

Online Communities for Knowledge and Belonging

Mark Fuller (UCL), Erin McNeill (University of Leeds) and Amnah Khan (The Ogden Trust)

The Ogden Trust Community

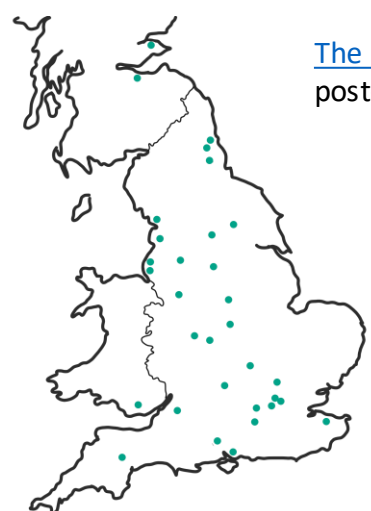


Figure 1: Map of Great Britain with the locations of both funded and previously-funded OOs, showing the geographical spread of the network. To see the interactive version, visit <https://www.ogdentrust.com/about-us/map/outreach-officers>.

The Ogden Trust aims to increase the uptake of physics for all post-16, particularly for those from under-represented groups.

This community is a network of Ogden Outreach Officers (OOOs) part-funded by the Ogden Trust and based in university physics departments across Great Britain, meeting twice a year.

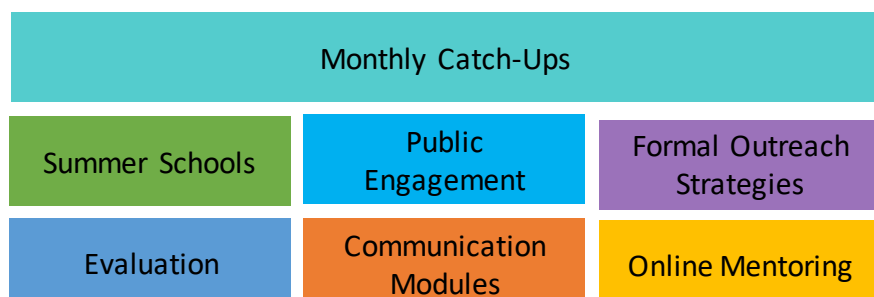


In their roles, OOs:

- ✓ Support local teachers in their teaching
- ✓ Provide enrichment and enhancement activities for under-represented groups
- ✓ Support UGs and PGs to work with schools
- ✗ Feel isolated in their physics departments
- ✗ Work independently on projects and events with stakeholders
- ✗ Have limited opportunities for collaborative work with other OOs due to geography

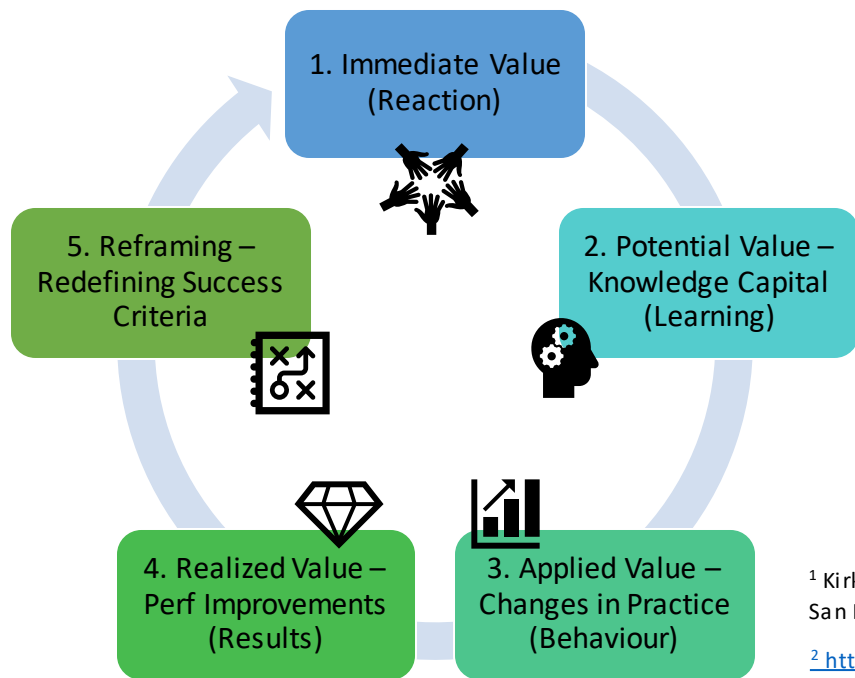
Building a New Community Online

In response to remote working, the Ogden Trust implemented weekly online drop-in meetings under a variety of relevant themes, to give OOs an opportunity to meet regularly, share best practice, and get feedback on their current projects.



Evaluating Our Effectiveness

These informal networks are often difficult to evaluate in their effectiveness and, even with the formalized Communities of Practice, success can be difficult to measure if there is no definite project outcome. These five stages represent the ways in which networks can not only be simply evaluated, but also help to shape the structure.



Not all five stages will fit every community, and the cycle could be over the length of an entire project or only the length of a meeting. Each stage is its own iterative process, although we found the order was not necessarily followed.

Figure 2: Kirkpatrick (1994)¹ offered a structure to evaluate training providers above and beyond standardized feedback on presenter pace and topic, and this has been further enhanced in the value creation framework in Wenger, Trayner, Latt (2011)²

¹ Kirkpatrick, D.L. (1994). Evaluating Training Programs: the four levels. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

² <https://wenger-trayner.com/resources/publications/evaluation-framework/>

Case Studies

We have selected two case studies to showcase the effectiveness of our online community in delivering outcomes from our working groups.

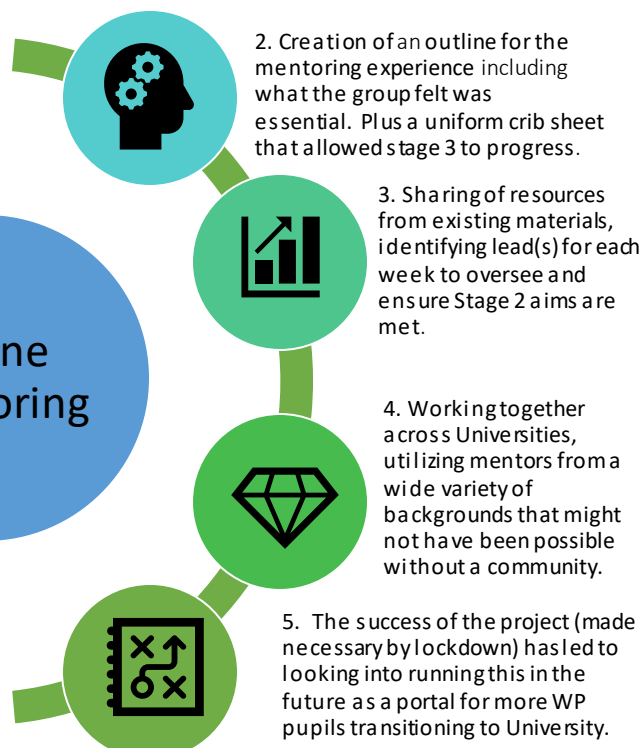
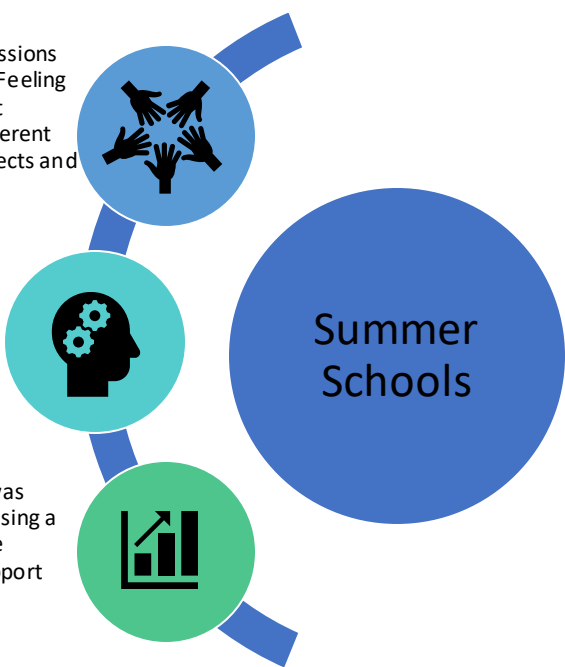
Rationale for Online Mentoring Working Group

- Concern from both students and universities for Year 13 students who would have a six-month gap before starting university
- Opportunity to provide targeted support to young people over a large geographic region

1. Immediate Value was generated through discussions and shared experience. Feeling part of a community that although working on different projects could share aspects and unburden concerns.

2. Discussions and documents regarding the pros & cons of various platforms, child protection and methods of engagement were shared.

3. Each summer school was created independently, using a variety of platforms. The iterative process and support allowed a less isolated approach.

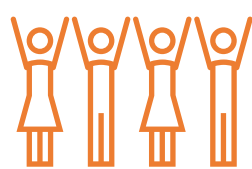


Figures 3 and 4: Two examples of Ogden Officer online communities that utilize the evaluation criteria, demonstrating how different stages can be implemented in your projects.

Rationale for Summer Schools Working Group

- Instead of in-person events, many summer schools had moved online at universities
- There was a lack of expertise in our community for how to best proceed with virtual events

Results From Our New Online Community



- ✓ Increased job satisfaction from a sense of community
- ✓ Focused on outputs and outcomes in the online environment
- ✓ Enabled nationwide, rather than localized, collaboration
- ✓ Accelerated rate of working due to instant feedback
- ✓ Pooled resources and shared workload while learning best practice from others

Tips for Creating An Online Community

- 1 Scope** – Identify and keep tight control of the scope of your community. May be better to have two or more projects rather than one large one. Have clear objectives and well-defined roles.
- 2 Reflective** – The evaluation framework can help keep community meetings and projects on track. Always ask what you are achieving and if it still meets your aims.
- 3 Responsive** – Do not be alarmed if your original aims change, you might decide the most valuable part of the community is one you did not originally think of.