

# Evolution of the Participation Bursary

*A Journey in Evaluation,  
Student Engagement and  
Co-Creation*



# Overview

- Background
- Why evaluate?
- 22-23 Evaluation + Theory of Change
- 23-24 Evaluation + Student Co-creation
- 24-25 Plans



# Participation Bursary Background

## What is it?

- Encourage participation for disadvantaged students
- **Aim** – Covering some of the costs associated with clubs and societies including memberships (club/society + gym), sports kit, equipment and travel.



# What is it?

- Access and Participation Plan (APP) objective\*
- Helps Newcastle Uni address its Widening Participation Goals
  - Improve equality of opportunity

## Extracurriculars?

- Contribute to sense of belonging, inclusion and community
- Financial barriers
- Impacts continuation and success



# Participation Bursary Background

# Participation Bursary Timeline



# Participation Bursary Timeline

2022-2023

Joined

+ Estranged

2020-2021

£280 Maximum  
Three Tier System  
Stage 0/1 Home UG\*

+ Disability

+ Caring responsibilities

+ Home postcode

2021-2022

Stage 0/1/2 UG  
Semester 2 - PG\*\*  
631 students

2014-2015

250 students x £200 Bursary  
Stage 0/1 Home UG\*  
Low Income + Care-Leavers

\*UG - Undergraduate

\*\*PG - Postgraduate

# Participation Bursary Background

## Funding

- APP Funding - **Undergraduate** students who pay **Home** fees **ONLY**
- Additional funding – less restrictions – opened it to **Postgraduate** and **International** Students who met the same criteria
  - 21-22 year – PG first time
  - 22-23 year – PG and International First Time



# 22-23 Year

## How did the 22-23 Year Go?

- 10<sup>th</sup> year - open at start of term 1
  - Extremely high volume of applications
  - Closed form early – contrast to previous years (one month vs entire year)
- **697/791 Successful Applications**
  - ↑ 10.5%
- £138 484 spent
- Challenges?





# Why Evaluate?

- **Access and Participation Plans (APP)**
  - Office for Students + Future APP – robust evaluations
    - Theory of Change
- University funding
- Being new
- Student Feedback – Improve the
- Staff Feedback
  - Manageable
  - Fit for Purpose



# Theory Of Change (TOC)

- *Comprehensive method of evaluation that illustrates the reasons behind a desired change that is expected to happen and the pathways of how this desired change would happen in certain contexts.*
- Identify **gaps** and **areas of improvements**
  - Revised scheme to better benefit staff and students
- **Collaborated** – Inclusive Newcastle Knowledge Centre
  - Expertise on TOC and APPs



# Theory Of Change (TOC)

## What did it entail?

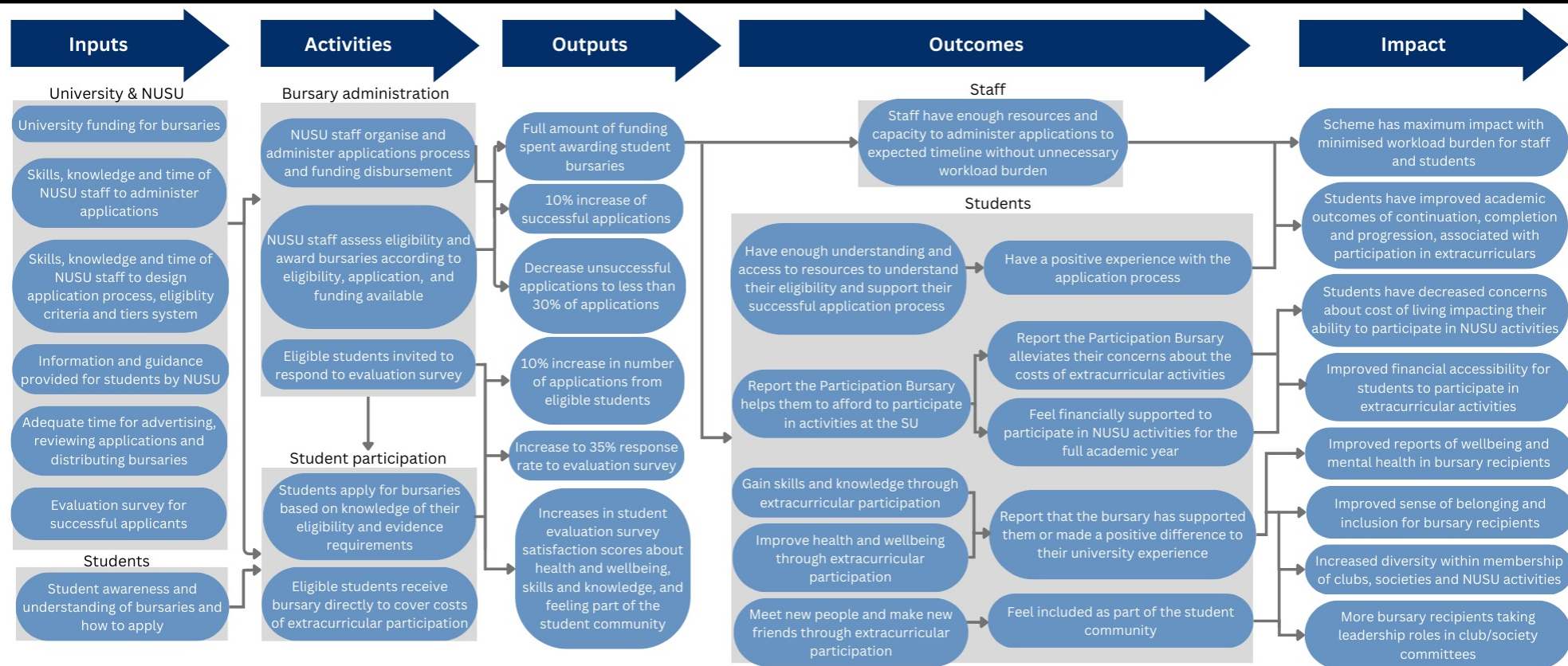
- Methodology Understand
- Hindsight – Create 21–22-year TOC Model
- Process and reflecting
  - What went well?
  - What did not go well?

Loads of  
Post Its



# Theory Of Change

<b>CONTEXT</b>	The Office for Students has identified <b>inequalities in access to extracurricular activities</b> (e.g. societies and clubs) as a <b>risk to equality of opportunity</b> for particular student groups, suggesting that differential access to participation in enrichment activities may lead to differential outcomes in terms of progression into further study and employment, supported by existing research (OfS 2023; Stuart, 2011). Previous Participation Bursary evaluation reports have shown that <b>financial barriers to participation are a key reason for these inequalities</b> , and that the current cost of living crisis is increasing financial pressure on students from various backgrounds and lived experiences. To improve equality of opportunity as part of Newcastle University's Access and Participation Plan, the Participation Bursaries scheme aims to remove some of the barriers to extracurricular participation for students from underrepresented backgrounds by covering some of the costs of getting involved in NUSU and University activities.
<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	To improve accessibility and inclusion of student engagement in various <u>extracurricular activities</u> at Newcastle University Students' Union through <u>distribution of direct funding to students</u> to <b>mitigate financial barriers to participation</b> , aiming to <b>improve sense of belonging, inclusion and wellbeing</b> for all under-represented students at Newcastle University.



Assumptions of the programme design	Risks to delivery
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students are <b>aware</b> of the Participation Bursaries</li> <li>2. Students are <b>able to apply</b> for the participation bursary and are <b>eligible</b></li> <li>3. There is <b>sufficient funding</b> to support the eligible students</li> <li>4. The students <b>want to use the participation bursary</b> to get involved with extracurricular activities</li> <li>5. Getting involved in extracurricular activities helps students <b>feel included, feel a sense of belonging</b> and <b>improves students' wellbeing</b></li> <li>6. <b>Direct funding</b> to eligible students is better than a reimbursement process</li> <li>7. There is a <b>relationship</b> between NUSU staff facilitating the participation bursary and the relevant university contacts</li> <li>8. There is a <b>manageable workload</b> and staff available to deliver the allocation and distribution of the participation bursary</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Lack of accessibility to and understanding of the bursary</b> will prevent some students from applying despite being eligible as well as students who are unsuccessful as they are ineligible</li> <li>2. <b>Misunderstanding/confusion about the application process</b>, application form, or purpose of the bursary leads to <b>lower quality applications</b> which require more follow up and <b>additional workload</b> for staff</li> <li>3. The students <b>struggle to justify the amount they require</b> without using a reimbursement process</li> <li>4. There are <b>not sufficient funds</b> to distribute to all eligible students who apply</li> <li>5. The bursaries are <b>not distributed to students in a timely way</b>, meaning students have to use their own funds which could be detrimental to their financial situation</li> </ol>

# How did the 22-23 Year Go?

## Quantitatively and qualitatively

- Evaluation survey
- Staff input
- TOC

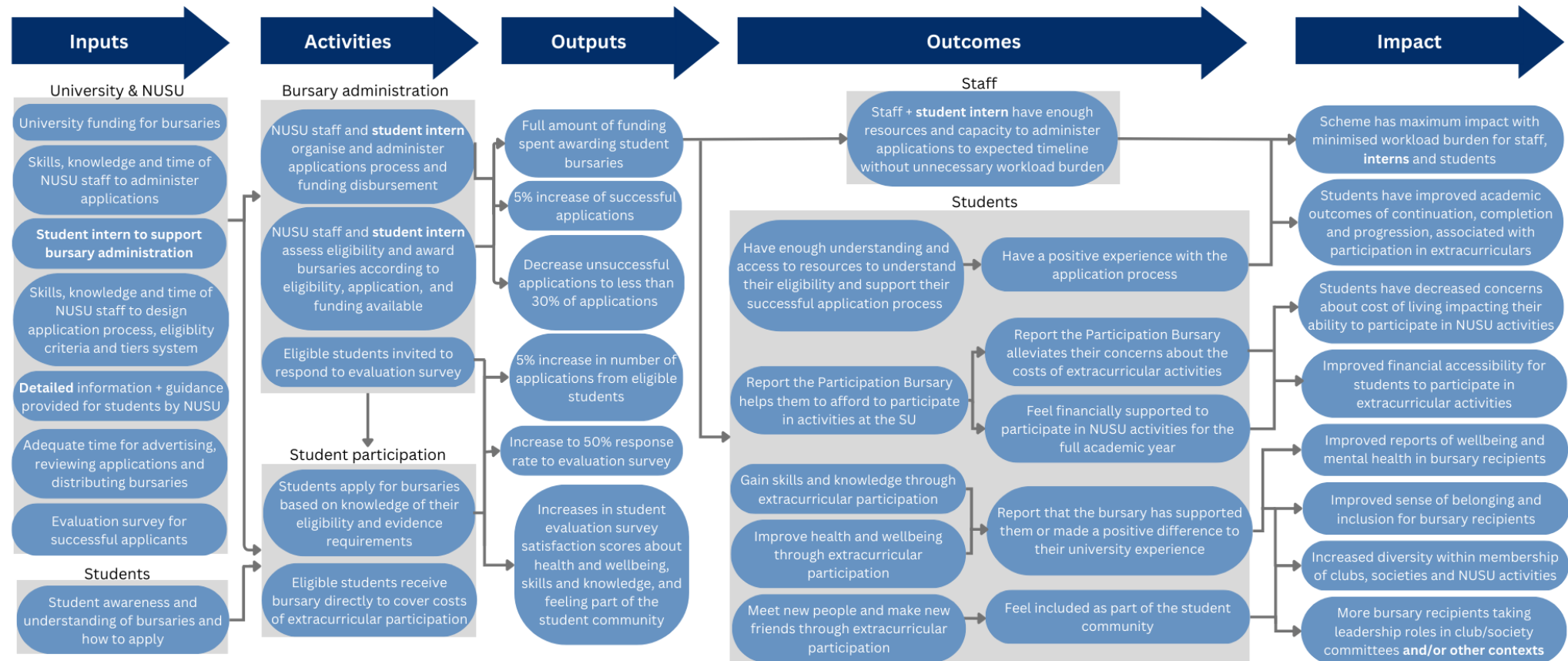
## ISSUES

- Students' expectations + experience
- Application Process
- Workload
- Website
- Tiers
- Eligibility Criteria
- Evidence Requirements

- **96%** of respondents agreed that their Participation Bursary was **necessary** to **engage with NUSU opportunities**
- **96%** of respondents agreed that the Participation Bursary **helps** them **afford to participate**
- **83%** of respondents **agreed** that the **amount was sufficient**



# Theory Of Change 23-24



Assumptions of the programme design	Risks to delivery
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students are <b>aware</b> of the Participation Bursaries</li> <li>2. Students are <b>able to apply</b> for the participation bursary and are <b>eligible</b></li> <li>3. There is <b>sufficient funding</b> to support the eligible students</li> <li>4. The students <b>want to use the participation bursary</b> to get involved with extracurricular activities</li> <li>5. Getting involved in extracurricular activities helps students <b>feel included, feel a sense of belonging and improves students' wellbeing</b></li> <li>6. <b>Direct funding</b> to eligible students is better than a reimbursement process</li> <li>7. There is a <b>relationship</b> between NUSU staff facilitating the participation bursary and the relevant university contacts</li> <li>8. Hiring a <b>student intern</b> to support bursary administration will <b>reduce workload burden</b> and positively affect the application process for staff, interns and students</li> <li>9. There is a <b>manageable workload</b> and staff available to deliver the allocation and distribution of the participation bursary</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Lack of accessibility to and understanding of the bursary</b> will prevent some students from applying despite being eligible as well as students who are unsuccessful as they are ineligible</li> <li>2. <b>Misunderstanding/confusion about the application process</b>, application form, or purpose of the bursary leads to <b>lower quality applications</b> which require more follow up and <b>additional workload</b> for staff</li> <li>3. A student intern <b>may not be the most effective input</b> to spread bursary administration workload</li> <li>4. The students <b>struggle to justify the amount they require</b> without using a reimbursement process</li> <li>5. There are <b>not sufficient funds</b> to distribute to all eligible students who apply</li> <li>6. The bursaries are <b>not distributed to students in a timely way</b>, meaning students have to use their own funds which could be detrimental to their financial situation</li> </ol>

22-23  
Year

## Main Recommendations for 23-24 Year

- Update the Participation Bursary *Application Form*
- *Timeline* Implemented and Communicated to Students
- Hire a *Student Intern*
- Increased *Information* about the Participation Bursary on both the Website and *Guidance Documents*
- Increased *Transparency* with Students – Evaluation Reports
- Increased Number of *Tiers*
- Update *Eligibility Criteria*
- Update *Evidence Criteria*
- Re-evaluate *Max Amount*
- Remain *Open to All Students*



23-24  
Year

Planning

## Positives:

- Hire **Student Intern**
- Clarified some **Eligibility Criteria**
- Update **Evidence required**
  - Estranged, Disability, Care-experienced
- Remain **Open to All**

## Changes

- Tiers (+)
- Registering Interest (+)

## Challenges:

- Timeline not communicated
- No increased information
- No increased transparency + reports
- Increased workload – process change
  - > 60 hours worked





# How did the 23-24 Year Go?

- Impact of lack of communication at the necessary time
- The **recommendations** from last year were not all implemented
  - University Communication
  - Negative impact on SU + student expectations.
- Additional funding in November only – confusing messaging
- **823/851 Successful Applications**
  - ↑↑**18%** bursaries allocated
  - Unsuccess rate –only 3.3% (↓↓)
- £192,500 (↑↑ 38%)



23-24  
Year

# 23-24 Year

## Evaluation

- **Co-evaluation with a student**

- Importance of student led and student insight in the project
- Increased responsibility - role valuable for them

- **Collaboration**

- SU Staff Guidance

- **Quantitatively and qualitatively**

- evaluation survey
- staff input
- reflection of the Theory of Change  
22-23 recommendations

- **99%** of survey respondents - extracurricular activity **costs were a concern** for them before receiving the Bursary
- **97%** of survey respondents - Participation Bursary **reduces concerns** about the costs of extracurricular activities
- **83%** of survey respondents - Bursary amount received was **sufficient**



23-24  
Year

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- ***Student Intern***
- ***Communication*** – Students expectations
- Increased ***information*** – better understanding
- Financially ***accessible*** – transparency
- Increase ***Maximum Amount***
  - Potentially Sliding Scale
- Remain Open to all Students\*\*



# PLANNING:

- New name
- New **maximum amount**,
  - Sliding scale to be piloted
- Improved **transparency about costs** – pilot draft document implemented
- **Improved communication** – purpose, eligibility + limitations, timeline
- Continue with our **student intern**
- Piloting use of **MS Automate**
- Open to All?\*

**Try something  
+ fail fast**



**24-25  
Year**

# SUMMARY

## THE PROJECT'S EVOLUTION

- Importance of co-creation + collaboration
  - New ideas
  - New perspectives/knowledge
- Student voice/ideas
- Hidden costs have a BIG impact
- The current student body
- **Fail Fast + new things**



# Thank you

**Any questions?**

