

Formative Evaluation and Capacity Building for NCOP

What is the formative evaluation about?

The Government has set goals to double the participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and increase by 20 per cent the number of students from ethnic minority groups into higher education by 2020. The NCOP is a new four-year investment by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to meet the Government's aims. 29 consortia have been awarded funding to target areas with low absolute levels of HE participation and where participation is lower than expected given GCSE attainment rates.

HEFCE has commissioned [CFE Research](#) in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University to undertake a formative evaluation of NCOP over the course of its operation commencing in January 2017 and to help develop the capacity of consortia to undertake robust local evaluations.

The purpose of the formative evaluation of NCOP is to gather evidence on and contribute to a fuller understanding of what works, in what context and why.

The key aims are to:

- explore the set-up and implementation of the collaborative approaches to outreach,
- work with and develop the capacity within

the consortia to undertake robust evaluation of activities at a local level, and

- triangulate local and national evidence to understand how effectively the partnerships are operating and delivering outreach in the target wards, and to identify good practice and areas for improvement.

What approach will the formative evaluation take?

Our approach to the evaluation will be flexible and iterative to reflect any changes in how NCOP is implemented. We will work collaboratively, ensuring consortia are supported to develop their local evaluations and consulted on their capacity building needs.

CFE Research is also leading HEFCE's impact evaluation of NCOP in which consortia will also be asked to participate. The two evaluation teams will plan our activities together to avoid overburdening and duplicating our engagement with consortia.

The main elements of the formative evaluation and capacity building activities (for 2017-18) are outlined overleaf.

Planning phase (February to April 2017)

<p>Review consortia operating plans to understand: models for collaborative outreach activities; the desired outputs and outcomes; and the evaluation activities planned to monitor progress and measure success. Our analysis will inform the development of a national evaluation framework, which will outline the evaluation questions and methods to be used to capture the necessary data for the formative evaluation.</p>	February to March
<p>Hold a workshop for consortia members leading the local evaluations to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• share further information about the national formative evaluation and how consortia evaluations will feed into it;• feed back the overarching strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation approaches outlined in consortia operating plans, the capacity issues these reveal, and propose the capacity building support we can offer to address these; and• provide an opportunity for consortia members to network and share ideas with each other and meet the evaluation team. <p>So that the workshop is accessible to all consortia, it will run twice in different locations. The first workshop will be held at Sheffield Hallam University on Monday 24th April; the second is scheduled for Thursday 27th April, venue to be confirmed.</p>	April

Capacity building activities (each year for 2017 and 2018)

2 x thematic webinars informed by engagement with consortia and the review of their operating plans. These will focus on topics relevant to the current status of local evaluations. They are likely to combine a presentation from an external expert with a local case study example followed by questions and a facilitated discussion.

2 x case studies to provide inspiration, information and guidance on a particular evaluation method being used by a consortium. These will draw on lessons learned to highlight tips for other consortia interested in adopting a similar approach and include links to further guidance and resources.

Ongoing contact and sharing of resources with consortia by: allocating a 'case manager' from the evaluation team to each consortium (to be assigned after the regional workshops); using HEFCE's NCOP JISCMail account to reach consortia; and uploading resource findings, materials and resources to HEFCE's Resource Pool.

Evaluation activities (each year for 2017 and 2018)

Online survey of all consortia members to identify processes and outputs of their outreach activity, and perceptions of the effectiveness of collaborative working.

Field visits to 6-8 consortia to understand the relative effectiveness of different collaborative approaches to outreach. All 29 consortia will be invited to take part in the field visits once over the course of the evaluation. This will ensure the experiences of consortia at different stages of development and adopting different operating models are captured. With permission, some of the findings will be used to develop illustrative case studies of interesting practice and approaches.

An **interim report in June** updating HEFCE on progress to date and emerging findings with a summary output produced for consortia and a formal **end of year report in December** to draw conclusions on the effectiveness of the collaborative approaches to date and make recommendations on programme development and the priorities for the next year's evaluation and capacity building activities.

What we need from you?

Please let the members of your consortium leading your local evaluation activities know the dates of the workshops. Invitations will be sent out soon once the venues have been confirmed.

Where can I find further information?

Please contact: Mary Winter, the assigned project manager with any questions or queries related to the NCOP formative evaluation & capacity building at: NCOP@cfe.org.uk Tel: 0116 229 3300.

