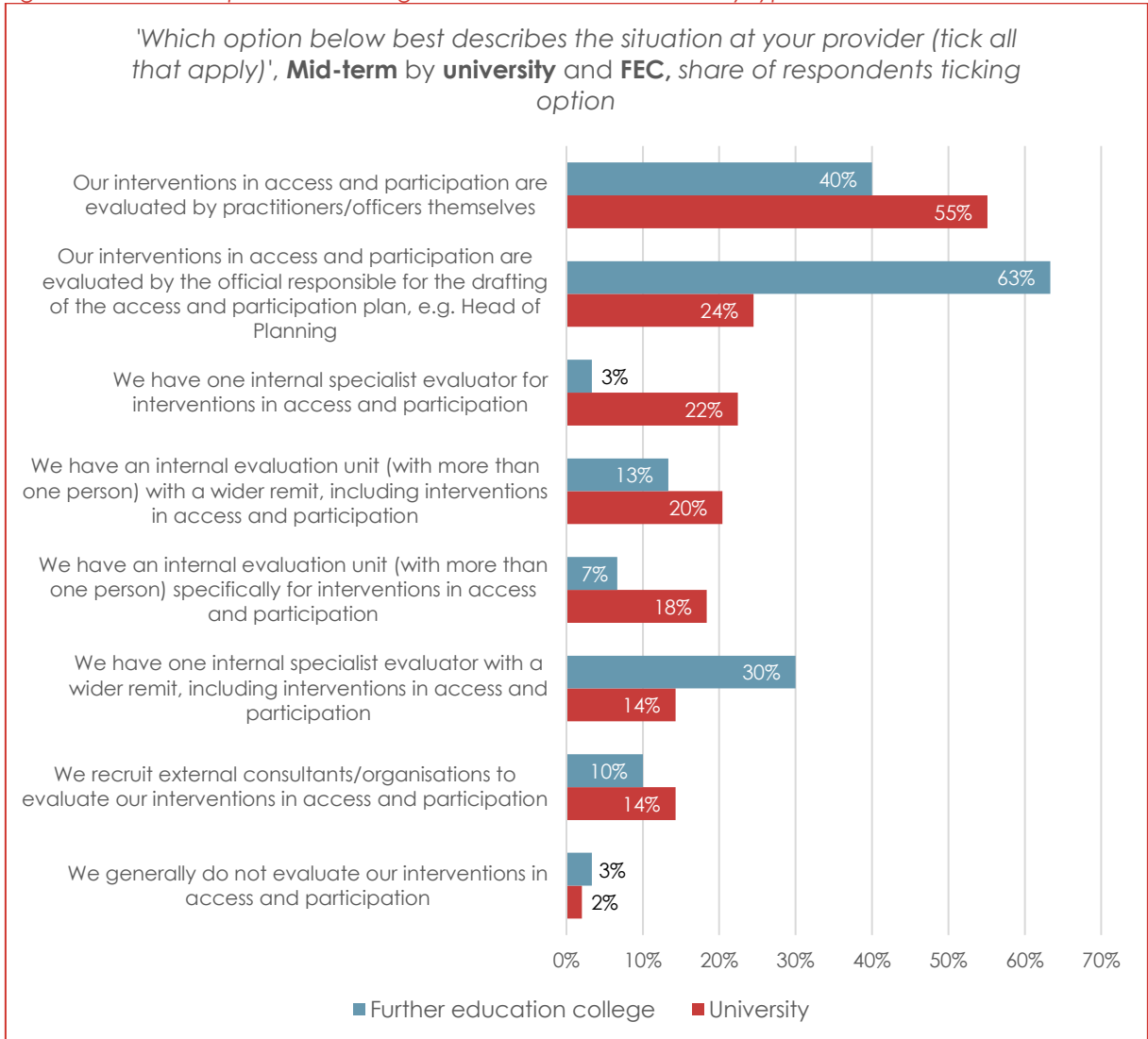
We also checked for regional variance in terms of HEP evaluation situations, but no meaningful patterns were identifiable.

4.1.5 Frequency of use

HEPs continue using evidence in access and participation across all stages of the student journey. There has been an increase in the use of evidence across all four stages of the student journey between the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys. Activities around access continue to enjoy the highest frequency of use of evidence, compared to the other three stages (continuation, attainment and progression).

The results are summarised in Figure 25. The highest increase (by ten percentage points) between the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys was observed in the use of evidence in activities around continuation.

Frequency of use of evidence in access and participation by range of types of activities, **Baseline** and **Mid-term**, *Share of respondents* (Baseline n=111, Mid-term n= 88)
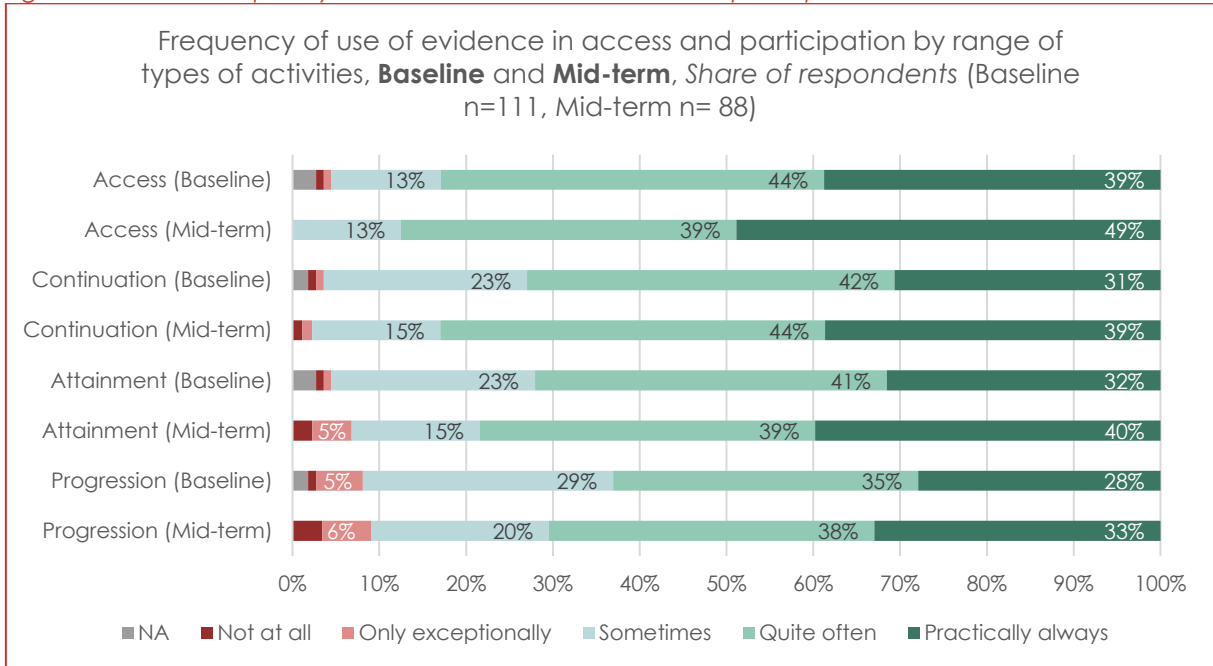
Figure 26 provides a synopsis of the survey results for Question 5, broken down by stage of student journey and by type of provider for both the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys. The results clearly show that there has been an increase between Baseline and Mid-term in the use of evidence across all four stages of the student journey across all provider types (except for specialist providers, where, nevertheless, the sample is very small).

Looking closer at Figure 26, the share of universities practically always or quite often using evidence in activities around progression has grown by 12 percentage points between the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys. In turn, the use of evidence in the further education sector has seen the highest increase in continuation (12 percentage points) and attainment (16 percentage points). This further confirms the significant increases in the further education sector that we have seen in responses to other questions in the survey (e.g. Figure 14, Figure 15, Figure 19 and Figure 20).

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Figure 26 – Q5 on frequency of use of evidence in access and participation by type of HEP

Source: Baseline and Mid-term Surveys of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

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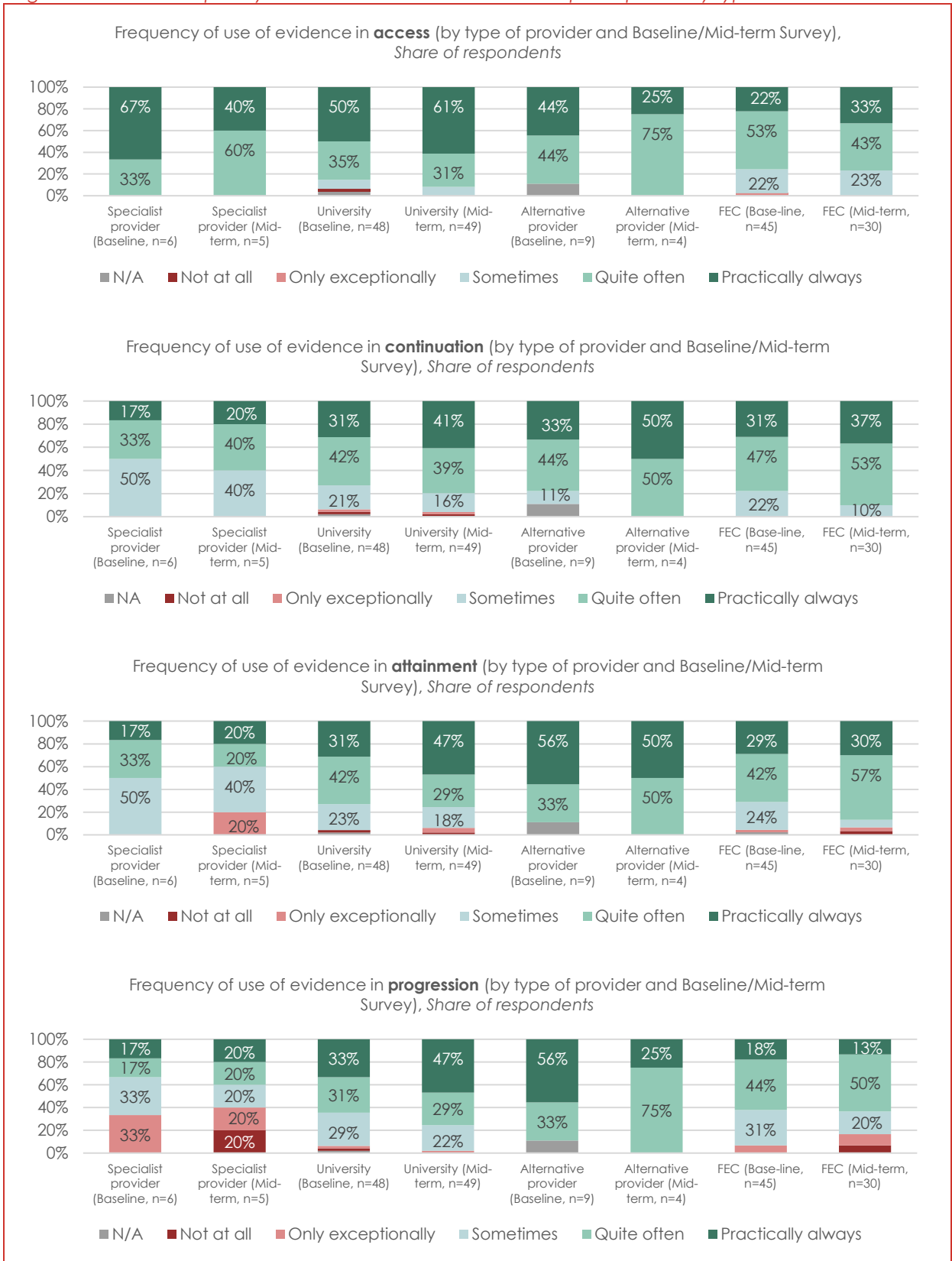
Question 6 of the survey explores the frequency of use of different types of evidence in terms of the way in which the evidence is generated. Figure 27 shows that results are differ between the Baseline and the Mid-term Surveys. The main conclusion here is that there has been an increase in the use of own evidence (i.e. own research evidence, evaluation from own specific activities) between the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys. For evidence generated by other providers (both general research evidence and evaluation of specific activities), the proportion of providers using this type of evidence quite often/practically always has dropped by six percentage points in both cases. Whereas for evidence relating to provider's own research evidence and evaluation activities the proportion of providers using this type of evidence quite often or practically always has increased by four percentage points and seven percentage points respectively.

Figure 27 – Q6 on frequency of use of different types of evidence

Frequency of use of different types of evidence, **Baseline** (n=111) and **Mid-term** (n=88), *share of respondents*

Source: Baseline and Mid-term Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

Figure 28 presents these results for university respondents only. For universities, the movements over the year largely match the general sample in Figure 27. Figure 29 presents results for FECs and shows a greater variation from the general sample in terms of evaluation of specific activities coming from other providers (a moderate increase, as opposed to the general sample which showed a small decrease) and own research evidence (a small decrease, as opposed to the general sample which showed a small increase).

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Figure 28 – Q6 on frequency of use of different types of evidence by universities

Frequency of use of different types of evidence, **universities** across
Baseline (n=48) and **Mid-term** (n=49), *share of respondents*

Baseline: Research evidence generated by other providers	40% 48% 8%
Mid-term: Research evidence generated by other providers	8% 41% 41%
Baseline: Evaluation of specific activities coming from other providers	8% 33% 40% 13%
Mid-term: Evaluation of specific activities coming from other providers	61% 29%
Baseline: Your own research evidence	27% 44% 17%
Mid-term: Your own research evidence	12% 18% 37% 27%
Baseline: National and international reports	15% 40% 42%
Mid-term: National and international reports	22% 37% 37%
Baseline: Evaluation from your own specific activities	6% 33% 54%
Mid-term: Evaluation from your own specific activities	37% 57%
Baseline: Published statistics / datasets	13% 21% 63%
Mid-term: Published statistics / datasets	10% 33% 51%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ We do not have access to this type of evidence ■ Not at all
■ Only exceptionally ■ Sometimes
■ Quite often ■ Practically always

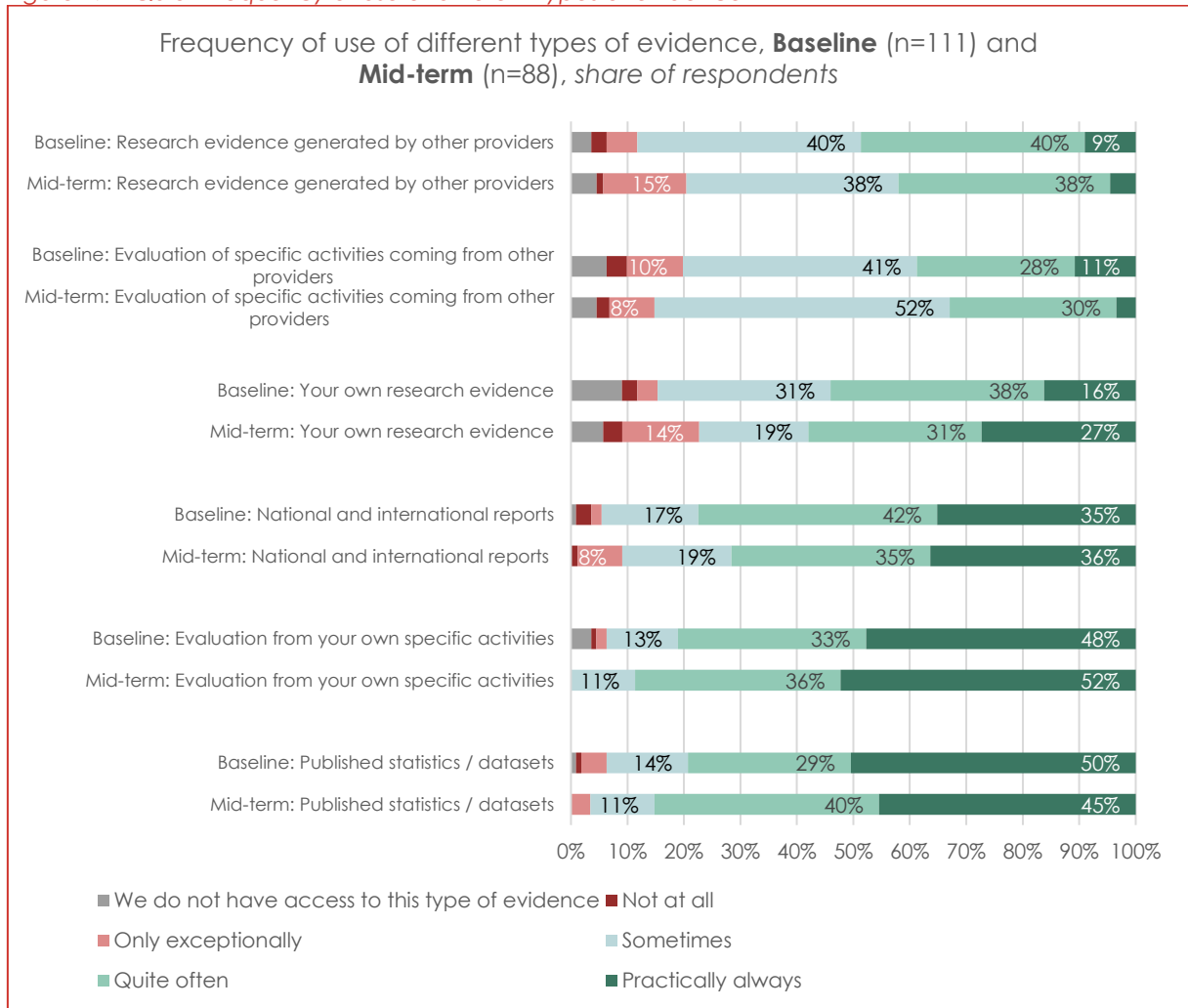Source: Baseline and Mid-term Surveys of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

Figure 29 – Q6 on frequency of use of different types of evidence by FECs

Frequency of use of different types of evidence, FECs across Baseline (n=45) and Mid-term (n=30), share of respondents

Category	Values
Baseline: Research evidence generated by other providers	11%, 40%, 36%
Mid-term: Research evidence generated by other providers	23%, 33%, 33%
Baseline: Evaluation of specific activities coming from other providers	13%, 49%, 22%
Mid-term: Evaluation of specific activities coming from other providers	13%, 40%, 37%
Baseline: National and international reports (e.g. by the OfS, DfE and the third sector)	22%, 49%, 22%
Mid-term: National and international reports (e.g. by the OfS, DfE and the third sector)	10%, 20%, 30%, 37%
Baseline: Your own research evidence	40%, 36%, 13%
Mid-term: Your own research evidence	7%, 17%, 27%, 23%, 23%
Baseline: Published statistics / datasets	9%, 20%, 38%, 33%
Mid-term: Published statistics / datasets	17%, 43%, 40%
Baseline: Evaluation from your own specific activities	20%, 40%, 36%
Mid-term: Evaluation from your own specific activities	23%, 37%, 40%

Legend:
- We do not have access to this type of evidence
- Not at all
- Only exceptionally
- Sometimes
- Quite often
- Practically always

Source: Baseline and Mid-term Surveys of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

4.1.6   Common barriers to using evidence

Figure 30 compares the results in relation to common barriers to using evidence from the Baseline and the Mid-term Surveys (noting that the choice 'There is a lack of internal capacity within our provider to generate evidence' was included in the Mid-term Survey only). Overall, the results from the two surveys are remarkably similar, showing that there has not been a major shift in perceptions of challenges to using evidence in the last year.

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Figure 30 – Q7 on common barriers to using evidence

Common barriers to using evidence in access and participation, Baseline (n=111) and Mid-term (n=88), *share of respondents selecting option*
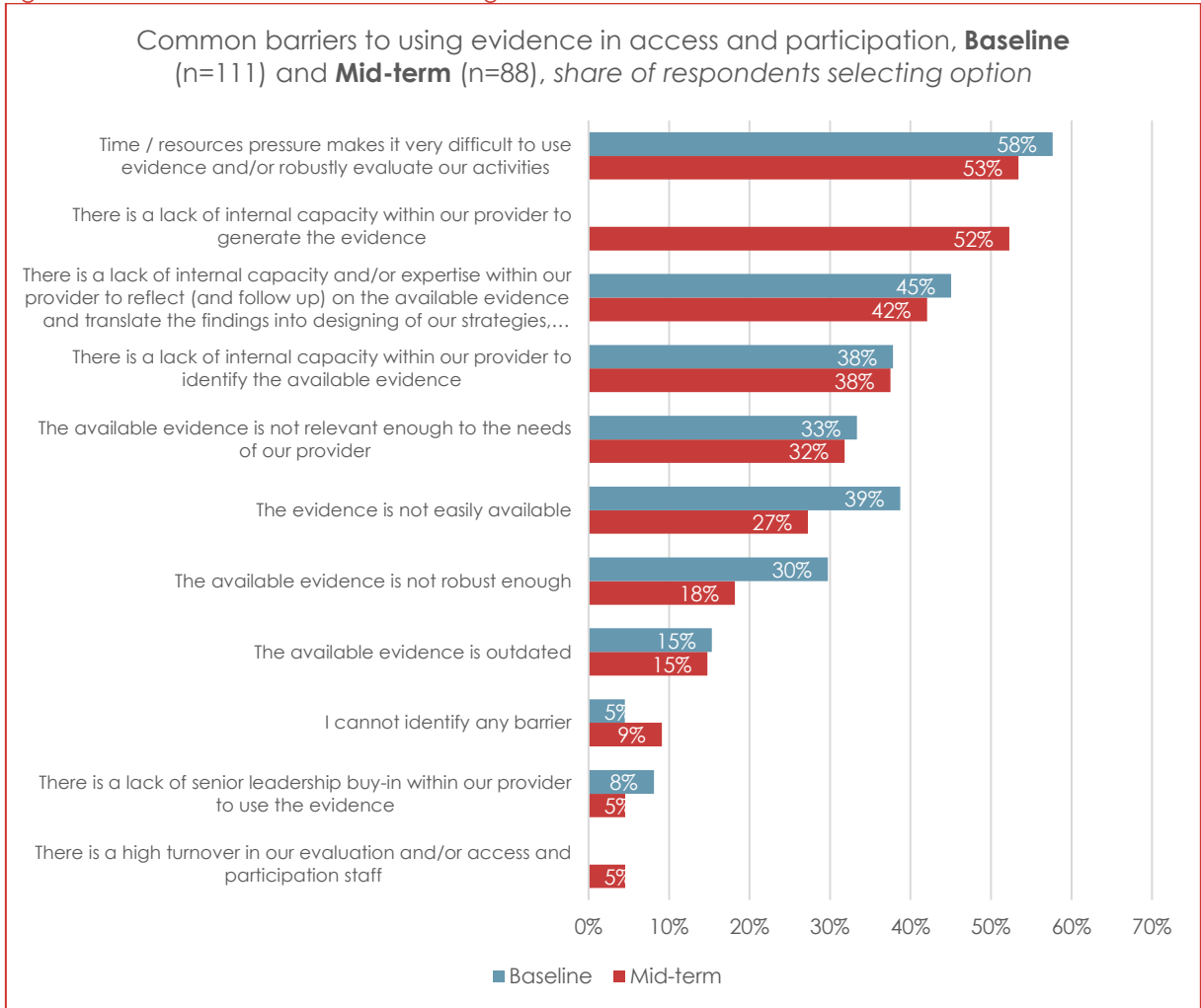
Source: Baseline and Mid-term Surveys of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

Looking more closely at universities and FECs, Figure 31 represents the Baseline results and Figure 32 the Mid-term results for both these types of HEPs. Again, the charts do not show a major shift of perceptions for either universities or FECs. There is, however, one notable result in relation to universities. The perception that the evidence is not easily available has fallen significantly for universities from 42% to 22% indicating that universities no longer see this issue as one of the most significant barriers.

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Figure 31 – Q7 on common barriers to using evidence in the Baseline Survey

Common barriers to using evidence in access and participation, **Baseline Universities** (n=48) and **Baseline FECs** (n=45), *share of respondents selecting option*

Barrier	University	Further education college
Time / resources pressure makes it very difficult to use evidence and/or robustly evaluate our activities	58%	64%
The evidence is outdated	19%	16%
The evidence is not easily available	42%	42%
The available evidence is not robust enough	35%	18%
The available evidence is not relevant enough to the needs of our provider	21%	47%
There is a lack of senior leadership buy-in within our provider to use the evidence	8%	7%
There is a lack of confidence within our provider to use the evidence	10%	9%
There is a lack of internal capacity and/or expertise within our provider to reflect on the available evidence and translate the findings into designing of our strategies, activities and practice	42%	44%
There is a lack of internal capacity within our provider to identify the available evidence	29%	47%

■ University ■ Further education college

Source: Baseline Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

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Common barriers to using evidence in access and participation, Mid-term Universities (n=49) and **Mid-term FECs** (n=30), *share of respondents selecting option*

Barrier	University	Further education college
Time / resources pressure makes it very difficult to use evidence and/or robustly evaluate our activities	51%	57%
The available evidence is outdated	16%	13%
The evidence is not easily available	22%	40%
The available evidence is not robust enough	22%	17%
The available evidence is not relevant enough to the needs of our provider	18%	53%
There is a lack of senior leadership buy-in within our provider to use the evidence	6%	3%
There is a lack of internal capacity and/or expertise within our provider to reflect (and follow up) on the available evidence and translate the findings into designing of our strategies, activities and practice	45%	30%
There is a lack of internal capacity within our provider to identify the available evidence	33%	40%
There is a lack of internal capacity within our provider to generate the evidence	53%	50%
There is a high turnover in our evaluation and/or access and participation staff	8%	
I cannot identify any barrier	12%	3%

■ University ■ Further education college

Source: Mid-term Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

The Mid-term Survey received 20 open-ended answers to the question of '*Any other challenges not listed*'. There were two common responses. Firstly, seven providers raised the issue that the size of the samples they were looking at in their providers were too small to allow for meaningful statistical analysis. Secondly, six providers said that their challenge was that they had only just started working on the evaluation of their APPs and/or only just appointed responsible teams and individuals so they were not yet fully operational.

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4.2 Role and activities of TASO

4.2.1 Awareness of TASO's work

In the Mid-term Survey, a question was added to measure awareness of specific TASO activities among HEPs. Figure 33 below shows the results. Overall, the results across all areas show a significant level of awareness, with responses indicating no awareness ranging between only 6% and 19%. The main variation in the results relates to the proportion of respondents indicating they are aware 'to a large extent'. The general TASO activities of Guidance and Workshops score significantly higher on this measure than the more specific Research Themes 1-3. The score for Research Theme 3 is particularly low with only 9% indicating they are aware 'to a large extent'.

Figure 33 – Q13 on level of awareness of TASO's activities
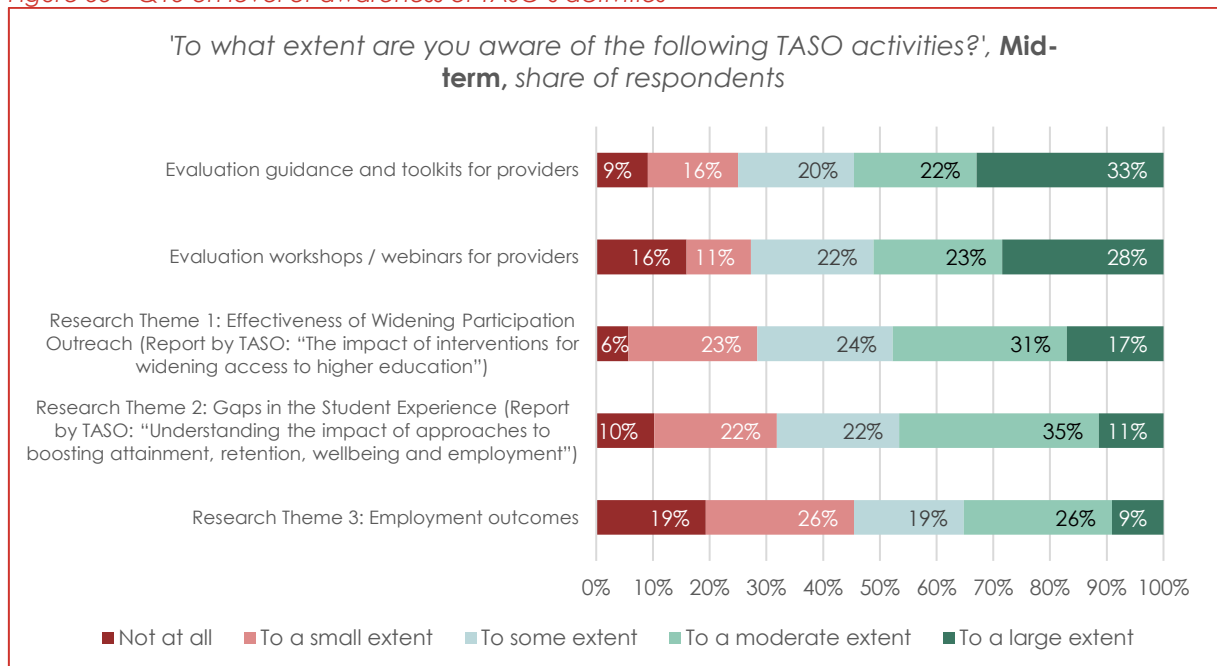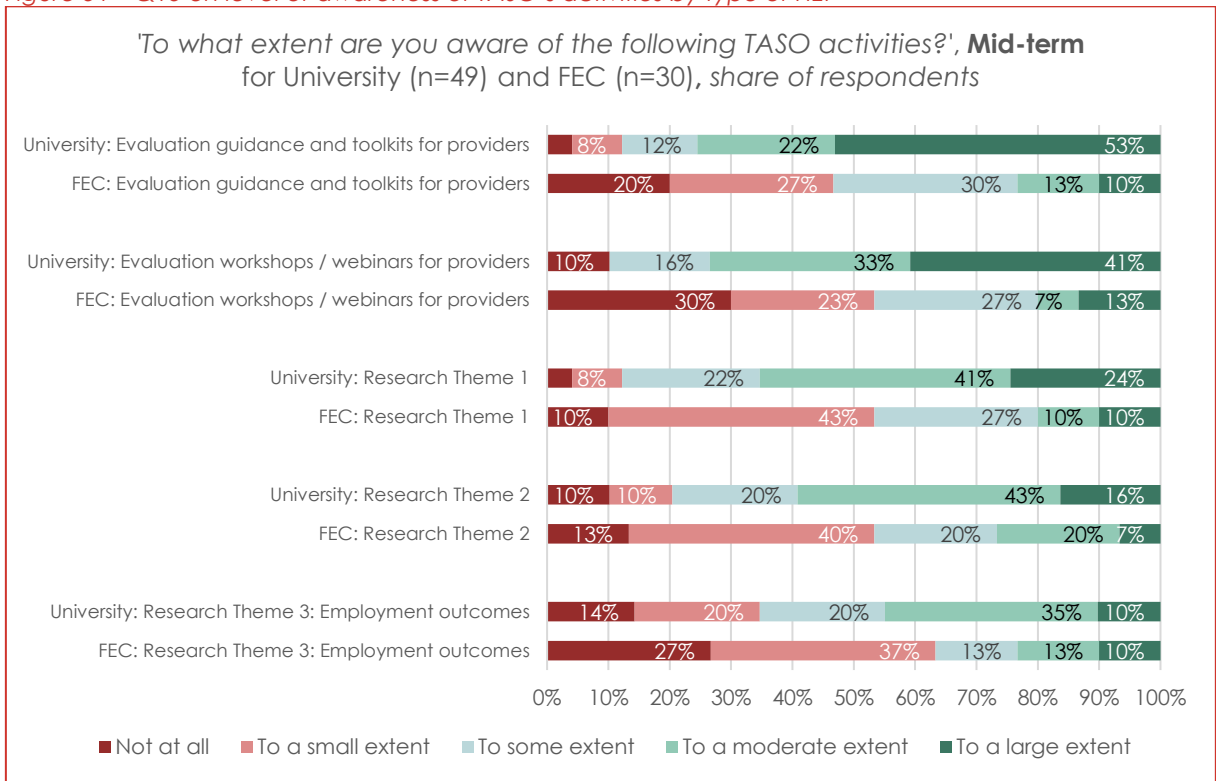

Source: Mid-term Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

Figure 34 compares the levels of awareness of activities reported by university and FEC respondents. The graph shows striking levels of difference in awareness across all the activities, with universities consistently more aware than FECs. The difference is strongest in relation to evaluation guidance and toolkits for providers, with 53% of universities stating they are aware 'to a large extent' compared to only 10% for FECs. This points to persistence of an issue identified in the Baseline Survey around the overall lower awareness of the further education sector about TASO's work.
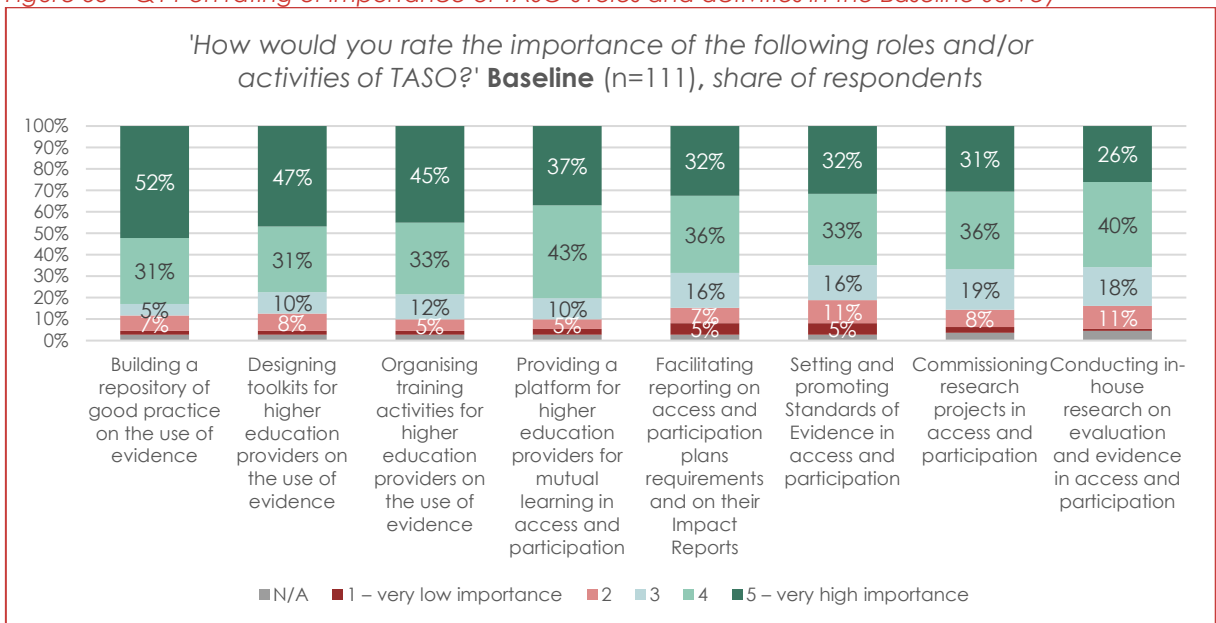
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Figure 34 – Q13 on level of awareness of TASO's activities by type of HEP

'To what extent are you aware of the following TASO activities?', **Mid-term** for University (n=49) and FEC (n=30), *share of respondents*

Source: Mid-term Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

In both surveys, providers were asked to rate the importance of the various roles and activities of TASO. Figure 35 shows the Baseline results and Figure 36 shows the results for the Mid-term Survey. The results across the two surveys show an almost identical pattern with no notable differences.

Figure 35 – Q14 on rating of importance of TASO's roles and activities in the Baseline Survey

'How would you rate the importance of the following roles and/or activities of TASO?' **Baseline** (n=111), *share of respondents*

Source: Baseline Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

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Figure 36 – Q14 on rating of importance given to TASO's roles and activities in the Mid-term Survey

'How would you rate the importance of the following roles and/or activities of TASO?' **Mid-term** (n=88), *share of respondents*
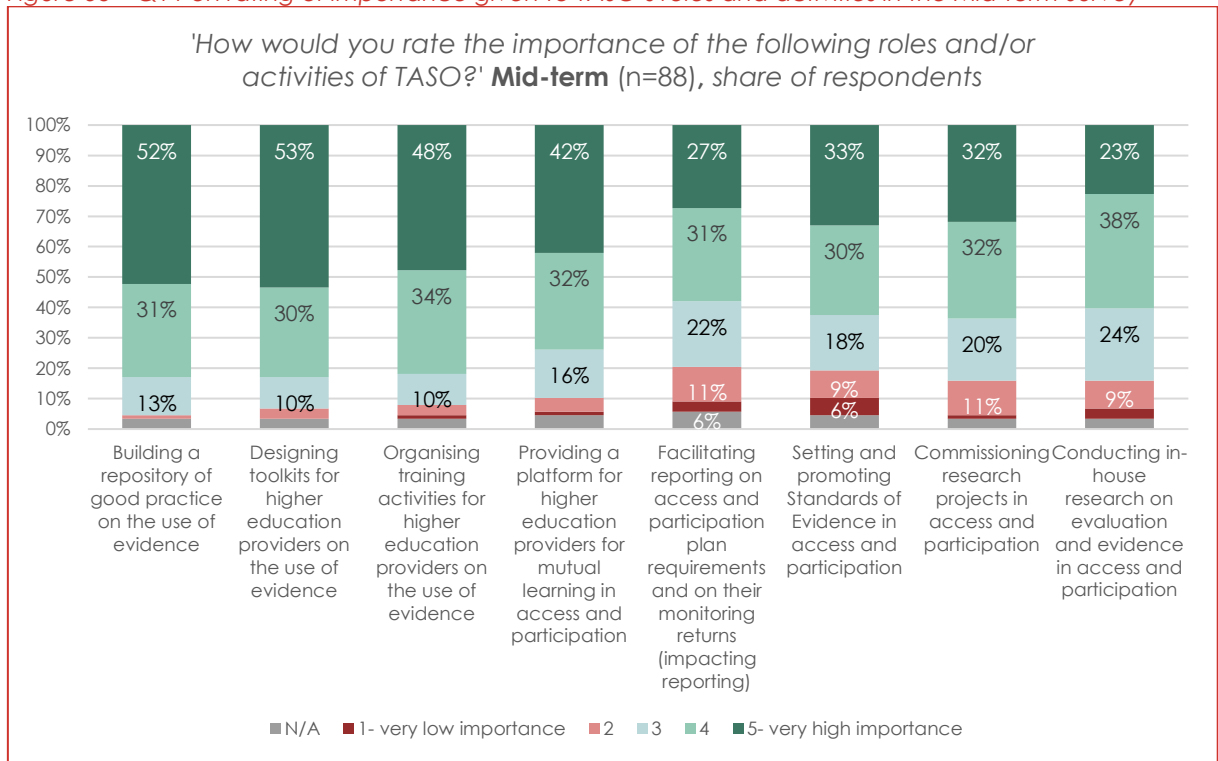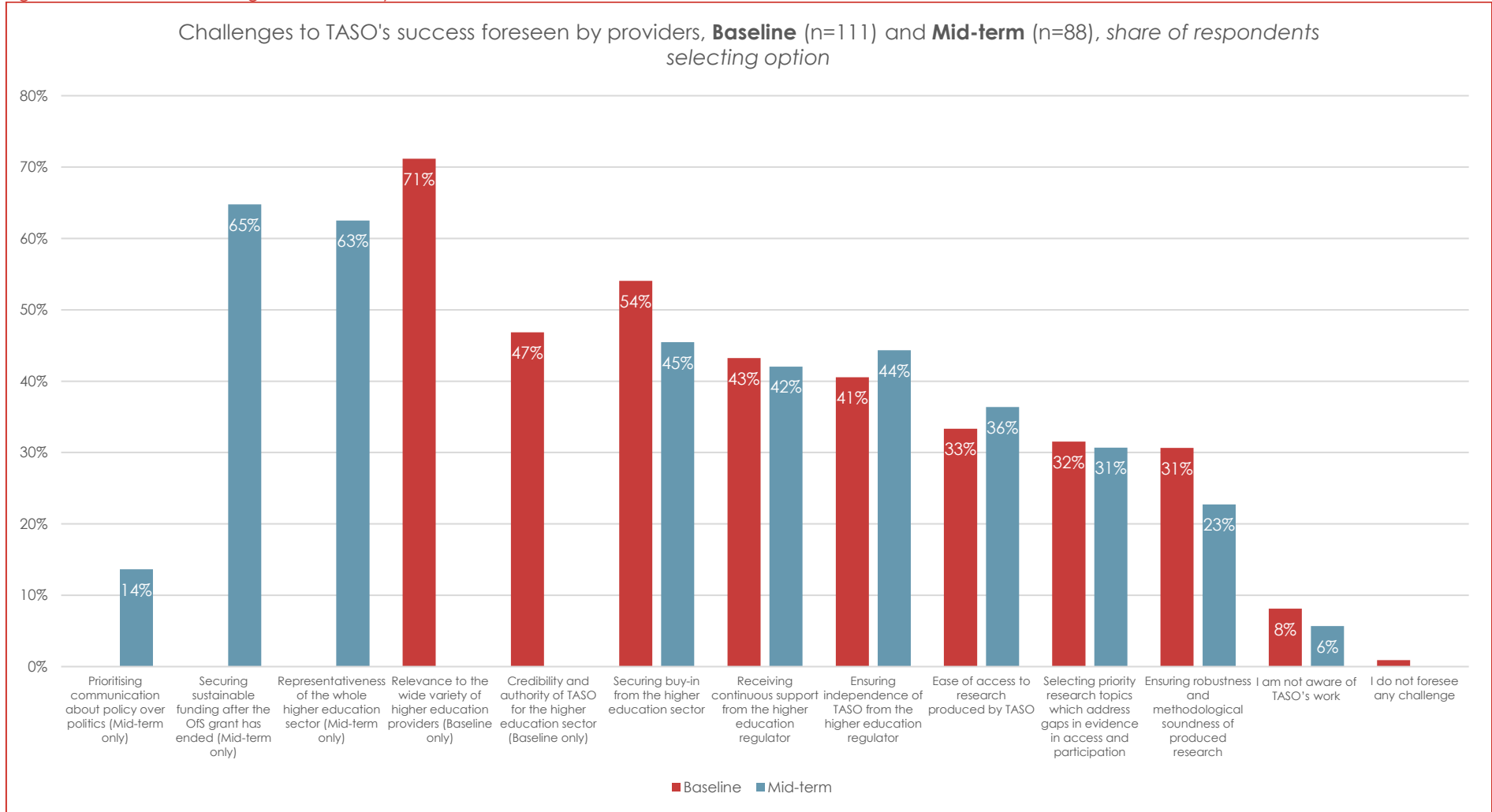
Source: Mid-term Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

4.2.2 Challenges foreseen for TASO

Figure 37 shows the perceptions of providers concerning TASO's main challenges across the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys. These questions did differ to some extent between the surveys but for the questions that appeared in both surveys the results are similar. The newly added option to the Mid-term survey 'Prioritising communication about policy over politics' was not perceived as a major challenge (with only 14% indicating they saw this as a challenge). However, 'Securing sustainable funding after the OfS grant has ended' and 'Representativeness of the whole higher education sector' (another two newly added options) were both seen as major challenges (with 65%, and 63% respectively, indicating they saw this as a challenge).

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Figure 37 – Q15 on challenges foreseen by HEPs for TASO

Challenges to TASO's success foreseen by providers, **Baseline** (n=111) and **Mid-term** (n=88), *share of respondents selecting option*

Source: Baseline and Mid-term Surveys of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

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4.3   Engagement with TASO

4.3.1   Level of engagement to date

Figure 38 shows levels of engagement with TASO to date from HEPs across the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys. The results indicate an improvement in engagement. Part of this improvement can be explained by the higher proportion of university respondents in the Mid-term Survey sample because, as Figure 39 shows, a high proportion of FEC respondents indicate they have not engaged. However, Figure 39 also shows that the change is partly attributable to the fact that for the FEC respondents the proportion indicating they have not engaged has fallen from 89% to 70%. This is still a very high proportion who have not engaged but is at least a positive sign that more engagement is perhaps now taking place.

Figure 38 – Q17 on level of engagement with TASO to date
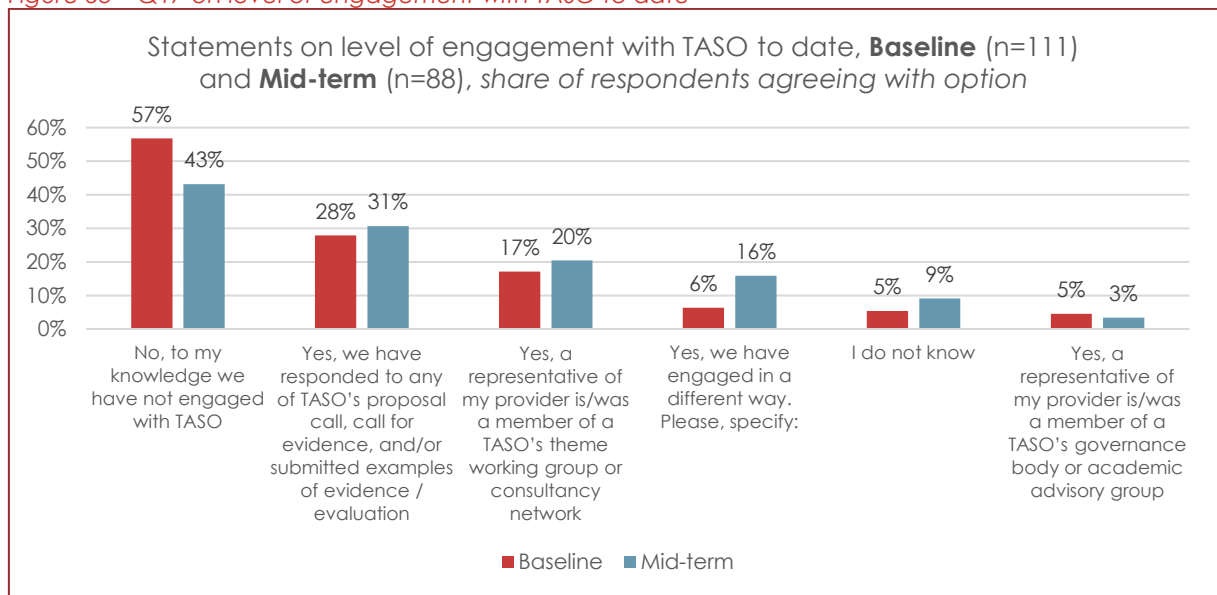
Source: Baseline and Mid-term Surveys of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

Statements on level of engagement with TASO to date, **Baseline** and **Mid-term** by **University** and **FEC,** *share of respondents agreeing with option*
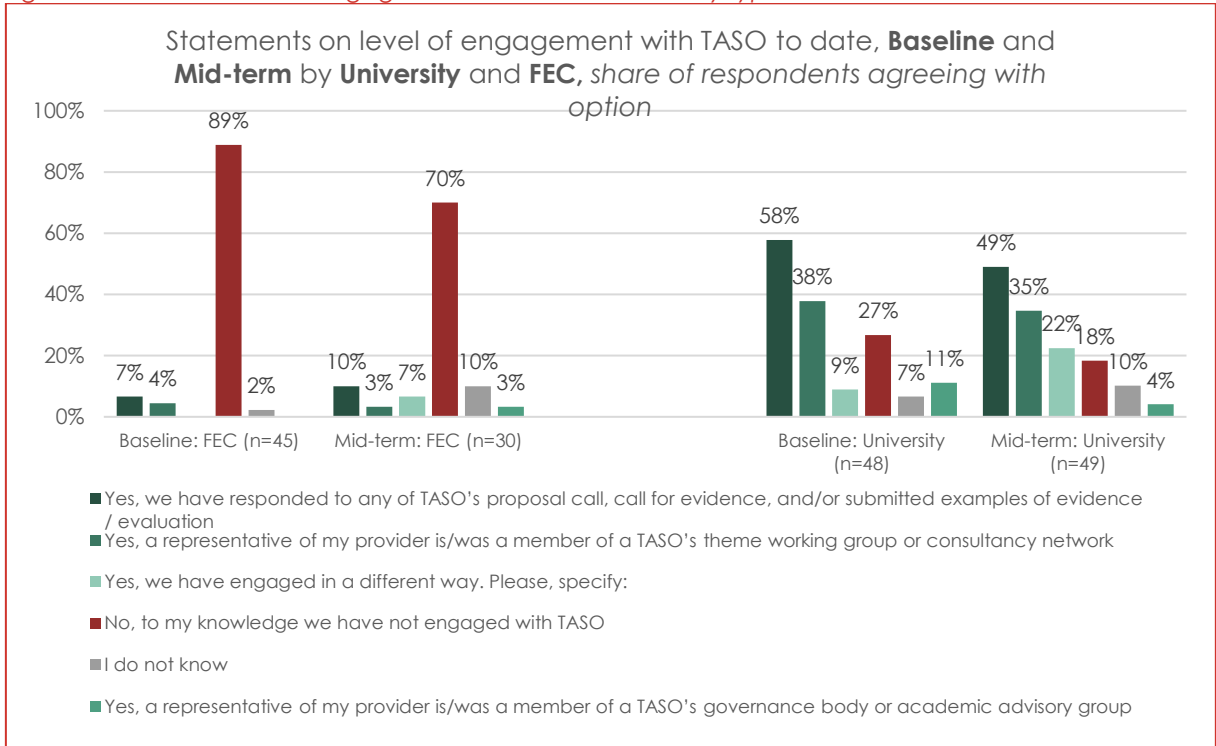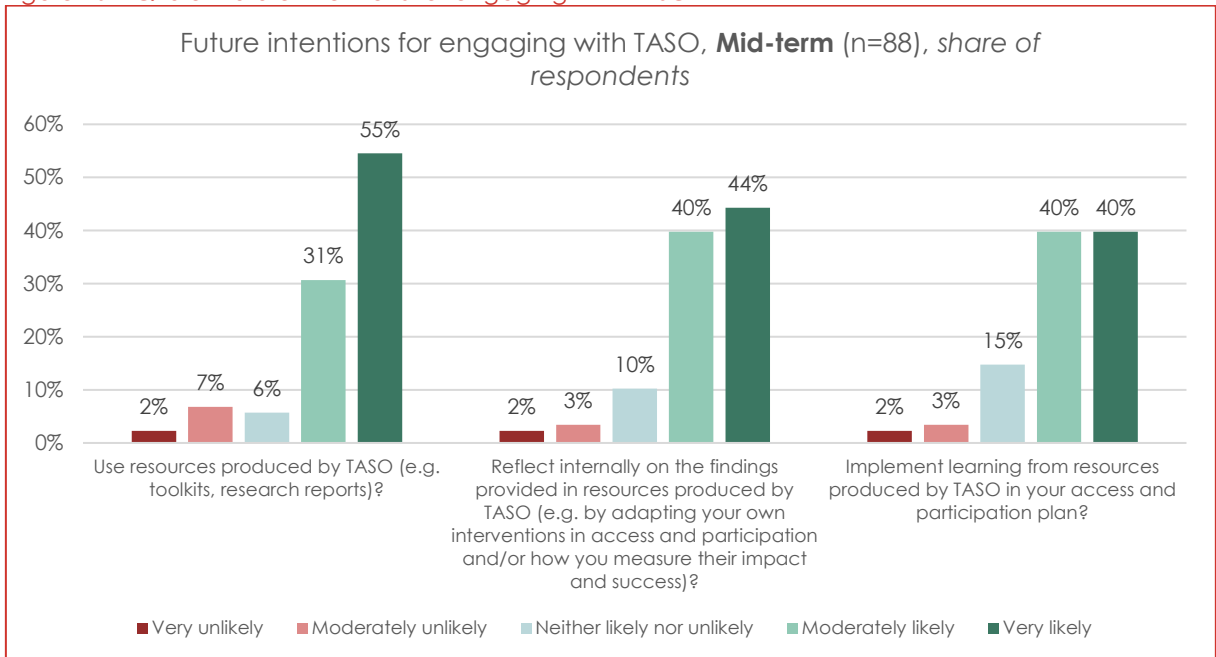
Source: Baseline and Mid-term Surveys of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

4.3.2   *Future intentions for engaging with TASO*

Question 16 is a new question in the Mid-term Survey asking about '*Future intentions for engaging with TASO*'. Figure 40 shows that the levels of intention are high across the three categories of engagement that the respondents were asked about, with no significant difference between them.

Future intentions for engaging with TASO, **Mid-term** (n=88), *share of respondents*

Source: Mid-term Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

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Figure 41 looks at differing levels of intentions across universities and FECs and shows a consistent pattern of much higher intention to engage for universities than for FECs.

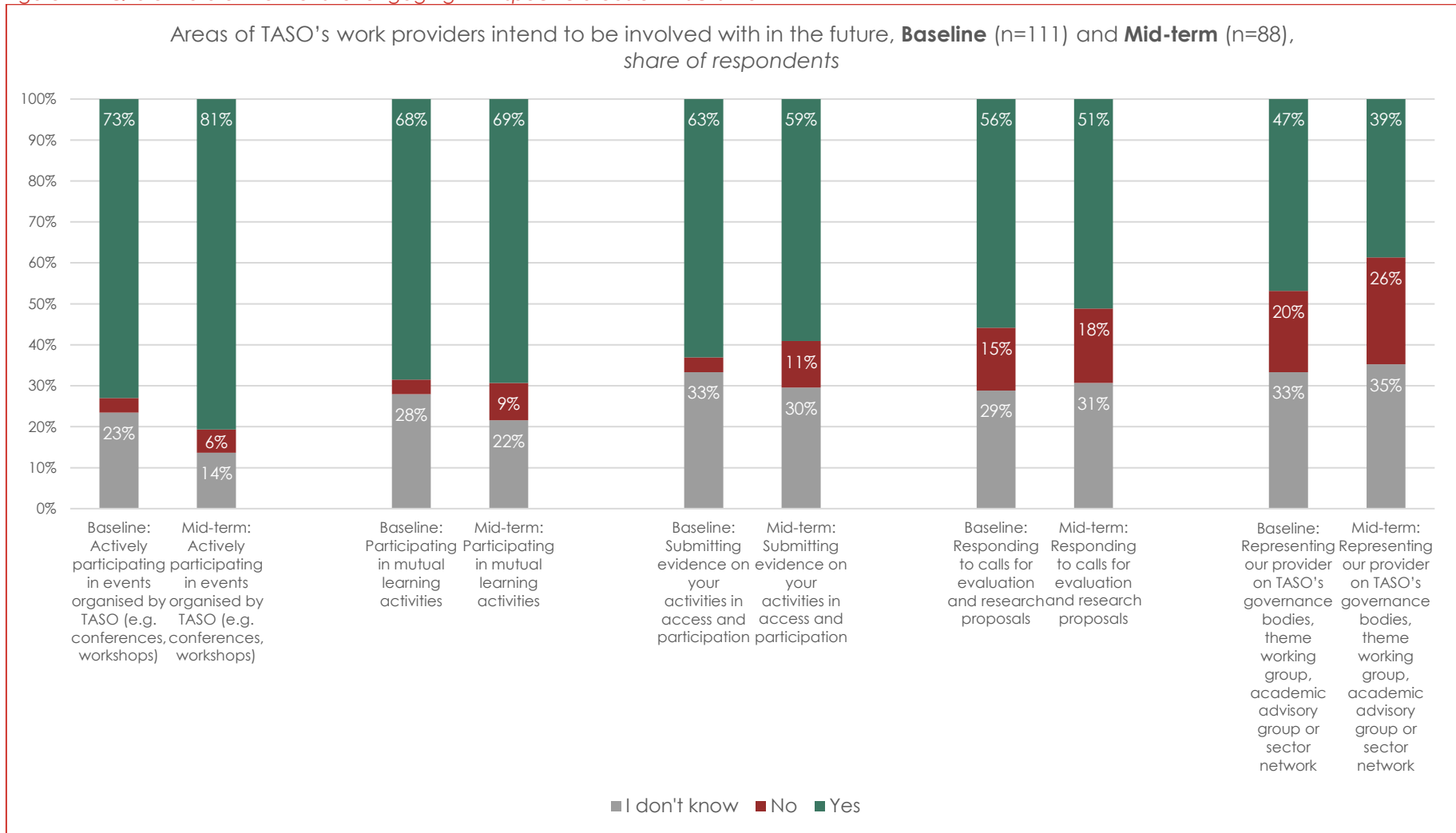*Figure 41 – Q16 on future intentions for engaging with TASO by type of HEP*
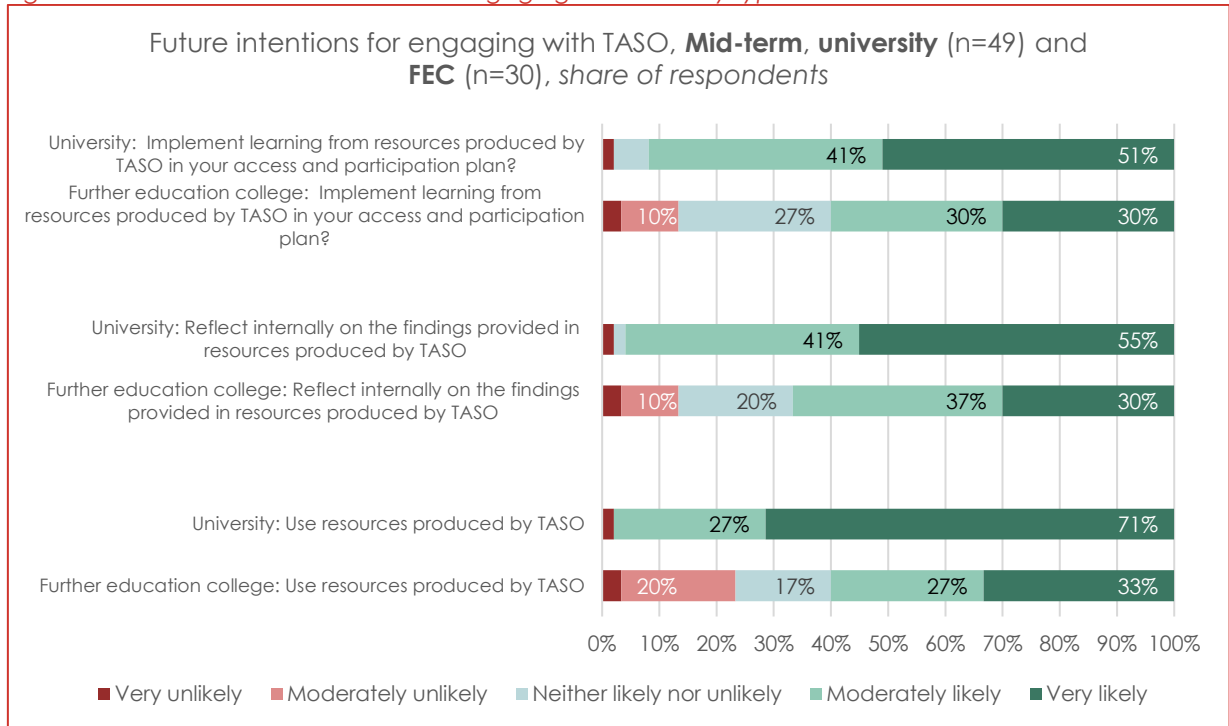
Source: Mid-term Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

Question 18 also relates to future intentions towards involvement with TASO's work. This question was asked across both surveys, allowing for comparison, and it relates to some further specific TASO activities. Figure 42 shows the results across the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys. Although the intentions for engaging with TASO's events and mutual learning activities have increased between the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys, the intentions for engaging with other areas of TASO's work have seen a decrease, mainly those around TASO's research (e.g. submission of evidence and responding to calls for evaluation and research proposals).

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Figure 42 – Q18 on future intentions for engaging with specific areas of TASO's work

Areas of TASO's work providers intend to be involved with in the future, **Baseline** (n=111) and **Mid-term** (n=88), *share of respondents*

Source: Baseline and Mid-term Surveys of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis

5   Conclusions and implications

Use of evidence

- **Main finding: The Mid-term Survey results indicate that, overall, the use of evidence in access and participation in the higher education sector has increased between 2020 and 2021.**

- **A very high share of providers (93.2%) uses narrative evidence (Type 1) to inform their APPs. A vast majority (83%) uses empirical enquiry evidence (Type 2). Around one third (33%) uses causality type evidence (Type 3).** Figure 43 shows these results broken down by type of provider. The most significant difference between universities and FECs is in the use of Type 2 evidence. Around 92% of universities and only 63% of FECs use this type of evidence.

Figure 43 – Use of the different types of evaluation evidence to inform APPs; share of respondents using this type of evidence; by type of HEP

Type of evidence	Universities (n=49)	FECs (n=30)
Type 1: Narrative	96%	87%
Type 2: Empirical enquiry	92%	63%
Type 3: Causality	31%	27%

Source: Mid-term Survey of HEPs; analysis by Technopolis; note: respondents were allowed to select multiple options, therefore the totals do not add up to 100%.

- There exist regional differences in the use of various types of evidence. More than 40% of providers from London, North-East, South-East and West Midlands use Type 3 evidence. However, less than 20% of providers from East Midlands, East of England and Yorkshire and the Humber do so.

- A large majority (72%) of providers plan to focus more on evaluation measures in the later stages of implementation of their APPs, and 70% of them have already implemented the evaluation measures included in their APPs. The majority of universities (92%) and FECs (60%) intend to implement learning from resources produced by TASO in their APPs.

- Providers continue to use evidence in access and participation across all stages of the student journey. There has been an increase in the use of evidence across all four stages of the student journey (access, continuation, attainment, progression) between the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys.

- Across all statements (around the use of evaluation and evidence in access and participation; question 8), the proportions of respondents who either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement have increased between the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys.

- The Mid-term Survey results, and their comparison with the Baseline Survey results, highlighted, in particular, a considerable improvement in the way the further education sector (and FECs) approaches and uses evidence in access and participation. This was evident across several sections of the survey (e.g. questions 5 and 8).

- There has been a considerable increase in the use of own evidence (i.e. own research evidence, evaluation from own specific activities) between the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys. This is particularly important because the use of evidence and research generated by other providers has decreased in the same period.

- FECs reported slightly higher degrees of generation of causality type evidence (Type 3) than universities. Currently, no explanation for this can be provided, however it is a point that we will focus on in the later stages of evaluation, and can be further explored, for example, in the analysis of the APPs, and through TASO's further engagement with the sector.

- Overall, sharing of evidence across the sector remains a point of concern. The proportion of universities sharing evidence across the sector has decreased from 59% to 57% between the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys. This further exacerbates the finding from the Baseline pointing to deficits in the degree of sharing of evidence across the university sector. On the other hand, in the further education sector, the proportions have slightly increased from 34% to 43%.

- The perception that evidence is not easily available has fallen significantly for universities, from 42% to 22%, indicating that universities no longer see this issue as one of the most significant barriers. Trying to explain why this happened would be speculation at this stage. It could be a combination of TASO reaching out to the sector on numerous occasions over the past year, explaining what the TASO team can offer to the sector, and also the fact that providers have been increasingly using evidence (which, in turn, can strengthen the perception that evidence is more easily available). However, this is not the case in the further education sector, where FECs still see the availability of evidence as a considerable challenge ahead.

- The degree of embeddedness of the use of evidence in business as usual is growing, especially in the university sector.

- The most common arrangement for evaluating interventions in access and participation in the higher education sector is evaluation by access and participation practitioners or officers themselves. Specialist evaluators and/or specialist evaluation units are still much less common, which confirms the trend identified in the Baseline Survey.

- The Mid-term Survey confirmed the issue of disconnect between academics and access and participation practitioners, which was identified in interviews with providers during the Baseline phase of the evaluation of TASO.

- The Mid-term Survey results did <u>not</u> confirm the Baseline finding (coming from interviews with providers) around the high turnover in evaluation and/or access and participation staff representing a significant barrier to using evidence in access and participation.

Providers and TASO

- **Main finding: The level of engagement of the higher education sector with TASO and its work has increased since the Baseline Survey. There is still a large proportion of FECs that have not engaged with TASO in any way (although this has improved since the Baseline).** This relates to the point below about the limited level of awareness of TASO in the further education sector.

- The levels of awareness of TASO's evaluation guidance and toolkits, as well as of events organised for providers, are higher than those of specific TASO research themes. This suggests that the more general TASO activities are more successful at targeting wider audiences than the research activities (and their outputs), which perhaps might be perceived as too specific by providers. However, the reasons for this would need to be explored further, probably through qualitative research.

- The further education sector is much less aware of TASO's work than the university sector. This points to persistence of an issue identified in the Baseline Survey. TASO still needs to focus more on targeted communication towards this sector.

- The perception in the higher education sector of which TASO activities are important has not significantly changed between the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys, which suggests that the priorities of the sector in the area of access and participation remain also largely the same as in 2020.

- Although intentions for engaging with TASO's events and mutual learning activities have increased between the Baseline and Mid-term Surveys, future intentions for engaging with other areas of TASO's work have seen a decrease, mainly those around TASO's research (e.g. submission of evidence and responding to calls for evaluation and research proposals). This is perhaps an issue for TASO to follow up on and tweak their communication strategy in order to avoid reaching the point of communication fatigue within the target audience too soon.

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