

NCOP phase two local evaluation plan guidance

Document purpose and audience

1. This document provides details of the OfS's requirements for partnerships' NCOP phase two evaluation planning:
 - **Section 1** provides a summary of the OfS's evaluation expectations for NCOP partnerships suitable for programme leaders and accountable leads.
 - **Section 2** provides an overview and update for the national approach to monitoring and evaluation in phase two.
 - **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 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 is 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 - October 2019** (consortia 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** (consortia may also run the wave 3 survey with Year 11 and Year 13 students ahead of exams in April-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 summer 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 summer 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 summer 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 (NPD) data is available from the DfE, 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 NPD, HESA and Individualised Learner Record (ILR) 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 Education¹ 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.
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.

¹ Further information on the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education at: <https://taso.org.uk/> (formerly referred to as 'the evidence and impact exchange' or 'EIX').

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 8 July 2019.** The self-assessment tool will not be assessed, given that it considers your historical evaluation practice during phase one. Scoring within the tool is for your own use only.
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](#)²': 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](#)³': 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](#)⁴': refer to section 6 (pages 45-50) for guidance on learning from evaluation and translating findings into action which improves impact (i.e. planning to use and share evaluation findings).

² The self-assessment tool is available at: <https://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/>

³ The self-assessment tool user guide is available at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/8963d318-cb0c-4d46-9359-18304bfb7588/how-to-use-the-self-assessment-tool-revised-april-2019.pdf>

⁴For the guide to using standards of evidence to evaluate impact of outreach, see: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/f2424bc6-38d5-446c-881e-f4f54b73c2bc/using-standards-of-evidence-to-evaluate-impact-of-outreach.pdf>

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 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/or 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 2-7) in the guidance '[Using standards of evidence to evaluate impact of outreach](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/f2424bc6-38d5-446c-881e-f4f54b73c2bc/using-standards-of-evidence-to-evaluate-impact-of-outreach)⁵' for more detailed advice and practical examples.
- Refer to the 'Strategic context' dimension in your completed self-assessment tool.

⁵ Available on the OfS website at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/f2424bc6-38d5-446c-881e-f4f54b73c2bc/using-standards-of-evidence-to-evaluate-impact-of-outreach.pdf>

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 / 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/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.
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
- Pro-actively engage with and support schools and colleges in the allocated 'local authority units' to improve outreach provision for young people from under-represented groups
- Provide a platform for collaborative, innovative and tailored outreach which supports young people from under-represented groups in the allocated 'local authority units' to make well-informed decisions about their future education

Resources: further guidance

- Refer to section 3 (pages 7-18) 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 Research⁶ (March 2018).
- Refer to the HEFCE commissioned: 'Student Opportunity outcomes framework research: in-depth study by CFE Research'⁷ (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/or 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 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:

⁶ 'Year one report of the national formative and impact evaluation' by CFE Research: http://cfe.org.uk/app/uploads/2018/08/2018_ncopyear1.pdf

⁷ 'Student Opportunity outcomes framework research: in-depth study' by CFE Research: https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/23656/1/HEFCE2015_sodepth.pdf

- a. the longer-term outcomes for your partnership's activities (e.g. through tracking and comparison groups) and,
- b. 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, and materials/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 18-45) in the guidance '[Using standards of evidence to evaluate impact of outreach](#)⁸' 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

⁸ Available on the OfS website at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/f2424bc6-38d5-446c-881e-f4f54b73c2bc/using-standards-of-evidence-to-evaluate-impact-of-outreach.pdf>

plans should 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 45-50) in the guidance '[Using standards of evidence to evaluate impact of outreach](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/f2424bc6-38d5-446c-881e-f4f54b73c2bc/using-standards-of-evidence-to-evaluate-impact-of-outreach)⁹' 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.

⁹ Available on the OfS website at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/f2424bc6-38d5-446c-881e-f4f54b73c2bc/using-standards-of-evidence-to-evaluate-impact-of-outreach.pdf>