FAQs for NCOP Consortia

Finances

1. What does 'spent' mean?

By 'spent' we mean funds that have been used to purchase goods and services which have been received as part of the delivery of the programme. For example, an invoice received but not paid is not classed as spent and should not be included within that month's spending. Outstanding committed costs are commitments to pay for something you have ordered or received, but have not yet paid for. For example, purchase order items that are yet to be invoiced or timesheets that have not yet been posted are classed as outstanding. Where work is contracted, partners' payments can only be classified as spent for the purposes of the quarterly financial return once the work is performed to a satisfactory standard. The lead institution is responsible for obtaining information from partner institutions and submitting a monitoring report on behalf of the consortium in line with the requirements set out in its NCOP award letter of September or October 2016.

We do not consider that funds are spent if they have been transferred to a partner organisation. The funding needs to have been used by the partner to pay for an activity or to meet other costs for us to consider it spent. Therefore you should not report this expenditure as actual spend at the point in time when you transfer the funding to your partner, but should wait until the activity takes place (or is paid for) and record the expenditure then.

2. Can NCOP funding be used to provide attainment-raising activity for target students?

The NCOP programme is targeted at those students who are on a trajectory to go onto higher education in terms of attainment, but who may choose not to. Therefore attainment-raising activity should not be a main focus of NCOP funding. However, we know that raising attainment above the minimum requirement at GCSE level will open up a wider range of options for young people, and it will therefore be up to consortia to work closely with schools in their target wards to determine whether some students with the potential to go onto higher education would benefit from this activity.

3. Can NCOP funding be used to purchase IT equipment?

Consortia may need to purchase IT equipment to support their planned activities. This should only be done where these items will directly benefit the successful delivery of activities and appropriate steps should be taken to ensure value for money. At the end of the programme, we will not seek ownership of these items. It will be for the accountable institution and partners to agree the ownership of any equipment purchased. Any large purchases or non-budgeted items should be discussed with your account manager.

4. What happens if consortia spend less than their allocation?

The OfS is not allowed to provide funding in advance of need, and consortia should discuss any anticipated underspending with their account manager in the first instance. Where slippage has occurred, there are opportunities to manage funding through the OfS's quarterly financial monitoring process, by re-profiling financial forecasts and updating action plans where necessary.

5. What should consortia consider when deciding what activities to provide to eligible learners?

All activities should be considered with the overall aims and objectives of the NCOP programme in mind. With any activities, whether provided in-house or by a third party, consortia will need to consider whether this activity is the most effective use of funds and how participation will be tracked and evaluated.

Data and tracking
6. How should consortia track applicants involved in NCOP activity?

As set out in the 'Guidance for consortia', all consortia are expected to have subscribed to and be using the services of either the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) or a similar mechanism (such as the East Midlands Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Partnership or the Aimhigher West Midlands Activity Database) that allows for the tracking of individual learners into and through higher education (HE), through linking with national

datasets. CFE Research (the national evaluation team) is working with all three sets of organisations in order to analyse and maximise the value of this commitment.

7. How does the incoming General Data Protection Regulation affect our ability to track students in this way?

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) comes into force on 25 May 2018 and will bring with it a number of new requirements for organisations when handling personal data. While the principles remain similar to the existing Data Protection Act, there are a number of changes, primarily relating to more stringent provisions around consent and privacy notices.

The GDPR sets out specific measures that must be in place to ensure that consent is clearly given, and that those giving it must be fully informed of the purposes for which their data will be used. The overview below is taken from [the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) guidance](#) (currently in draft):

- The GDPR sets a high standard for consent, but the biggest change is what this means in practice for your consent mechanisms.

- The GDPR is clearer that an indication of consent must be unambiguous and involve a clear, affirmative action.

- Consent should be separate from other terms and conditions. It should not generally be a precondition of signing up to a service.

- The GDPR specifically bans pre-ticked opt-in boxes.

- It requires granular consent for distinct processing operations.

- You must keep clear records to demonstrate consent.

- The GDPR gives a specific right to withdraw consent. You need to tell people about their right to withdraw, and offer them easy ways to withdraw consent at any time.

- Public authorities, employers and other organisations in a position of power are likely to find it more difficult to get valid consent.

- You need to review existing consents and your consent mechanisms to check they meet the GDPR standard. If they do, there is no need to obtain fresh consent.

Individuals also need to be fully informed about the uses that will be made of their personal data, at the point of data collection, by a 'privacy notice'. Again, the ICO provides guidance on privacy notices. It is vital that the privacy notice created for participation in NCOP includes full and transparent information about the uses of the personal data collected, including disclosures to third parties (such as HEAT) for educational tracking purposes. While the GDPR comes into force in May 2018, you will need to think about these issues before then, to ensure that data collected prior to that date can still be used as required.

There are other updates in the legislation, but the above are the most relevant in this scenario. The ICO has a website dedicated to GDPR (more will be added as May 2018 approaches) and you should also speak to your data protection officer or legal adviser to ensure that all relevant provisions are in place to allow you to use personal data for the purposes required by NCOP.

8. How should consortia approach prioritising their learners beyond core eligibility for NCOP?

We understand that targeting is not a clear-cut process and will depend on the context of your wards. In making your decisions we would refer you back to the programme's key aims and objectives:

- To meet the Government's ambition to double the proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education (HE) by 2020, from a 2009 baseline.

- To increase the proportion of students in HE from ethnic minority groups by 20 per cent by 2020.

There is a clear expectation that the programme will work with all ethnic groups and targeting will need to reflect this. However, we are aware of pressing concerns regarding the participation rates of disadvantaged boys and other specific disadvantaged groups of students in particular localities. Consequently, targeting should seek to be inclusive and schools should be encouraged to seek a gender and ethnicity balance when assisting in targeting. We encourage consortia to make contact with their local authorities and tracking

service providers to access the most recent targeting data for the populations in their target wards.

9. What is the definition of ward participation rate that the OfS will use to determine the success of the NCOP programme?

The success of NCOP will be determined by the doubling of the proportion of entrants aged 18 or 19 years old to higher education from the identified wards. Students older than 19 will not count towards this target, as the programme targets 'young people', defined as 19 and under. It is worth noting that any form of prescribed higher education will be captured, including HNDs, higher education in further education colleges, degree apprenticeships and the like, provided the student is 19 or under when they enter higher education.

10. Can consortia include Access to HE students?

The students would need to have the Key Stage 4 attainment level to demonstrate their ability to enter HE. Consortia would need to be clear why these learners are being targeted, as their course suggests their intention to study HE. NCOP is aimed at those who have the attainment (qualifications) to progress but who are not planning to enter HE.

11. How should consortia develop their targets? What if the consortium's plans change?

We expect consortia to work with a minimum of 20 per cent of the target cohort using the estimated target population for each target ward, as set out in the NCOP award letter. The best way to get accurate, up-to-date population data is via your local authority, combined with data from HEAT (or one of the equivalents mentioned under Question 5) in collaboration with the National Pupil Database to keep the information up to date. Interim measures of success are important for consortia and for the national evaluation team, who will be working closely with consortia to identify which datasets may be useful in confirming these measures. There will also be an opportunity for operating plans to be amended in line with the monitoring submissions to reflect new information and data sets.

12. Will the OfS want to know how many learners from target wards consortia have worked with?

Yes, this will be evidenced through tracking. The OfS will provide guidance on how this should be reported for end of year monitoring.

13. What does the Gaps analysis account for in terms of GCSEs?

It accounts for a range of measures, including GCSE and equivalent attainment, and GCSE only, if at least five grade Cs are achieved at GCSE.

14. The school-to-ward lookup, the school participation area mapping tool and the POLAR3 and Gaps information use historical data. Is this still relevant?

The OfS has recently updated and adapted the ward lookup tool to allow users to select an area and find out which schools are associated with it. Please note that these tools are intended to indicate links based on one cohort of historical Key Stage 4 data. The data behind the tools can be downloaded from the 'POLAR3 data' area of the OfS website. POLAR3 is based on five cohorts of 15-year-olds combined to give robust classification of small areas. We consider that these classifications will be relevant for some time.

15. Ward boundaries have changed since the programme was announced. Will target wards be updated?

We do not plan to change the geographical basis or the current ward coverage of NCOP. This is to provide consistency and to support the robust evaluation of the programme.

We are using 2001 census ward boundary information for the following reasons:

- This is the geographical basis of the analysis informing the targeting.

- Widening participation practitioners are familiar with this geography, and the interactive mapping on the OfS website allows users to see where wards fall in terms of other geography levels.

- The Office for National Statistics' National Postcode Directories enable wards to be looked up in relation to other geographies.

- Using the 2001 census ward boundaries will enable us to look at trends over time.

16. How can we search for participation rates in our area?

We have provided a postcode-to-ward lookup, including Gaps and POLAR3 information. This allows users to select an area and find out which schools are associated with it, so should alleviate any issues in identifying areas and boundaries.

HEAT, EMWPREP and Aimhigher West Midlands Activity Database subscribers can also access a postcode profiler which they can share with schools.

17. Which wards have been identified as rural?

Rural areas have been identified on a combined county basis. Counties are classed as rural where more than 50 per cent of the total population (all age groups) are from rural areas, based on the Office for National Statistics' rural-urban classification. This is the case for: Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, Cumbria, East Anglia, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire. Overall, this affects 141 wards. All the wards in the five combined counties identified have been given the rural weighting.

18. Why are there two expected participation rates?

For each ward we have provided two rates of expected participation (and so two different-sized gaps). These rates are based on the two different Gaps analyses used in the NCOP targeting:

- The young participation rate expected for the area based on Key Stage 4 attainment information only.

- The expected rate based on Key Stage 4 attainment and ethnicity information.

19. Why is the observed young participation rate different from the POLAR3 map?

The observed young participation rate is based on state school pupils only. It will differ from those young participation rates in the POLAR3 data. POLAR3 looks at all young people in a ward, not just state school pupils (it also uses a slightly different set of cohorts).

20. Does the observed young participation rate include learners who have progressed onto higher and degree level apprenticeships? Will progression to apprenticeships be counted towards the goals of NCOP?

Yes, higher and degree apprenticeships are captured in the young participation rate – specifically, the higher education elements that are delivered to the learner as part of their apprenticeship.

Evaluation and monitoring
21. If a consortium is constituted of different networks, should it take a single approach to evaluation?

Yes, there will need to be one consistent approach to evaluation across the consortium. There may be targeted local delivery, but the OfS will view the collaboration as one consortium.

22. How much can we change our evaluation approach during the programme?

There will be an expectation that some evaluation plans and approaches will need to be in place from the outset but that they will be flexible. The national evaluation is likely to require specific evidence to be gathered consistently across all consortia, so we will expect consortia to adapt their evaluation strategies to accommodate this. The team at CFE Research that we have commissioned to undertake the formative and impact evaluation of NCOP will be supporting local consortia in developing and implementing high-quality evaluation plans that use robust approaches to evaluating outreach activity. An early task for the team is to conduct a critical analysis of consortia plans, success criteria and evaluation strategies and to work with the OfS to produce clear and unambiguous guidance on how these might be strengthened.

23. How can we contact CFE Research?

Email CFE on ncop@cfe.org.uk, or phone 0116 229 3300. Sarah Tazzyman is Research Manager for the evaluation. CFE have also allocated case managers to each consortium.

24. Do we need to get the agreement of a particular institution's research ethics committee if we are to take part in the work being led by CFE (particularly randomised control trials)?

It is unlikely that all elements of local or national evaluation would need to come under the purview of an institutional research ethics committee. However, given the nature of randomised control trials and the consent issues discussed elsewhere, you may need to get some form of 'sign off' from such a body. This should be discussed and agreed by the relevant members of the consortium. Your steering group will need to consider whether this can be agreed through a departmental committee at the lead HEI (and if so which one), and whether this needs to be endorsed by other members. We would advise that this is considered as part of any formal agreements set up by consortium members at an early stage, to minimise delays to participation in any trials. CFE case managers will be able to advise on how they will be taking account of ethical considerations in their work.

Governance and management
25. Can a new partner join the consortium?

New partners are welcome to join consortia. They will need to submit a letter of support and will need to be listed on the operating plan with the other partners. Consortia will need to consider how they will distribute funding to the new partner from their budget allocation.

26. What do we do if a partner is not engaging with us?

The OfS urges consortia to continue trying to engage with partners in the first instance. For a partner to be removed from the consortium, they need to give formal notification of opting out, addressed to the head of the accountable institution. The OfS needs to see a copy of this. It should also be made clear that they would cease to receive consortium funding for any activity.

27. A local college is already taking part in another consortium but has a campus near us. Should we invite it to join us too?

The college would be welcome to join your consortium. We advise contacting it to consult directly about the relevant wards and target numbers to see if it may be interested in working with you.

28. Can we change the name of our consortium?

The submission of your operating plan was the final chance to change the name of the consortium. As the information for all consortia is now on our website, and is therefore publicly available, we are unable to make any further changes. If you wish to use a strapline in line with building a recognisable brand locally, this is acceptable.

Communications
29. How and where can we use the NCOP logo?

Contact your account manager for a copy of the NCOP logo guidance.

30. Can our consortium employ branding companies to develop marketing materials?

Consortia are permitted to spend some of their budget on marketing costs, including branding or promotion of their work, where this will directly benefit the successful delivery of activities as part of a consortium's approach. We do not encourage the use of branded materials (for example, umbrellas or mugs) which play no part in activities provided to young learners.

If consortia do not have appropriate design and marketing expertise or resource in house to produce the branding they are looking to develop, they may commission an external company to do so using NCOP funds. Consortia should follow procurement and due diligence processes to ensure best value for money.

31. What is the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON)'s involvement with NCOP in respect of its specific NCOP events?

National Collaborative Outreach Programme

NEON has worked successfully with practitioners over a number of years to support their training and development needs, and the OfS contributes to sessions from time to time. As with previous OFS collaborative outreach programmes, NEON is putting on events to meet the demand of its members, but it is not run on behalf of the OfS. It is entirely up to consortia whether they attend these events. The OfS and the CFE Research evaluation team will be running events throughout the programme and we will make it clear to consortia when attendance at these is expected or advised.

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