National Collaborative Outreach Programme

Phase two guidance

Contents

Introduction and background to the programme

1. This document provides guidance on the second phase of the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP), covering the period August 2019 to July 2021. For **specific guidance on the evaluation planning requirements** for phase two please see **Annex D.**

2. NCOP brings together partnerships (known as 'consortia' in phase one) of universities, colleges and other local partners to deliver outreach programmes to young people in Years 9 to 13.

3. The work of these partnerships is focused on local areas where higher education participation is low overall and lower than might be expected given the GCSE results of the young people who live there. In England 997 wards were identified as NCOP target areas.

4. Phase one of the programme started in January 2017 and aimed to support the government's social mobility goals by rapidly increasing the number of young people from underrepresented groups who go into higher education. The original phase one guidance is available on the Office for Students (OfS) website[1].

5. Phase two commences on 1 August 2019. Building on phase one it will support two main strands of activity:

   - targeted higher education outreach within the local areas where we can have the most impact (the same areas as in phase one)

   - outreach hubs within the 29 local partnerships with cross-England coverage to help schools and colleges access the higher education outreach they need and provide a platform for wider collaboration.

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[1] See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/national-collaborative-outreach-programme-ncop/resources-for-partnerships/

Phase two overview

6. In December 2018, the OfS board agreed that, through NCOP, in 2019-20 and 2020-21 the OfS will:

   a. Continue to invest in targeted higher education outreach within the areas where it can have the most impact ensuring that it makes the most of the opportunity to strengthen evaluation practice and knowledge of 'what works'.

   b. Commit to supporting collaboration in the longer term by funding sustainable local partnerships ('outreach hubs') with cross-England coverage to help schools and colleges access the higher education outreach they need and provide a platform for wider collaboration, including with regard to joined up careers advice.

7. The programme is intended to complement and add value to the work that higher education providers undertake through their access and participation plans, in particular work that is best delivered in collaboration. Through the local partnerships NCOP supports wider collaborative activity with local authorities, employers and local enterprise partnerships, as well as with key partners such as the new local careers hubs, careers leaders and the opportunity areas.

8. The OfS's goals for the second phase of NCOP are to:

   - reduce the gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups[2]

   - support young people to make well-informed decisions about their future education

   - support effective and impactful local collaboration by higher education providers working together with schools, colleges, employers and other partners

   - contribute to a stronger evidence base around 'what works' in higher education outreach and strengthen evaluation practice in the sector.

9. Figure 1 provides an overview of the NCOP approach to phase two of the programme. NCOP will achieve the goals for phase two through:

   - providing impartial, sustained and progressive higher education outreach from a range of providers tailored to the needs of young people in target areas

   - providing open, transparent and impartial routes for schools and colleges to access outreach activity from a range of higher education providers

   - supporting a local partnership infrastructure now and in the future which can act as a vehicle for activity on a range of agendas relating to access and participation, including activity set out in providers' access and participation plans

   - robust evaluation at both local and national levels, including capability-building support.

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[2] See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/measures-of-our-success/participation-performance-measures/gap-in-participation-between-most-and-least-represented-groups/

Figure 1: Overview of NCOP approach

OfS funding to support	Complementing and adding value to	Leading to
Sustained and progressive programmes of targeted outreach for young people from Year 9 upwards. Information and signposting for teachers and advisors about local outreach activity. Support for schools and colleges in areas of low participation to access higher education outreach. Strategic engagement and activity through local outreach hubs. Robust qualitative and quantitative evaluation, locally and nationally.	Individual provider activity, as set out in access and participation plans. Collaborative activity by providers, as set out in access and participation plans. Local authority and local enterprise partnership activity to address educational disadvantage, high level skills needs and joined up careers advice. Local careers leads and Enterprise Advisor Networks. Opportunity Areas and Opportunity North East.	Reduced gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups. Young people supported to make well-informed decisions about their future education. Effective and impactful local collaboration by higher education providers and their partners. Stronger evidence base and strengthened evaluation practice in the sector.

10. The success measures for the programme are focused on progression to any course of higher education, whatever the mode of study (HNC, HND, foundation degree, any degree). Partnerships are expected to shape their offer in terms of information about alternative routes into higher education, including through further education and through higher and degree apprenticeships so that students take the best route for them.

11. NCOP provides a route through which schools and colleges can access impartial outreach, information, advice and guidance, without issues of competition acting as a barrier. Partnerships bring together higher and further education providers, and integrate other sources of advice and guidance, in order to achieve this.

Phase two: Targeted outreach

12. The sole focus of phase one of NCOP was the delivery of targeted outreach with young people in Years 9 to 13 who live in 997 wards in England where participation in higher education is low and lower than might be expected given local GCSE results[3]. These areas continue to be the focus of the targeted outreach during phase two.

13. We have removed the upper age limit for engagement with the programme, but learners over 19 from NCOP target wards must be studying on a Level 2 or 3 further education course to be eligible. NCOP partnerships are expected to engage at least 20 per cent of those in Years 9 to

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[3] During the first phase, NCOP targeted wards (Office for National Statistics 2001 Census Area Statistics wards) that had low levels of young participation (Participation of Local Areas (POLAR3) quintile 1) and lower than expected levels of young participation, considering Key Stage 4 attainment and ethnicity (quintile 1 or quintile 2) or low levels of young participation (POLAR3 quintile 1) and lower than expected levels of young participation, considering Key Stage 4 attainment only (quintile 1 or quintile 2). For more information see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/polar-participation-of-local-areas/

13 in each of their allocated wards[4]. There is no minimum level of expected engagement with those over 19 years of age.

14. The NCOP focus on the target wards supports the OfS goal of reducing gaps in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups. Partnerships should ensure that they focus their targeted outreach activities on these eligible learners. Within the core eligibility, partnerships may want to consider whether to apply additional targeting, for example, students from NCOP wards with a disability, receiving free school meals or in care. This would need to be agreed in consultation with the schools and colleges concerned. We would encourage partnerships to consider prioritising particular student groups within the target wards where data shows gaps in equality of opportunity in relation to access to higher education

Phase two: Outreach hubs

15. Through phase two of NCOP the OfS will provide support for local collaborative outreach hubs operating across England. As well as delivery of outreach activity, the targeted NCOP outreach hubs will be expected to:

   a. Help teachers and advisors find out about the outreach activity available in an area by:

      i. Acting as a point of contact and information for all secondary schools and colleges in their geographic remit.

      ii. Hosting a website with details of the local outreach offer and signposting other information to support schools and colleges.

   b. Support schools and colleges in areas of low participation to access higher education outreach by:

      i. Engaging with those schools and colleges to understand their outreach needs.

      ii. Facilitating access to existing outreach provision, either locally or nationally.

      iii. Working collaboratively to help develop new or expanded outreach provision to meet identified needs, using the combined resources of the providers in the area and drawing on the investment set out in their access and participation plans where appropriate.

   c. Provide a platform for other local collaborative activity by:

      i. Engaging strategically with local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, employers and others to understand the landscape of educational disadvantage, high level skills needs and joined up careers advice in the area.

      ii. As far as possible developing innovative and locally tailored approaches to address the challenges identified through the above engagement, drawing in additional funding and support from available sources to support this.

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[4] See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/national-collaborative-outreach-programme-ncop/how-ncop-works/

16. Outreach hubs are intended to add value by providing relevant information in one easily accessible place for all secondary schools and colleges in an area. They are not intended to replace the many well-established school to higher education links which already exist.

17. Outreach supported by the hub should complement the existing targeted outreach being delivered by individual higher education providers and be in line with the needs of the schools and colleges concerned. As with the targeted outreach, when considering where to focus outreach activities we encourage partnerships to prioritise student groups where data shows gaps in equality of opportunity in relation to access to higher education[5].

18. The OfS investment in outreach hubs is intended to provide an infrastructure to support wider activity with schools, colleges and other partners across the outreach hub geography. We expect any activity of this kind to be done in partnership with local agencies and to align with other initiatives. Where this wider activity involves a financial contribution from the outreach hub we expect this funding contribution to be matched by other partner contributions. NCOP funding should not be used in place of other government funding, including other OfS grant funding, or funding which would ordinarily be expected to be provided by another organisation. In accordance with the terms and conditions of funding, the grant must only be used in accordance with the grant objectives and purposes set out in the terms and conditions of funding, any direction issued by the OfS, any operating plan accepted by the OfS, this guidance and any other guidance issued by the OfS (as amended from time to time).

19. Further information on the aims, expectations and how the OfS will understand progress towards outreach hubs is set out in Annex A. This annex also provides an overview of the key elements of both targeted outreach and outreach hubs and activities, and targeting and funding arrangements for each of these.

20. Partnerships are also encouraged to consider how the outreach hubs link to the Civic University Agreement signed by a number of universities. The Civic Universities report[6] includes four key points of relevance:

    a. Understanding local populations, and asking them what they want. Analysis of their place and people's priorities is essential.

    b. Understanding themselves (as universities) and what they are able to offer.

    c. Working with other local anchor institutions, businesses and community organisations to agree where the short, medium and long-term opportunities and problems lie for communities. Linking with local authorities and other local plans, such as the local industrial strategy is particularly important.

    d. A clear set of priorities. A process of agreeing clear priorities will therefore be necessary and, again, this is where collaboration and aligning resources with local authorities, local enterprise partnerships (LEPs), the NHS and similar bodies can help to identify the live issues that universities can most usefully help with.

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[5] See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/national-collaborative-outreach-programme-ncop/how-ncop-works/

[6] UPP Foundation Civic University Commission, 'Truly civic: Strengthening the connection between universities and their places, available at https://upp-foundation.org/civic-university-commission/

Section 1: Working with learners through targeted outreach and outreach hubs

Progression framework

21. Higher education outreach is most effective when delivered as a progressive, sustained programme of activity and through engagement over time[7]. For phase two of the programme all NCOP partnerships are expected to put in place a progression framework. The progression framework should set out a clear statement of the specific changes that are expected for an individual learner over time as a result of the activities undertaken as part of NCOP targeted outreach.

Appropriate activities

22. The activities and approaches delivered under NCOP can be shaped to meet the needs of local areas and the young people who live there. However, all outreach activities and interventions delivered through the programme are expected to:

- deliver activity that demonstrably improves equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in and progress from higher education

- be informed by evidence and focused on activity that has greatest impact on access and participation outcomes

- maximise opportunities to develop and deliver effective outreach collaboratively and in partnership with schools, colleges and others to create a shared vision and aims

- be transparent and accountable so that partners (including learners) and the wider community can understand the work taking place

- provide value for money

- be focused on continuous improvement drawing on robust evidence of what works, and in what context, to address the challenges of improving access, success and progression.

23. The targeted outreach element of NCOP is targeted at young people whose attainment suggests that they could be on a trajectory to higher education but who may choose not to pursue it as an option. For this reason, attainment may not be the most important factor for these young people in terms of accessing higher education but it may be a factor in terms of increasing the range of options that may be open to them and the choices they make. Therefore, although attainment raising activity may not be a primary focus for NCOP partnerships, they would be expected to reflect on how their activity influences the expectations of young people which may itself influence their attainment levels. In addition, specific activity to help raise attainment above the minimum requirement at GCSE level will open up a wider range of options for young people. Therefore partnerships may wish to work closely with

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[7] Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2014), 'National strategy for access and student success in higher education', available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-strategy-for-access-and-student-success

schools serving their NCOP target wards to determine whether young people from those wards with the potential to go onto higher education would benefit from attainment raising activity.

Section 2: Programme funding

24. Funding for phase two of the NCOP programme has been confirmed for academic year 2019-20. Indicative funding has been set for academic year 2020-21 (with phase two funding anticipated to finish at the end of July 2021). For the avoidance of any doubt, the indicative funding for academic year 2020-2021 is subject to any changes to the grant that the OfS receives from the government.

25. The award letter and general terms and conditions of grant are attached to the guidance as Annex B and the grant objectives and purposes are attached to the guidance as Annex C. For the avoidance of any doubt, where the terms and conditions of the grant (including any specific conditions imposed on a partnership) are inconsistent with this guidance, the terms and conditions of the grant will prevail.

26. In order to commence phase two funding, partnerships were required to submit an operating plan, through the lead provider, to be reviewed and approved by the OfS, which forms part of the funding agreement with the OfS, and to confirm acceptance of the funding terms and conditions.

27. Providers that participate in the partnership are expected to support the partnership and the partnership's lead provider in meeting the expectations of the programme. Membership may change over the course of phase two and partnerships are reminded that new members will need to submit a letter of support to the OfS. This letter should be emailed to ncop@officeforstudents.org.uk once membership has been confirmed by the partnership.

Programme expenditure

28. Partnerships are required to accurately report NCOP spending. The funding guidance provided in this document is based on broad categories of spending that were set out in the phase two operating plans. We reserve the right to make amendments to categories of spending in future monitoring returns.

Staff costs

29. The cost, including on-costs (i.e. the salary and national insurance and pension contributions) of all staff employed by NCOP partnership members.

30. Staff costs have been split into three sub-categories – 'programme management', 'outreach delivery' and 'research and evaluation'. Staff involved in the management of the programme (for example programme managers, project support and administrative support) are included within the 'programme management' category.

31. Outreach delivery staff are those involved in the actual delivery of outreach, for example outreach officers, graduate interns, and buying out or contributing to staffing in schools and colleges to support NCOP activities.

32. In-house staff employed to deliver NCOP research and evaluation are included in the 'research and evaluation' category. If the work is commissioned externally, costs should be reported in the 'Non-staff costs' section.

33. Partnerships are permitted to use NCOP funds to cover maternity, paternity and adoption leave costs should they arise. This is an allowable cost under NCOP funding and should be included in 'Staff costs'.

34. Partnerships may incur liability for redundancy costs of staff who were recruited to work on the programme for either all or part of their time. NCOP funds can be used to cover the costs of staff redundancy as follows:

   a. The redundancy payments should be reasonable and in line with the statutory minimum. Should staff be employed on enhanced contracts, the employer should cover any additional benefits associated with redundancy.

   b. NCOP funds should only be used to cover the period of time the individual has worked on NCOP, irrespective of their overall period of employment.

   c. The NCOP was designed as a time-limited programme. Therefore, partnerships must demonstrate that reasonable steps were taken to recruit in a way that sought to control and minimise staff costs. This would include consideration given to whether posts would be temporary or permanent, the drafting of employment contracts and so on.

   d. The OfS will not provide additional funds to cover redundancy, so any costs will need to be taken from the funds already allocated.

35. If NCOP funding is used to cover redundancy costs, partnerships will need to confirm that payments have been made in line with the above guidance. Reporting will form part of the normal monitoring process.

Non-staff costs

36. This should cover all costs directly attributable to supporting NCOP that are not reported within staff costs, i.e. payments to third parties, travel and subsistence, IT purchases and lead institution or host costs. Only lead institution or host costs that are directly attributable to supporting the NCOP partnership are permitted; NCOP funding should not be used for more general estate costs and services at the provider.

37. Outreach delivery should include non-staff costs associated with delivery, including third party costs, learning resources and equipment.

38. Research and evaluation should capture any non-staff costs associated with the partnership's plan to evaluate its work. The only evaluation staffing cost that can be included in this category is if an activity is wholly outsourced; otherwise evaluation staffing costs need to be included under the relevant category within 'Staff costs'.

39. Partnerships are required to use one of the three recognised tracking services – the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT), the East Midlands Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Partnership (EMWPREP) and Aimhigher West Midlands – on the programme and the associated costs should be included as tracking costs in monitoring returns.

40. Other costs could include travel and subsistence, IT costs and lead institution or host costs directly attributable to supporting the NCOP partnership. Partnerships are not permitted to set aside any funding for contingency purposes. These costs will be reported in future monitoring returns and we will request further information where we are unclear about what has been

included in this category or where the funding set aside for 'other costs' is high in relation to other categories of spending.

41. Partnerships 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 partnership's approach. Partnerships should not use NCOP funds to pay for branded materials which play no active part in activities provided to young learners.

Outreach

42. The OfS has provided partnerships with allocations for targeted outreach and outreach hubs, within its overall funding allocation. We expect partnerships to use their targeted outreach allocation to meet the costs associated with their targeted outreach activity, including an appropriate share of partnership costs directly attributable to supporting NCOP activity. The amount of NCOP funding used to support outreach hub activity should not exceed the outreach hub allocation given to the partnership. We expect the monitoring returns to focus on the overall package of funding so that these funding elements will not be required to be reported separately.

43. Activities and programmes funded through NCOP should be evidence-based and mapped through the partnership progression framework to demonstrate that they form part of a sustained and progressive programme.

Subcontracting

44. It is not a requirement of the programme that partnerships work with third party providers but partnerships can commission other organisations (including third-sector organisations which have particular expertise) to deliver activity on their behalf as part of this programme. We advise that partnerships conduct thorough research on the effectiveness and track record of any third party provider before committing funding. The partnership governing board and the lead provider will remain fully accountable to us for the funding and delivery of all of the partnership's activity, including that of third party providers. Partnership governing boards are required to monitor the risks and mitigations of such arrangements with third party providers so that they are assured they are delivering activity in line with the principles and goals of the programme.

Outreach hubs matched funding

45. The OfS investment in outreach hubs is intended to provide an infrastructure to support wider activity with schools, colleges and other partners across the outreach hub geography. We expect any activity of this kind to be done in partnership with local agencies and to align with other initiatives.

46. Where new collaborative activity is identified and involves a financial contribution from the outreach hub, we expect this funding contribution to be matched by other partner contributions as appropriate. Partnerships will need to ensure that funding they secure is genuinely matched funding and will not result in double funding of activity. For example, if an outreach hub develops partnerships with the local authority, LEP, local colleges and schools and they identify a need for a targeted programme of outreach for care experienced and estranged students, matched funding should be provided for this specific programme of outreach from the local authority, LEP and other partners as appropriate.

47. NCOP funding should not be used in place of other government funding, including other OfS grant funding, or funding which would ordinarily be expected to be provided by another organisation.

Value for money

48. Partnerships are reminded that NCOP is a publicly funded programme and value for money considerations should be at the forefront of all expenditure. Following the results of the programme audit of the first two years, we advise that partnerships **do not use** NCOP funding for:

    a. **Overseas visits or activities**: Unless there is direct correlation to a particular higher education subject (for example, foreign languages). If a partnership would like advice on the appropriateness of an overseas visit, it should check with its OfS NCOP account manager.

    b. **Capital spending**: For example, the purchase of office equipment, refurbishment of office space or large scale equipment or asset purchases. If a partnership is unsure whether a request falls into this category, it is advised to contact the OfS before expenditure is committed.

    c. **Marketing and student recruitment**: NCOP funding is strictly for the provision of impartial outreach, advice and guidance to students and therefore must not be spent on marketing materials or the recruitment of students to particular providers.

49. We expect the majority of NCOP funding provided to partnerships to be spent on outreach, which includes outreach staffing and the delivery of outreach activities, including outreach hub activities. The OfS will review expenditure through future monitoring returns and will challenge partnerships where this is not the case.

50. We recommend that all partnership governing boards have oversight of what is funded and scrutinise expenditure, ensuring that activities are evidence-based and fit with the partnership progression framework.

51. In the event of programme underspending, partnerships should focus clearly on meeting the programme goals and ensure value for money.

Section 3: Partnership governance

52. Partnership governing boards and steering groups should have sufficient oversight of the range of activities that are being offered through the programme, so that they can provide appropriate scrutiny of the fit with the principles of the programme. In supporting the lead provider to fulfil the requirements of the programme, the NCOP partnership governing boards play a critical role in ensuring successful delivery of the programme and should challenge the partnership where it has concerns about the use of funding.

53. Governing boards and steering groups should be focused on setting the strategic vision and direction for the partnership and establishing links with other policy initiatives such as opportunity areas to ensure NCOP contributes to wider social, cultural and economic objectives. Senior leaders within partner organisations are often best placed to achieve and maintain this synergy.

54. We expect the chair of each governing board to engage with ongoing OfS-convened chairs and leads meetings, ensuring that messages about the programme and issues raised by the funder are understood and can be communicated effectively through the individual partnerships.

Membership

55. The forthcoming evaluation report from consultants CFE Research highlights the importance of ensuring that all core partners are represented on strategic and operational bodies. Partnerships may also want to consider the merits of inviting colleges and wider stakeholders to join their strategic governance group to provide external perspectives and challenge decisions.

Devolved partnerships

56. The year one evaluation report argued that:

> 'A degree of central control from consortia is needed to ensure the NCOP offer is coherent and coordinated. More effort is needed in highly-devolved funding models to ensure overarching aims and objectives are effectively communicated, understood and adhered to.'[8]

As a result, we recommend that in partnerships with a devolved funding model, the governing board particularly scrutinises the relationship with partners to provide some assurance of the coherence and consistency of the NCOP offer and to ensure funding is spent in line with the principles of the programme.

Programme risk

57. All partnerships are required to provide a risk assessment as part of the project plan submitted within their operating plan return. We are predominantly interested in strategic risks to collaborative working and to the success of the partnership in achieving the objectives it has defined for itself. We welcome the delivery of innovative activity where it can be effectively evaluated. Every partnership will wish to capture a mixture of risks and opportunities within and outside its control. We would expect a partnership's governing board to receive updates on the risks to the partnership as part of its assessment of the partnership's progress against its plans.

58. An assessment of risk will be captured through programme monitoring and evaluation, but we encourage partnerships to make us aware of changes to risk which may affect their work.

Intellectual property

59. Governing boards need to consider how they will develop resources across the partnerships, and decide how any intellectual property will be managed between partners. We would expect partnerships to share effective practice and resources they develop with other NCOP partnerships, and to put in place mechanisms to enable this dissemination.

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[8] CFE Research (2018), 'National Collaborative Outreach Programme: Year one report of the national formative and impact evaluation, including capacity building with NCOP consortia', available at https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180405115436/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2018/ncopyear1/

Section 4: Engaging local partners

60. NCOP partnerships are expected to build upon the models of strategic collaborative activity which have developed within phase one of the programme. The level of strategic engagement partnerships have had with local partners and initiatives, such as LEPs and Careers Hubs, is varied. A greater focus on this activity will be expected in phase two and the infrastructure of the outreach hubs is intended to support this. Partnerships will need to ensure that they understand the landscape of educational disadvantage, careers advice provision and higher level skills needs in their area. This will require engagement with local partners such as the LEP, local authorities, employers and others.

61. Partnerships are expected to build links to other programmes and initiatives active in their areas, aligning their work to complement this activity where appropriate. Different local areas face different challenges and the resources and focus of local partners will vary. It is also the case that the distribution of programmes and initiatives is not uniform across England. However, building effective and impactful collaboration, including with local partners and initiatives, is a key element of the programme which requires appropriate resourcing and commitment within the partnership. This is particularly important in areas where there may be a large number of different agencies engaging with schools or where there is the risk that schools and colleges may not receive any activity.

62. This section has highlighted particular organisations, programmes and initiatives which we expect partnerships to consider when developing their approaches to phase two. It is not intended to be exhaustive and there may be other organisations which partnerships may also wish to engage with.

Opportunity areas and Opportunity North East

63. The government is supporting tailored interventions in 12 opportunity areas across England that experience significant challenges in social mobility[9]. In addition in October 2018 the government launched a £24 million programme for the North East to improve opportunities for young people in the region[10]. NCOP partnerships delivering targeted outreach or outreach hubs in areas that overlap with an opportunity area or Opportunity North East are expected to align their activities where appropriate.

The Careers and Enterprise Company

64. The Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) supports schools and colleges to strengthen their approach to careers through its network of Enterprise Advisers. In local areas enterprise coordinators support this activity and many have already developed positive relationships with the NCOP partnerships. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE, the OfS's predecessor) and the CEC wrote jointly to NCOP partnerships in June 2017 to encourage alignment across the NCOP and this activity where appropriate. The OfS expects NCOP partnerships to build on and strengthen the engagement and relationships they have formed in

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[9] See https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-and-opportunity-areas

[10] See https://www.gov.uk/government/news/education-secretary-launches-24-million-programme-for-north-east

phase one with all Enterprise Coordinators and Careers Hub Leads in their area to ensure a joined up offer to all schools and colleges.

65. Schools and colleges within the CEC Enterprise Adviser Network are encouraged to use their Compass and Tracker tools to self-assess their approach to careers and to record and manage their career plan[11]. Schools and colleges within a Careers Hub are mandated to use Compass and Tracker. These tools could help support schools and colleges as they seek to join up their NCOP activity with their wider careers offer and partnerships should work with schools and colleges to ensure NCOP activity is recorded in Compass and Tracker. Partnerships may also wish to include relevant information in the CEC's 'find a provider' directory[12].

66. As part of the Department for Education's Careers Strategy the government tasked the Careers and Enterprise Company to establish 40 Careers Hubs across the country, allocating £7.5 million to support them[13]. Careers Hubs are groups of between 20 and 40 secondary schools and colleges located in the same geographic area, working together, and with partners in the business, public, education and voluntary sectors to deliver the eight Gatsby Benchmarks of excellent careers education. This includes encounters with higher education and helping young people to understand the full range of learning opportunities that are available to them.

67. The first wave of Careers Hubs began operating in September 2018 and the second wave, announced in May 2019, will begin activity from September 2019. Just over 1,300 secondary schools and colleges (around a quarter of those in England) will now benefit from being part of a Careers Hub. It is important that NCOP partnerships align their outreach hubs and targeted outreach activity with existing and future Careers Hubs to maximise the outcomes of this investment for learners, schools, colleges and communities.

National Citizen Service

68. National Citizen Service (NCS) is a government-backed initiative that brings together young people aged 15 to 17 from different backgrounds, giving them the chance to undertake a programme of personal and social development and community action[14]. There is potential to more closely align activity delivered by NCOP and NCS. The OfS wrote to NCOP partnerships in May 2018 to encourage them to consider how they could work together with the NCS, especially in the opportunity areas. All NCOP partnerships are encouraged to explore whether there are further opportunities to simplify the landscape for schools and colleges by greater join up with the NCS. The OfS and NCS will be running two joint events to explore collaboration with NCOP partnerships in autumn 2019.

Local enterprise partnerships

69. LEPs have an important remit focused on local economic growth, job creation, infrastructure and skills. LEP boards include representatives from educational institutions, most often local higher education providers. In many areas the LEP is a key partner for some of the initiatives

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[11] See https://compass.careersandenterprise.co.uk/info

[12] See https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/new-provider-enquiry

[13] See https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/schools-colleges/careers-hubs

[14] See https://www.ncsyes.co.uk/

mentioned above, such as the Enterprise Advisor Networks, Careers Hubs and opportunity areas.

70. Given the expanded remit of NCOP to include outreach hubs, the LEPs are an increasingly important local partner; NCOP partnerships are expected to actively seek their involvement. This might include the formal involvement of the LEP on the partnership governing body. It is acknowledged that LEPs have varying capacity for such engagement and that their focus on this agenda may be limited. In such circumstances, providers involved in NCOP partnerships may consider what role their senior management teams could play in helping to strengthen links between NCOP and the LEP.

71. The outreach hub geographies may not always map across to LEP boundaries. Some NCOP partnerships may operate across two LEP geographies. In this case partnerships are expected to consider the most appropriate focus for their engagement as well as the geographies of the surrounding NCOP partnerships. Where an NCOP partnership is the sole NCOP operating in a LEP area it is expected to take necessary steps to develop its engagement with that LEP.

Student Loans Company

72. The funding information partners at Student Finance England, a team of Student Loans Company experts, can support NCOP partnerships with student funding information. They can help partnerships ensure that any information on student finance they share is accurate as well as act as a point of contact for queries[15].

Job Centre Plus support for schools

73. Through the Job Centre Plus support for schools initiative[16] local Job Centre Plus advisors are helping schools to meet their statutory duties around careers. This is a demand-led service which can respond flexibly to the needs of individual schools. There is a strong focus in the work of the advisors on working with employers and understanding the local labour market. Partnerships are encouraged to develop links with the advisors operating in their area to coordinate and align activities where appropriate.

Section 5: Evaluation and tracking

74. Evaluation is a critical part of NCOP outreach delivery. The OfS expects institutional and strategic commitment and prioritisation to support and invest in evaluation as a key part of NCOP activity, including engaging with learning from both local and national findings to build the impact of NCOP.

75. In April 2019 the OfS provided guidance for partnerships that sets out the requirements for phase two evaluation plans; providers should refer to this when developing their evaluation plans (see Annex D). NCOP represents a significant investment by the OfS in the targeted outreach which partnerships are delivering through NCOP in phase two. As this is an investment of public funds, we need to ensure that it is used most effectively to deliver the

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[15] For more information see https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/about-us/funding-information-partners-account-managers/

[16] See https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-jobcentre-plus-support-for-schools-programme-national-roll-out-evaluation

programme's intended goals and outcomes. Given that NCOP activity involves young people and is designed to positively influence their future decisions, there is also a clear imperative that evaluation seeks to understand any unintended negative impacts.

76. One of the aims for NCOP is to: 'Contribute to a stronger evidence base around "what works" in higher education outreach and strengthen evaluation practice in the sector'[17]. The evidence generated by local NCOP partnership evaluation will be synthesised by CFE Research and is an important resource for the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO)[18], to understand effective outreach practice.

Longitudinal tracking

77. Comprehensive monitoring and longitudinal tracking are vital to good governance and evaluation. The data that partnerships collect is an essential requirement for both the local and national level evaluation. Missing or poorly collected data will have significant negative consequences for the quality of evidence NCOP is able to generate and the programme's legacy.

78. Partnerships are required to use one of the three recognised tracking services (HEAT, EMWPREP and Aimhigher West Midlands).

79. Partnerships must track all individuals who participate in outreach activity which is wholly or partly paid for using NCOP funds (whether facilitated through an outreach hub or not). Where outreach activity is **not** NCOP-funded, tracking participants is recommended but not required (for instance, where an outreach hub only signposts or coordinates access to outreach).

80. Partnerships must have the legal basis in place to share outreach participant data with the tracking services and make best efforts to gain participant consent from young people participating in outreach activities where possible and capture accurate data through the tracking systems. This is likely to require supporting activity to gain commitment from different partners and other key stakeholders. Partnerships must comply with the data protection law, including the Data Protection Act 2018, General Data Protection Regulation and any successor legislation and regulation enacting provisions relating to the processing of personal data.

81. The OfS will work with the tracking services to support a consistent approach to tracking outreach hub activities across NCOP. Further guidance will follow prior to phase two initiation on 1 August 2019.

82. The tracking services will continue to share partnerships' activity and consenting participant data with CFE Research at periodic intervals for analysis during phase two. Partnerships must ensure they have the necessary updated data sharing agreements in place as specified by CFE Research.

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[17] 'How NCOP works' available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/national-collaborative-outreach-programme-ncop/how-ncop-works/

[18] Further information on TASO (formerly referred to as 'the evidence and impact exchange' or 'EIX') is available at http://www.taso-he.org/

Phase two national programme evaluation (programme level)

83. CFE Research will continue the national impact evaluation of NCOP through phase two using a quasi-experimental approach drawing on NCOP learner participant survey data and longitudinal tracking data. Partnerships must engage with the national evaluation team as directed. Partnerships are expected to act on any learning which the national evaluation generates.

84. Partnerships are expected to work with CFE Research to administer the participant survey as directed. Partnerships must make best efforts to collect accurate data from NCOP learners who have completed prior evaluation surveys and are participating in sustained progressive outreach.

85. The phase two participant surveys are expected to run as follows:

    a. **Main wave 2 survey: September – October 2019** (partnerships may also run the wave 2 survey with Year 11 and Year 13 students ahead of exams in April-May 2019).

    b. **Main wave 3 survey: September – October 2020** (partnerships may also run the wave 3 survey with Year 11 and Year 13 students ahead of exams in April-May 2020).

Phase two evaluation capability building

86. Substantial evaluation capability building support will be provided for partnerships to develop evaluation practice and improve the quality of evidence generated in phase two. This support is being commissioned for July 2019 and will be tailored to meet partnerships' needs in conducting appropriately robust evaluation. We expect the capability building support to:

    - assess NCOP phase two local evaluation plans and give feedback to partnerships

    - provide expert evaluation advice to partnerships

    - facilitate an outreach evaluation community of practice

    - capture and share practical evaluation resources

    - develop and support use of shared evaluation measurement tools

    - work with TASO to coordinate how NCOP partnerships can respond to evidence gaps.

87. Partnerships must not use the capability building support to fill staffing gaps or lack of sufficiently experienced or deployed evaluation resource. It remains the responsibility of partnerships to resource, develop and implement robust evaluation practice.

Local partnership evaluation planning requirements

88. Evaluation planning requirements are set out in the phase two evaluation plan guidance (Annex D). Key requirements include:

- a completed evaluation self-assessment tool[19] submitted to the OfS by **Monday 8 July 2019**

- a robust and credible evaluation plan submitted to the OfS by **Monday 8 July 2019**, as specified in the phase two evaluation plan guidance (Annex D).

89. Following submission, evaluation plans will be reviewed by external evaluation experts appointed by the OfS. Where an evaluation plan does not meet the criteria outlined in the guidance, partnerships are expected to work with external evaluation experts to rapidly strengthen the plan. As standard good practice, we expect that evaluation plans will be reviewed within the partnership periodically during phase two to ensure they remain appropriately robust. Amended evaluation plans do not need to be resubmitted to the OfS, though we may ask to see these in exceptional circumstances.

90. Partnerships' evaluation plans should cover the period of funded NCOP activity from 1 August 2019 to 31 July 2021. However, some partnerships may need to plan for some local evaluation activity or evaluation staff contracts to extend beyond the programme end date (e.g. if a partnership depends on key data or analysis available shortly after July 2021 which is likely to generate important evidence). See **Section 6: Monitoring** for further details about how partnerships should account for this spending.

Supporting evaluation in the partnership (strategic context)

91. Robust evaluation requires strategic commitment from partnerships and support from partner organisations, alongside the schools and colleges that partnerships work with to deliver outreach activities. Partnerships must work with their partners and other key stakeholders to gain their commitment to supporting local and national evaluation activity to ensure that it can be appropriately robust.

92. Evaluation activity during phase two must be adequately resourced by appropriately skilled staff who are able to evaluate in line with partnerships' approved evaluation plans (either through employed staff, external independent evaluation, or both).

93. Partnerships should consider whether their budget allocation for evaluation, along with staff resources (skills and capacity), are sufficient to deliver their evaluation plan for phase two.

Learning and generating evidence from evaluation

94. Learning from evaluation and translating findings into practice is vital to ensure evaluation contributes to improved practice and greater impact. Partnerships must have effective mechanisms in place through which the evaluation findings can inform their strategic decision making and outreach practice. Evaluation should be coordinated so that relevant findings can be fed into partnerships' wider planning cycles.

95. The evidence generated from individual partnerships' evaluation must be shared with CFE Research so that it contributes to developing the evidence base for widening participation outreach activity more broadly. The OfS expects findings to be shared with CFE Research for

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[19] The self-assessment tool is available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/standards-of-evidence-and-evaluation-self-assessment-tool/evaluation-self-assessment-tool/

positive, negative and no difference results. Partnerships should additionally submit their evidence to TASO where appropriate[20].

Section 6: Monitoring

Purpose of monitoring

96. The purpose of monitoring is to enable us to:

- understand how the programme aims are being met

- gain assurance about programme funding

- integrate monitoring information with the programme's evaluation, including seeking information about value for money and return on investment.

97. Monitoring of the programme will take the form of six-monthly updates to ensure that financial profiles and budgets are on track and to monitor partnerships' progress against their operating plans and in relation to school or college and learner engagement, although this may vary depending on the terms and conditions of the specific grant provided to a partnership. Partnerships are expected to comply with the monitoring deadlines and failure to do so may result in delays to payments. As set out in the terms and conditions of funding, the OfS also reserves the right to suspend, terminate or recover the grant if any of its monitoring requirements are not met.

98. Any slippage in expenditure will be managed in discussion with the partnership. All instances of underspending will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis and will take into account the rationale or explanation provided by the partnership.

99. The OfS is working with the tracking services to develop processes in phase two which will improve the efficiency and accuracy of the monitoring data we collect. Monitoring guidance for phase two will be issued separately through the normal channels in due course. Submission of phase two monitoring is expected in February and September each year.

End of programme assurance

100. Phase two will finish on 31 July 2021 and more detailed guidance on OfS requirements will be issued to partnerships during academic year 2020-21. We anticipate requesting the final monitoring return three months after the end of the programme. We are likely to request an audit from partnerships in phase two, towards the end of the programme.

101. As referenced in the evaluation section above, the partnership may need to plan for some local evaluation activity or evaluation staff contracts to extend beyond the programme end date of July 2021 (e.g. if the partnership depends on key data or analysis available shortly after July 2021 which is likely to generate important evidence). This activity can be costed for up until the final monitoring return is submitted, three months after the end of the programme.

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[20] See http://www.taso-he.org/

Section 7: Communications

OfS communications

102. The OfS will formally publish communications about the programme through published documents and reports as well as the OfS website but will also use more informal mechanisms such as social media. We will continue to request effective practice case studies from partnerships to publish on our website.

103. We reserve the right to publish some or all of the partnership's final report on our website (and any other outputs from the programme, including the evaluation), as part of disseminating the findings of monitoring and evaluation for the benefit of the sector. We would contact the partnership ahead of doing this. We will also use these outputs for internal purposes, such as policy development. If the partnership believes the report, or elements of it, are confidential and should not be published, partnerships should state the reasons why in advance and we will consider them.

104. We will also issue regular updates on the programme, which will take the form of a newsletter for all partnerships. We will always notify partnerships when we issue a communication they need to be aware of.

105. Key information that requires action from, or gives guidance to, all partnerships will most likely be given via letter or a direct formal email to the partnership manager, the chair of the partnership governing board and if appropriate the lead provider, as identified to us. We expect that any information sent to the partnership manager will be appropriately disseminated to partners.

106. We will continue to use the Very Connect community platform (https://groups.officeforstudents.org.uk/login) to post guidance and share other information with partnerships; however, it is primarily a tool for the partnerships to use to communicate with each other.

Partnership communications

107. The OfS encourages partnerships to share the work they are doing both locally and nationally where appropriate and to consider key audiences and influencers, for example teachers and parents and carers.

108. We have previously issued guidance around NCOP branding, including a logo. Partnerships should use this logo on resources, materials, websites and digital resources developed by the partnership.

109. Partnerships should advise the OfS of any upcoming media coverage of their NCOP partnership by emailing NCOP@officeforstudents.org.uk.

110. The OfS's contributions to the partnerships should be acknowledged in press releases, which should also make reference to the wider NCOP programme.

111. The NCOP community platform Very Connect is funded by the OfS for the partnerships to use and communicate with each other and its continued use is encouraged. Many partnerships also use Jiscmail and the NCOP distribution list, which remain effective ways of communicating with the wider NCOP community.

112.   When posting about NCOP on social media, partners should be mindful of the OfS's key objectives (see Figure 2) and ensure that any posts reflect these appropriately.

Figure 2: The OfS's key objectives

We aim to ensure that...

Office for Students | OfS

every student, whatever their background,	has a fulfilling experience of higher education	that enriches their lives and careers.
Participation	**Experience**	**Outcomes**
Objective 1 All students, from all backgrounds, with the ability and desire to undertake higher education, are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from higher education.	**Objective 2** All students, from all backgrounds, receive a high quality academic experience, and their interests are protected while they study or in the event of provider, campus or course closure.	**Objective 3** All students, from all backgrounds, are able to progress into employment, further study, and fulfilling lives, and their qualifications hold their value over time.

Value for money

Objective 4
All students, from all backgrounds, receive value for money.

Section 8: How the OfS will work with partnerships

How the OfS will work with partners

113.   Each partnership will be allocated an NCOP account manager from the OfS, who should be the first point of contact. The account manager will oversee the monitoring process and subsequent actions for their portfolio of partnerships, as well as communicating with partnerships through face-to-face meetings, phone, email and video conferencing.

Communication will normally be with the lead contact for each partnership, but this may include the chair of the steering group and other partners and stakeholders as necessary. A list of the account managers and the partnerships they are responsible for is available on the VeryConnect community platform.

114. To run a successful programme, the OfS will foster open and transparent relationships with NCOP partnerships. In order to do this we will:

a. Listen to what you have to say on all aspects of the programme.

b. Champion effective practice through case studies and video clips on our website and in OfS publications.

c. Visit partnerships to see NCOP in action.

d. Hold webinars, conference calls or online chats (on the NCOP community platform), when we think it appropriate, for partnerships to raise questions or discuss potential courses of action. We will arrange these and communicate the details in advance. Themes for discussion can be suggested by both the OfS and partnerships.

e. Email partnership chairs or leads (as appropriate) directly with key information or action that needs to be taken.

f. Continue to send out operational update emails to partnerships' named first, second and third contacts.

g. Respond to emails sent to the NCOP inbox within five working days.

What the OfS expects from partners

115. We expect partnerships to be open, clear and honest in their communications with us.

116. Partnerships should use the most appropriate form of communication. The NCOP inbox is monitored throughout the day but partnerships may want to discuss particular matters with us by telephone.

117. We expect partnership chairs and leads to disseminate information throughout their partnerships as and when necessary.

118. Partnerships are required to respond to requests for information in accordance with the timeframes set by the OfS. In general, we would expect partners to respond to requests for information or queries from the OfS within five working days, but we will consider whether it is appropriate to set a shorter or longer timeframe depending on the particular circumstances.

Section 9: When a partnership fails to deliver

119. The partnership's award letter and its annex form part of the terms and conditions of the grant. These terms and conditions confirm the circumstances in which we would withhold or suspend payment of funds or require repayment (see Annex B).

120. Partnerships will send financial updates to the OfS every six months through monitoring returns, as detailed in Section 6 (although this may vary depending on the terms and conditions of the specific grant provided to a partnership). We expect to engage regularly with

partnerships through account managers and we advise partnerships to keep their account manager informed of progress and whether there are any partnership or financial issues that might arise.

121.   Where there are concerns about the use of the funding, the OfS will in the first instance contact the partnership manager and lead provider to investigate further. The OfS reserves the right to audit any funding it allocates, and we would do this through the lead provider with responsibility for the funding. It is highly likely that an audit will be conducted for phase two of the programme as it was for the first phase.

122.   Partnership members are encouraged to contact the OfS via their account manager in the first instance if they wish to bring an issue to our attention and we would advise early contact whenever possible, before matters escalate. We expect partnership members to notify us of any event or circumstance that materially affects or could materially affect its ability to comply with the terms and conditions of funding. Equally, there might be instances when an issue is reported to the OfS anonymously, by way of 'whistle-blowing'. While the OfS's powers do not extend to investigating individual complaints, these matters may be of regulatory interest in circumstances where they are relevant to a provider's compliance with the conditions of registration or the terms and conditions of the grant. The process for notifications is available on our website[21].

A step-based approach

123.   We recognise that plans may change and that there may be unavoidable slippage in progress or a delay in programme activity or expenditure. The OfS will always work flexibly with partnerships, taking a risk-based approach to support them in meeting their own objectives and the delivery of the programme. Without prejudice to any other steps we may take in accordance with the terms and conditions of funding, the following steps set out our expected approach to working with a partnership when things do not go to plan:

a.   **Step 1:** Where we become aware of issues of slippage in progress against a partnership's operating plan through informal updates or programme monitoring, we would normally expect, in the first instance, to arrange a discussion with the chair of the partnership's governing board, the partnership manager and a representative from the lead provider (if this person is not the chair). This will be to understand the issues around the partnership's lack of progress and what the partnership is doing to address it. We will ask the partnership to draw up an action plan setting out those tasks which will get it back on track in a specified timeframe. We will also re-profile funds if this forms part of the action plan approach.

b.   **Step 2:** We will expect regular updates, via the OfS account manager, on the implementation of the partnership's action plan. If it appears that the timescales or tasks within it are not on track, or if the original action plan was in response to a significant issue, we may escalate to the senior management of the lead provider. The OfS will want to engage with the lead provider to ensure that strategic resource is provided to ensure the

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[21] See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/contact/complaints-and-notifications/. The OfS will not be able to provide an update on the progress or outcome of any issue raised. This is because our statutory powers do not extend to investigating individual complaints and because of the confidential nature of any decisions we take about the regulatory affairs of a provider.

partnership's progress is brought back into line, against the expectations set out in an updated action plan and the partnership's original operating plan. The partnership governing board should also be informed of these issues and be updated on progress.

c. **Step 3:** Circumstances in which we would consider a partnership to be persistently failing include if it has not delivered on its action plan, is significantly behind or repeatedly underperforming against its objectives and project plan, and where it does not respond to OfS requests appropriately or in a timely manner. If any of these circumstances arise we can consider withholding or suspending payment of the grant, requiring repayment of all or part of the grant, or both, as well as recommissioning the related wards. We expect that this will be taken forward through a meeting with the OfS NCOP team including the Director for Fair Access and Participation, representatives of the lead provider and the partnership (including the chair of the governing board). Subsequent steps will be taken forward through notice to the accountable officer of the lead provider and the OfS directors or board where necessary. The terms and conditions set out in Annex B provide further clarification on the circumstances by which the OfS would withdraw funding from a partnership.

124. Correspondence for all steps will be issued by the partnership account manager and sent to the partnership manager, partnership chair and lead provider representative.

Section 10: Relationship with condition of registration

125. Partnerships are reminded that compliance with the terms and conditions of funding (including a direction issued pursuant to paragraph 5 of the award letter) is a mandatory requirement under condition G2 of the conditions of registration[22].

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[22] See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/conditions-of-registration/initial-and-general-ongoing-conditions-of-registration/

Annex A: Overview of key elements within the programme

	Aim	Coverage	Activities	Funding
Targeted outreach	Target learners supported to make well informed decisions about their future education.	Target learners who reside in Participation of Local Areas (POLAR3) quintile 1 and Gaps[23] quintile 1 and 2 areas.	Provision of programmes of higher education outreach.	OfS NCOP funding (targeted outreach allocation).
Outreach hubs: Signposting	Enabling teachers and advisors to find out about local outreach activity.	All secondary schools and colleges in the outreach hub area.	Acting as a point of contact signposting existing outreach. Website providing information and signposting.	OfS NCOP funding (outreach hub allocation).
Outreach hubs: Support	Enabling the schools and colleges most likely to benefit to access the higher education outreach that they need.	Secondary schools and colleges serving pupils from POLAR4 quintile 1 and 2 areas.	Engaging schools and colleges to understand their outreach needs. Facilitating access to existing outreach provision, either locally or nationally. Collaborative approaches to new provision where needed and where resources allow.	Drawing on both OfS NCOP funding (outreach hub allocation) and provider resources as set out in access and participation plans and other funding sources.
Outreach hubs: Strategic engagement	Supporting effective and impactful collaboration between higher education providers and	Geographic area covered by outreach hubs.	Understanding the local landscape of educational disadvantage, higher-level skills	Blend of OfS NCOP funding (outreach hub allocation) and other funding sources.

[23] See explanation on the archived HEFCE website at https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180319115152/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/gaps/

	their local partners.		needs and joined up careers advice. Developing innovative and locally tailored approaches to addressing the challenges identified.	

As new elements of the NCOP programme in phase two, additional information on the expectations and components for understanding progress in the delivery of outreach hub work is set out below.

Outreach hubs: Signposting

Expectations

- To provide a point of contact for teachers and advisors at all local state schools and colleges by signposting to existing outreach.

- Partnerships will have a website in place than can provide further information and signposting.

- There are no targets around the number of engagements through signposting.

- This activity will be funded through the outreach hub allocation.

Understanding progress

- To be measured through evaluation (locally and nationally) and through monitoring.

- The OfS will seek evidence that work has commenced and continues through routine monitoring.

- Partnerships should have a website in place and information should be easily accessed by teachers and advisors.

- The outreach hub is recognised as the first port of call to find out about higher education outreach offer in the local area.

Outreach hubs: Support

Expectations

This is specifically aimed at state secondary schools and colleges serving learners from POLAR4 quintile 1 and 2 areas. There are three elements to this:

1. Engaging schools and colleges to understand their outreach needs.

- By completing a mapping exercise and discussing current coverage with all partners, the partnership will understand which schools and colleges could be targeted for proactive engagement or additional support.

2. Facilitating access to existing outreach provision, either locally or nationally.

   - Proactive signposting to schools and colleges after assessment of need.

   - Help with facilitating access and delivery of outreach provision. For example, this might include providing support with travel costs, or help with supply teacher cover.

3. Collaborative approaches to new provision where needed and where resources allow.

   - Where unmet needs and gaps in outreach provision are identified, new collaborative provision can be funded to fill this gap.

   - This activity should be focused on specific underrepresented groups as identified in access and participation guidance ('OfS regulatory notice 1: Access and participation plan guidance for 2019-20' (OfS 2019.05)[24]).

   - Partnerships should work with local schools and colleges to determine the most appropriate recipients. For example, specific outreach provision for care experienced and estranged students in a locality.

Understanding progress

- All outreach activity delivered through NCOP funding must track learners – this includes any outreach activity facilitated through the outreach hub.

- NCOP activity should not duplicate or replace existing outreach that is delivered through access and participation plan activity. However, it can be used to help facilitate access to existing outreach.

- No learner engagement targets or school or college targets are in place so there are no minimum expectations.

- Progress will be reported through monitoring but all activity needs should be included in partnerships local evaluation plans.

Outreach hubs: Strategic engagement

There are two elements to this work:

1. Understanding the local landscape of educational disadvantage, higher level skills needs and joined up careers advice.

2. Developing innovative and locally tailored approaches to addressing the challenges identified.

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[24] Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-notice-1-access-and-participation-plan-guidance/

Expectations

Strategic engagement has a specific focus on collaborative work between partnership members (universities and colleges) and their local partners, through the two key elements above. We would also advise partnerships that OfS NCOP funding should not be used to displace other funding.

Understanding progress

- All outreach activity delivered through NCOP funding must track learners – this includes any new strategic outreach activity the hub collaborates on with other partners.

- No engagement targets are in place so there are no minimum or maximum expectations.

- Progress will be reported through monitoring but all activity needs to be included in evaluation plans.

Annex B: NCOP phase two award letter and terms and conditions of grant

Nicholson House

Lime Kiln Close

Stoke Gifford

BRISTOL

BS34 8SR

0117 931 7317

www.officeforstudents.org.uk

Date

Dear [accountable officer]

National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP): [PARTNERSHIP NAME] allocation

1. I am pleased to confirm the arrangements for providing grant funding from the Office for Students (**'OfS'**) to PROVIDER NAME (**'the lead provider'**) under section 39 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (**'HERA'**).

2. The OfS board has agreed at its meeting on 26 March 2019 to provide support for the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (**'NCOP'**) (**'the Project'**) in 2019-20 and 2020-21. This letter confirms:

   • the terms and conditions the partnership will be obliged to fulfil and for which, as lead institution, you will be responsible (see Annex A of the original letter)

   • the Grant Objectives and Purposes (see Annex B of the original letter)

   • the geographic coverage of your partnership (see Annex C of the original letter)

   • the funding your partnership will receive for 2019-20 and the indicative funding for 2020-21 (see Annex D).

3. By investing in the NCOP the OfS aims to:

   • reduce the gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups

   • support young people to make well-informed decisions about their future education

   • support effective and impactful local collaboration by higher education providers working together with schools, colleges, employers and other partners

   • contribute to a stronger evidence base around 'what works' in higher education outreach and strengthen evaluation practice in the sector.

4. The OfS will provide support for the Project in the form of grant funding to the lead provider in relation to the delivery of the Project in the geographic locations assigned to the NCOP partnership (as set out in Annex C of the original letter). In doing so, the lead provider must act only in connection with the Grant Objectives and Purposes at Annex B.

5. For the avoidance of any doubt this grant is being provided to the lead provider for the Grant Objectives and Purposes set out in Annex B. In providing the grant funding, the OfS requires, as a condition of funding, the lead provider to comply with any directions given by the OfS that are within the scope of the Grant Objectives and Purposes and to ensure that the partnership complies with any directions given by the OfS. This includes, but is not limited to, directions in relation to:

   - the governance arrangements required to ensure the delivery of the Project, including that the partnership is effectively constituted, there are appropriate service level agreements in place, and governance meetings take place in a timely fashion

   - engagement with learners, including that partnerships are using all reasonable steps to engage through targeted outreach at least 20 per cent of the total population of target young people in Years 9 to 13

   - ensuring that the types of activities undertaken through targeted outreach are in accordance with the progression framework

   - the delivery of robust evaluation at both a local and national level to assess how successfully the Project is meeting its objectives

   - the use of the recognised NCOP tracking services and timely submission of data

   - information and signposting for teachers and advisors about local outreach activity, including the use of a website for the partnership's outreach hub

   - engagement with schools and colleges and pro-active support around outreach

   - strategic engagement with local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, employers and others to understand the landscape of educational disadvantage, high level skills needs and joined up careers advice in the area

   - compliance with the OfS's monitoring requirements

   - the guidance around NCOP branding

   - the partnership's engagement with the OfS.

6. In order to receive its funding allocation the lead provider will be required to submit an approved operating plan, with a funding profile, to the OfS in line with the schedule we have agreed with you. The operating plan will need to be agreed with the OfS and will form part of your funding agreement. For the avoidance of any doubt, funding for phase two of the Project is conditional on the OfS's approval of the operating plan.

7. Annex D of the original letter sets out the indicative funding for 2020-21. For the avoidance of any doubt this is indicative funding only and is subject to any changes to the grant that the OfS receives from the government.

8. Project guidance will be released in June 2019 which will set out our detailed phase two Project requirements.

9. The terms and conditions of the grant are set out at Annex A of the original letter. This letter also forms part of the terms and conditions of your grant, including the condition set out at paragraph 5 above.

10. The OfS reserves the right to revise or add to the terms and conditions that apply to this grant.

11. In order to allow commencement of funding once the preconditions of funding have been satisfied, please sign the box below to confirm your understanding of, and agreement to, the terms and conditions of funding and return the signed copy of the letter, preferably in PDF format, to ncop@officeforstudents.org.uk.

12. If you have any questions about the content of this letter please contact ncop@officeforstudents.org.uk.

13. Thank you for your continued support for NCOP.

Yours sincerely

Chris Millward

Director for Fair Access and Participation

CC NCOP lead and chair contacts for partnership

I have read, understood and agree to the terms and conditions associated with this funding for the National Collaborative Outreach Programme and that acceptance of the funding offered will not result in any double funding (as defined in Clause 5(d) of Annex A).

Signed _____ Date _____

Print name _____

Annex A (of the original letter) Terms and conditions of grant

1. The lead provider must, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the OfS, use the grant made by the OfS only in accordance with the Grant Objectives and Purposes set out at Annex C of the original letter, any operating plan accepted by the OfS, any direction issued by the OfS

pursuant to paragraph 5 of the covering letter, the guidance to be issued in June 2019 and any other guidance issued by the OfS (as amended from time to time).

2. The lead provider is receiving the grant to support its partnership in the delivery of the Project in accordance with its approved operating plan, the guidance to be issued in June 2019 and any other guidance issued by the OfS (as amended from time to time).

Payment of grant

3. The OfS and the lead provider will agree a funding profile based on the provider's eligible expenditure. The OfS cannot provide funding in advance of need.

4. The OfS may withhold, suspend or require the lead provider to repay part or all of the grant if it does not comply with the conditions the OfS has attached to the funding or if it has been over-funded. In cases where we require repayment under clauses 5(a) to 5(f) inclusive we may charge interest, at 2 per cent above the Bank of England base rate, for the period before the lead provider repays the funding to us.

5. The circumstances in which the OfS reserves the right to withhold or suspend payment of the grant and/or require repayment of all or part of the grant include, but are not limited to, the following circumstances:

   a. The grant is used otherwise than in accordance with paragraph 1.

   b. The OfS considers reasonably that satisfactory progress has not been made with the delivery of the Project in accordance with the approved operating plan, the guidance to be issued in June 2019 and any other guidance issued by the OfS (as amended from time to time).

   c. The OfS considers that the Project is being delivered in a negligent manner.

   d. Duplicate funding for the Project is obtained from a third party ('**double funding**').

   e. Funding is obtained from a third party which, in the OfS's reasonable opinion, undertakes activities that are likely to bring the Project or the OfS into disrepute.

   f. The partnership provides the OfS with information which is materially misleading or inaccurate.

   g. The OfS considers that further payment would place public funds at risk.

6. Where any sum fails to be repaid to the OfS in connection with the allocation, the OfS may recover that sum by way of set-off against any other sum payable by the OfS to the lead provider or issue an invoice. Under no circumstances will the amount of the allocation be increased in the event of any overspending in the delivery of the partnership's work.

7. When using OfS funding, the lead provider must apply proper processes that ensure effective accountability and secure value for money. This requirement also applies where the lead provider passes on part of its OfS funding to any of the parties to the partnership or another legally distinct entity. In these circumstances, the lead provider will be held accountable for those funds. The lead provider must therefore ensure adequate and effective accountability arrangements are in place when it passes on such funding to a partner or another entity.

Monitoring and reporting

8. It is the responsibility of the lead provider to closely monitor the delivery and success of the partnership to ensure that the OfS's minimum expectations of the Project are met. Other aims and objectives for the partnership's activities are the responsibility of the recipient and constituent partners. The OfS requires the lead provider to have appropriate governance and monitoring arrangements in place for this collaborative work.

9. The lead provider must keep separate accounting and other records in relation to the Project.

10. The lead provider is required to fulfil the OfS's monitoring requirements in relation to the Project. This will be notified in Project guidance to be issued in June 2019.

11. The lead provider will be expected to engage with the allocated OfS officer who will assess whether the partnership is meeting its targets and milestones as well as ensuring the partnership's funding profile is appropriate.

12. The OfS reserves the right to suspend, terminate or recover the grant if any of its monitoring requirements are not met. Additionally, monitoring requirements agreed at the outset of the Project are subject to adjustment by the OfS upon receipt of progress reports or for any other reasonable cause.

13. The lead provider must promptly inform the OfS (in advance where this is known) in writing:

    a. Of any significant variances of expenditure to that set out in the funding profile or subsequent Project monitoring.

    b. If there is any significant alteration to the Project or a matter which is likely to significantly affect the intended aims, outcomes and/or outputs.

    c. If there are delays in starting or implementing the Project or the Project is put on hold for any reason.

14. The lead provider must inform the OfS if it obtains any additional funding, normally as part of routine Project monitoring.

15. The OfS reserves its ability to amend the funding it provides under this grant.

Data protection and state aid

16. The lead provider must comply with the Data Protection Act 2018, General Data Protection Regulation and any successor legislation and regulation enacting provisions relating to the processing of personal data.

17. The lead provider must ensure compliance with EU state aid law in its own use of OfS funding. In the case of any breach of state aid law the OfS may be required to recover all or some funding, together with interest. The OfS may also be required to withhold funding or aspects of funding to the lead provider in the event that it is subject to a state aid enquiry or has an outstanding recovery notice against it.

Eligibility

18. Grant payments will be made only while, and in respect of periods during which, the lead provider meets all eligibility requirements, including that it is in the Approved (fee cap) category on the OfS's Register.

Provision of information and data assurance

19. The lead provider must promptly provide to the OfS (or shall provide the OfS with access to) such of the accounting, accountability and other information, records and assets as the OfS or its agents shall reasonably require from time to time for the purposes of any of the OfS's functions. This may include the supply of management accounts, data and other financial or non-financial information. The responsibility for the quality and accuracy of that data rests with the lead provider. The lead provider is responsible for ensuring that the other parties to the partnership also provide any such reasonably requested information.

Audits and data reconciliation

20. The OfS monitors the reasonableness of data and undertakes verification, validation and reconciliation work with other datasets.

21. The OfS may undertake audits of the recipient if it deems this necessary, including grant audits.

22. If data or information has not been provided, or the OfS considers that it is incomplete, incorrect or otherwise not of a satisfactory quality, then the OfS may, at its sole discretion, use its own assumptions or estimates about the relevant data or information for the provider to determine its eligibility for, and level of, funding. This may include assuming that the provider has no eligible activity to count towards the allocation of a particular element of funding and thus that no such funding should be provided.

Evaluation

23. The partnership must submit a local evaluation plan to the OfS in line with the schedule agreed between the lead provider and the OfS. The partnership is required to engage fully with the OfS appointed external Project evaluation provider.

24. The partnership is required to engage the services of an approved higher education tracking provider.

Relationship with conditions of registration

25. The provider is reminded that compliance with the above terms and conditions (including a direction issued pursuant to paragraph 5 of the covering letter) is a mandatory requirement under condition G2 of the conditions of registration. For the avoidance of doubt, any remedial power contained in the above terms and conditions (for example, a power to withhold, suspend or require repayment of funding) is without prejudice to the OfS's powers under sections 15, 16 and 18 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017.

Annex C: Grant objectives and purposes

1. The Office for Students (**'OfS'**) is providing grant funding to the recipient pursuant to section 39 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (**'HERA'**) to provide support for the delivery of the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (**'NCOP'**) in the geographic locations assigned to the NCOP partnership led by the recipient.

2. In doing so, the recipient must act only in connection with its approved operating plans, guidance issued by the OfS (as amended from time to time) and the following objectives (collectively, **'the Grant Objectives and Purposes'**):

   a. Providing impartial, sustained and progressive higher education outreach from a range of providers tailored to the needs of young people in its allocated target ward areas (**'targeted outreach'**).

   b. Providing open, transparent and impartial routes for schools and colleges to access outreach activity from a range of higher education providers avoiding duplication and eliminating gaps in outreach provision (**'outreach hubs'**). This includes:

      i. Helping teachers and advisors find out about the outreach activity available in an area by:

         • acting as a point of contact and information for all state secondary schools and colleges in its allocated geographic remit

         • hosting a website with details of the local outreach offer and signposting other information to support schools and colleges.

      ii. Supporting schools and colleges in areas of low participation to access higher education outreach by:

         • engaging with schools and colleges in areas of low higher education participation to understand their outreach needs

         • facilitating access to existing outreach provision, either locally or nationally, for schools and colleges in areas of low participation

         • working collaboratively to help develop new or expanded outreach provision to meet the needs of schools and colleges in areas of low participation using the combined resources of the providers in the area and drawing on the investment set out in their access and participation plans where appropriate.

   c. The provision of outreach hubs also includes supporting a local partnership infrastructure which can act as a vehicle for activity on a range of agendas relating to access and participation, including activity set out in institutional access and participation plans. This includes:

      i. Engaging strategically with local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, employers and others to understand the landscape of educational disadvantage, high level skills needs and joined up careers advice in the area.

    ii.   As far as possible developing innovative and locally tailored approaches to address the challenges identified through the above engagement.

  d. Supporting robust evaluation at both a local and national level and the development of a strengthened evidence base.

3. The activities and approaches delivered under (2)(a) and (2)(b) above are expected to:

  a. deliver activity that demonstrably improves equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in and progress from higher education

  b. be informed by evidence and focused on activity that has greatest impact on access and participation outcomes

  c. maximise opportunities to develop and deliver effective outreach collaboratively and in partnership with schools, colleges and others to create a shared vision and aims

  d. be transparent and accountable so that partners (including learners) and the wider community can understand the work taking place

  e. provide value for money

  f. be focused on continuous improvement drawing on robust evidence of what works and in what context to address the challenges of improving access, success and progression.

Annex D: NCOP phase two local evaluation plan guidance

1. This document provides details of the OfS's requirements for partnerships' NCOP phase two evaluation planning:

   a. Section 1 provides a summary of the OfS's evaluation expectations for NCOP partnerships suitable for programme leaders and accountable leads.

   b. Section 2 provides an overview and update for the national approach to monitoring and evaluation in phase two.

   c. Sections 3 and 4 provide full details and guidance for partnership evaluation specialists to report phase two evaluation plans to the OfS.

Key action points and deadlines for partnerships

2. Complete the evaluation self-assessment tool.

3. Develop a robust and credible evaluation plan which maps onto your progression framework and covers each essential element detailed in this guidance.

4. Submit the evaluation self-assessment and plan documents to the OfS at ncop@officeforstudents.org.uk by **Monday 8 July 2019**.

Section 1: OfS expectations for partnerships' evaluation in phase two

Why evaluate?

5. Funding of over £100 million will be invested in the targeted outreach which partnerships are delivering through NCOP in phase two. This represents a significant investment of public funds and we need to ensure that it used most effectively to deliver the programme's intended outcomes. Given that NCOP activity involves young people and is designed to positively influence their future decisions, there is also a clear imperative that evaluation seeks to understand any unintended negative impacts.

6. One of the aims for NCOP is to: 'Contribute to a stronger evidence base around 'what works' in higher education outreach and strengthen evaluation practice in the sector'. The evidence generated by your evaluation will be synthesised by CFE Research and shared more widely through regular reporting. We expect that the evidence your evaluation generates will be an important resource for the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education.

7. We expect you to have a strong evaluation plan in place, which is appropriately resourced, to underpin your ability to generate high quality evidence throughout phase two. The primary focus of your evaluation must be on understanding the effectiveness of your outreach work (in which contexts, and for which learners) to improve your activities and contribute to the wider evidence base.

Section 2: Outlining phase two national monitoring and evaluation

Continuing programme monitoring and longitudinal tracking in phase two

8. Comprehensive monitoring and longitudinal tracking are vital to good governance, we also expect that this data will play an important role in your evaluation. However, collecting monitoring and tracking data alone, does not equate to evaluation.

9. Routine programme monitoring will continue in phase two, the continuing requirement for each partnership to return data to the OfS at regular intervals. The OfS is working with the tracking services to develop processes in phase two which will improve the efficiency and accuracy of the monitoring data we collect. Monitoring guidance for phase two will be issued separately through the normal channels in due course. Phase two monitoring is expected in March and October each year.

10. You must track all individuals who participate in outreach activity which is wholly or partly paid for using NCOP funds (whether facilitated through an outreach hub or not). Where outreach activity is not NCOP-funded, tracking participants is recommended but not required (for instance, where an outreach hub only signposts or coordinates access to outreach). The OfS will work with the tracking services to support a consistent approach to tracking outreach hub activities. Further guidance will follow in due course.

11. The tracking services will continue to share partnerships' activity and participant data with CFE at periodic intervals for analysis during phase two.

National evaluation (programme level) and capability building in phase two

12. We expect you to engage and communicate with the national evaluation and capability building as and when requested. You are also expected to engage with and, where appropriate, act on any learning which the national evaluation generates.

13. CFE Research will continue the national impact evaluation of NCOP through phase two using a quasi-experimental approach drawing on NCOP learner participant survey data and longitudinal tracking data. The phase two participant surveys are expected to run as follows:

    a. **Main wave 2 survey: September to October 2019** (consortia may also run the wave 2 survey with Year 11 and Year 13 students ahead of exams from April to May 2019).

    b. **Main wave 3 survey: September to October 2020** (consortia may also run the wave 3 survey with Year 11 and Year 13 students ahead of exams from April to May 2020).

14. CFE will continue to synthesise and report on the evidence generated by partnerships to capture and share the programme learning. This critical part of the national evaluation aims to develop a stronger evidence base around 'what works' in higher education outreach.

15. CFE's next impact evaluation report due to be published in autumn 2019, will contain findings from phase one formative research, impact data analyses and a synthesis of evidence generated by partnerships (from the latest spring 2019 call for evidence).

16. The CFE report due in autumn 2019 plans to compare NCOP learner's baseline and wave 1 survey responses at a programme level to explore changes in:

- attitudes towards higher education

- aspirations for the future

- perceived knowledge about higher education

- intention to apply to higher education.

17. The CFE report due in autumn 2019 will explore differences in the frequency and type of outreach activities, to see whether any differences are associated with differential participant outcomes. CFE will also look at differences between specific demographic characteristics captured (ethnicity, disability and gender) through the longitudinal tracking data. When National Pupil Database data is available from the Department for Education, CFE will conduct a more detailed analyses including other learner characteristics and educational attainment, alongside use of comparison groups.

18. The OfS will conduct analyses of the programme as it progresses through phase two, to understand higher education participation patterns in the target NCOP wards. Analyses will be defined during 2019 and completed as the National Pupil Database, the Higher Education Statistics Agency and Individualised Learner Record national datasets become available. The analyses will consider progression rates into pathways at Key Stage 5, as well as progression rates into and through higher education. During phase two, the OfS additionally plans to work with UCAS to conduct an analysis of application rates. Plans, findings and data from analyses will be shared as they are available.

19. The OfS will commission substantial capability building support for partnerships to develop evaluation practice in phase two. This support will be tailored to meet partnerships' needs, starting with a review of the self-assessment tools and evaluation plans. The support will not be designed to fill staffing gaps and weaker practice due to lack of sufficiently experienced or deployed evaluation resource. We expect the support to include elements of:

- knowledge capturing

- knowledge sharing

- facilitating a community of practice network

- identifying opportunities for shared measurement tools

- working with the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education[25] to coordinate how NCOP partnerships can respond to evidence gaps

20. The OfS will recommission the national formative evaluation, to be in place for phase two.

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[25] Further information on the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (formerly referred to as 'the evidence and impact exchange' or 'EIX') is available at http://www.taso-he.org/

21. The national evaluation plans will be in place by July 2019 to evaluate phase two outreach hubs at a programme level. Details will be shared with partnerships in due course to assist with planning.

Section 3: Completing a self-assessment of your current evaluation approach

Completing the evaluation self-assessment tool

22. You must submit your completed self-assessment tool by email to ncop@officeforstudents.org.uk by **Monday 8 July 2019**. The self-assessment tool will not be assessed, given that it considers your historical evaluation practice during phase one.

23. You should use the tool to assess your partnership's phase one evaluation approach and identify where you can make changes to improve your evaluation in phase two. Self-assessments will be reviewed by an external expert and used to inform the design of the NCOP evaluation capability building support commissioned by the OfS for phase two.

24. The self-assessment tool is designed to support you to reflect on your phase one evaluation approach and identify areas where you can improve. Please answer the questions honestly so the results can help provide more tailored and appropriate support in future. We have strong expectations for evaluation practice and we want to better understand how we can help partnerships face the shared challenges of evaluation.

25. We recommend that you draw on the 'Learning' dimension of the self-assessment tool and associated guidance to optimise learning from your evaluation in phase one. This includes learning from the evidence your evaluation has generated, but also learning from how the evaluation has worked during phase one.

Resources

- 'Evaluation self-assessment tool'[26]: the self-assessment tool in Microsoft Excel which you will need to complete and submit alongside your evaluation plan.

- 'How to use the self-assessment tool'[27]: a short pdf document which will guide you through completing the self-assessment tool. You may only need to refer to this if you have questions about using the tool.

- 'Using standards of evidence to evaluate impact of outreach'[28]: refer to section 6 (pages 45 to 50) for guidance on learning from evaluation and translating findings into action

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[26] The self-assessment tool is available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/standards-of-evidence-and-evaluation-self-assessment-tool/evaluation-self-assessment-tool/

[27] The self-assessment tool user guide is available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/standards-of-evidence-and-evaluation-self-assessment-tool/evaluation-self-assessment-tool/

[28] For the guide to using standards of evidence to evaluate impact of outreach, see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/standards-of-evidence-and-evaluating-impact-of-outreach/

which improves impact (i.e. planning how you can use, interpret and share evaluation findings).

Section 4: Developing your phase two evaluation plan

Evaluation plan purpose and scope

26. You must submit your evaluation plan by email to ncop@officeforstudents.org.uk by **Monday 8 July 2019** for approval (associated files accepted, e.g. Excel files for logic models).

27. Each plan will then be reviewed externally (by the successful tenderer for the new phase two capability building commission), and partnerships will be given feedback rapidly to ensure phase two evaluations are appropriately robust.

28. Your evaluation plan will also be used alongside your self-assessment tool, to identify areas where we can provide additional capability building to support developing evaluation practice.

29. The evaluation plan documents are not planned for wider dissemination or to be used as NCOP promotional materials. You can assume reviewers will have a high level of familiarity with the NCOP wider programme, knowledge of evaluation approaches, and access to submitted operating plan documents.

30. Your evaluation plan should cover the period of funded NCOP activity from 1 August 2019 to 31 July 2021. However, your partnership may need to plan and budget for some local evaluation activity to extend beyond the programme end date (e.g. if you depend on key data or analysis available shortly after July 2021 which is likely to generate important evidence)

Evaluation plan essential element: Strategic context

31. Your evaluation plan must include a summary of your current practice and key action plan points to develop your strategic context for evaluation. Draw on the 'Strategic context' dimension in your completed self-assessment tool to develop an action plan which will build the partnership's evaluation approach in this area.

32. You should include your plans to continue and build engagement with the evaluation and accountability at all levels, from practitioners working in classrooms to senior strategic oversight. We expect you to understand which roles need to be engaged and to summarise the practical mechanisms which are, or will be, in place to do this. This stage should lay the foundations to gain commitment from people whose help you will need to deliver the evaluation. These activities can also help develop later conversations when you deliver evaluation findings and how others can translate those into their practice.

Resources: Further guidance

- Refer to section 2 (pages 2 to 7) in the guidance 'Using standards of evidence to evaluate impact of outreach'[29] for more detailed advice and practical examples.

- Refer to the 'Strategic context' dimension in your completed self-assessment tool.

Evaluation plan essential element: Programme design

33. The evaluation plan must include a summary of the **evidence informed rationale** for your **activity selection and design**. This should draw on and reference existing relevant evidence and consider the underlying assumptions you have made. Ensure that this is a short summary outline that articulates briefly which evidence has informed your decisions of activity choice and evaluation design, referenced where appropriate. Do not submit literature reviews or your phase one evaluation reports as part of your evaluation plan as these would be far too detailed. We expect that the strength and nature of your evidence base for activity design will affect how you approach different areas of your evaluation design.

34. The evaluation plan must include a **detailed** (i.e. at micro activity level) **logic model** which includes the standard elements as below. We expect that the detailed logic model will map onto the progression framework that has been submitted to the OfS as part of your phase two operating plan and will also align with the wider NCOP outcomes.

    a. **Resources and inputs**: the identified necessary resources to deliver phase two.

    b. **Activities**: details of the specific activities which will take place in phase two. Most partnerships will be able to map these on to their existing progression framework.

    c. **Outputs**: the expected outputs for your planned activities. This should include what you expect or will observe when activities have taken place, and how you know they have taken place as you planned.

    d. **Short, medium, and long-term outcomes**: the specific expected short, medium, and long-term outcomes for your planned activities (these should map onto your existing progression framework). Outcomes should define expected 'change' (e.g. increase or decrease) and are ideally an observable or measurable change. If there are only outputs and no identified outcomes for an activity, you should seriously question why that activity is taking place.

35. The evaluation plan must include a detailed (i.e. at micro activity level) indicator bank which inventories the indicators, measures and targets which map on to the outcomes your programme is expecting to achieve. These should be as specific as possible and use validated tools where possible which can be externally compared or benchmarked. Measures may include questions from the national evaluation participant survey. You may wish to submit these as separate documents if this is more useful for your evaluation operationally.

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[29] Available on the OfS website at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/standards-of-evidence-and-evaluating-impact-of-outreach/

36. We understand that logic models are a simplified representation of your programme and do not fully capture the complex interrelationships between the different elements. Logic models generally also do not help identify or articulate where and what assumptions underpin the 'logic'. To support your logic model, you may additionally include details of any theory of change work if your consortia has taken this approach.

37. Relevant NCOP phase two programme impact outcomes are included here below for your reference. You will need to link your activities, outputs and outcomes with the wider programme outcomes for the evaluation plan. In your own evaluation planning, you should account for these wider NCOP outcomes being evaluated at a programme level through the national impact and formative evaluation.

38. You may also wish to briefly describe other evaluation approaches (e.g. process evaluation) or research to supplement your impact evaluation.

Resources: NCOP programme outcomes

NCOP is currently focused on providing targeted sustained and progressive higher education outreach to young people (Years 9 to 13) living in particular areas ('wards'). The programme is intended to complement and add value to the work that higher education providers undertake (i.e. not replace) through their access and participation plans, in particular work that is best delivered in collaboration.

The programme of funded NCOP outreach activity aims to:

- Reduce the gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups in 997 specific targeted wards in England where participation in higher education is low and lower than might be expected given local GCSE results.

- Support young people in Years 9 to 13 to make well-informed decisions about their future education.

- Support effective and impactful local collaboration by higher education providers working together with schools, colleges, employers and other partners.

- Contribute to a stronger evidence base around 'what works' in higher education outreach and strengthen evaluation practice in the sector.

The funded NCOP outreach hubs aim to:

- Support schools and colleges in the allocated 'local authority units' to find out about the existing outreach provision which is available to them.

- Proactively engage with and support schools and colleges in the allocated 'local authority units' to improve outreach provision for young people from underrepresented groups.

- Provide a platform for collaborative, innovative and tailored outreach which supports young people from underrepresented groups in the allocated 'local authority units' to make well-informed decisions about their future education

Resources: further guidance

- Refer to section 3 (pages 7 to 18) in the guidance 'Using standards of evidence to evaluate impact of outreach' for more detailed advice and practical examples.

- Refer to the areas included in the 'Programme design' dimension in your completed self-assessment tool and the examples of how this might be demonstrated.

- Refer to Appendix 2: NCOP evaluation logic chain and indicator bank in the 'Year one report of the national formative and impact evaluation' by CFE Research'[30](March 2018).

- Refer to the HEFCE commissioned: 'Student opportunity outcomes framework research: In-depth study by CFE Research'[31] (2015).

Evaluation plan essential element: Evaluation design and implementation

Evaluation design

39. You should plan to generate evidence through your evaluation that helps you understand which interventions (in which contexts, and for which learners) work well, and learn from what is not working so well.

40. We recently published standards of evidence which define three types of evidence and what associated causal claims can be made from these (see resources for this section). Your evaluation design must **support you to generate robust type two or type three evidence** (qualitative or quantitative) for the majority of your NCOP funded outreach activity. This is to support NCOP's goal to contribute to a stronger evidence base around 'what works' in higher education outreach.

41. Your decisions about which type of evaluation evidence is appropriate should be guided by: the type and intensity of the activity, the strength of existing evidence, the level of investment, and the importance of the outcome within your wider progression framework.

42. Your evaluation plan must include a brief summary of your evaluation methodology and the type of evidence (referring to the standards of evidence types) that you expect to generate for **each** of your outcomes (intermediate and long term) and activities.

43. Your evaluation design should be transparent and critically aware of your selected methods' limitations. Where appropriate, you should plan to generate and triangulate different types of evidence to address the methodological limitations and strengthen the evaluative conclusions you will make.

44. There are challenges associated with evaluating a programme of activities and disentangling the combined effects of those. NCOP is focused on a sustained progressive approach which

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[30] 'Year one report of the national formative and impact evaluation' by CFE Research, available at https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180405115436/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2018/ncopyear1/

[31] 'Student Opportunity outcomes framework research: in-depth study' by CFE Research, available at https://dera.ioe.ac.uk//23656/

aims to derive benefits from delivering numerous outreach activities over time to the same NCOP learners. However, we expect your evaluation design to consider how you will evaluate both:

- the longer-term outcomes for your partnership's activities (e.g. through tracking and comparison groups)

- the intermediate outcomes you have identified for an activity or a small sub-set of activities.

Evaluation implementation

45. Your evaluation planning will be most useful if you think through the practical elements which will help you deliver an effective evaluation. We recommend that your evaluation planning considers the following areas in further detail and you may wish to tell us briefly about how you approached accounting for these in your evaluation plan: project management, data collection, ethical advice and approval, data access and sharing.

46. Your evaluation plan must include a brief summary of key risks you have identified and your plans to mitigate these.

47. Your evaluation plan must include an **estimated breakdown** of the **cost allocation** for your evaluation and research, including any related services, subscriptions, staffing time, materials and equipment. Research and evaluation activity should be separated where possible. You will not be monitored against these detailed financial estimates.

Resources: further guidance

- Refer to section 4 and 5 (pages 18 to 45) in the guidance 'Using standards of evidence to evaluate impact of outreach'[32] for more detailed advice and practical examples.

- Refer to the areas included in the 'Evaluation design' dimension in your completed self-assessment tool and the examples of how this might be demonstrated. You may choose to complete the tab 'Evaluation activities optional' as individual assessments for each of your activities.

- Refer to the areas included in the 'Evaluation implementation' dimension in your completed self-assessment tool and the examples of how this might be demonstrated.

Evaluation plan essential element: Planning to learn from the evaluation

48. Learning from evaluation and translating your findings into practice is critical to ensure your evaluation contributes to improved practice and greater impact.

49. Your evaluation plan must include an outline of how you plan to ensure that the evidence generated through the evaluation will be shared within the partnership. These plans should

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[32] Available on the OfS website at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/standards-of-evidence-and-evaluating-impact-of-outreach/

ensure that the evaluation informs strategic decision making and practice (i.e. activity choices and improving how these are run).

50. Your plans may include evaluation engagement and communication activities designed for specific stakeholders within the partnership. Consider the areas within your strategic context section (see earlier section) as laying the foundations for your planned activities to promote learning from the evaluation.

51. Your evaluation plan must include an outline of how you plan to ensure that the evidence generated through the evaluation will be shared externally. These plans should ensure that the evaluation contributes to a stronger evidence base for NCOP and the wider sector (i.e. through submitting evidence to CFE Research and the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education).

52. We expect findings to be shared externally even where they show no impact or a negative impact, because this is often where the greatest learning takes place. Evaluation tends to generate many new questions and you may be able to make more sense of these through sharing with others and relating your findings to other evidence.

53. You should coordinate the timing of the engagement and communication, so it can make the most difference to your consortium's wider planning cycle.

Resources: further guidance

- Refer to section 6 (pages 45 to 50) in the guidance 'Using standards of evidence to evaluate impact of outreach'[33] for more detailed advice and practical examples.

- Refer to the areas included in the 'Learning' dimension in your completed self-assessment tool and the examples of how this might be demonstrated.

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[33] Available on the OfS website at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/standards-of-evidence-and-evaluating-impact-of-outreach/

Annex E: Phase two timeline

(Timings as of June 2019)

Activity	Date
OfS to commission capacity building support for partnerships (evaluation)	July 2019
Partnerships to complete and submit evaluation self-assessment tools to OfS	8 July 2019
Partnerships to complete and submit local evaluation plans to OfS	8 July 2019
Phase two commences	1 August 2019
Phase two monitoring submission dates	February and September 2020 and February 2021 (dates to be confirmed)
Phase two finishes	31 July 2021
Final monitoring submission (content to be confirmed)	October 2021 (to be confirmed)

List of abbreviations

CEC   Careers and Enterprise Company

EMWPREP   East Midlands Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Partnership

HEAT   Higher Education Access Tracker

LEP   Local enterprise partnership

NCOP   National Collaborative Outreach Programme

NCS   National Citizen Service

OfS   Office for Students

POLAR   Participation of Local Areas

TASO   Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes