

# NCOP Impact Evaluation

## An opportunity to inform the outreach evidence base

### What is the impact evaluation about?

The Government has set goals to double the participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and increase by 20% 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 with 29 consortia 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](#) to undertake an impact evaluation of NCOP over the course of its operation commencing in January 2017.

CFE Research will lead on the evaluation with contributions from our associates, the Behavioural Insights Team (<http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/>), the University of Sheffield and the London School of Economics.

Prior work by CFE identified a need for a step-change in evaluation practice of widening participation. This includes adopting more systematic and robust evaluation methods. To date there has been very little experimental work and exploration of different methods to evidence the impact of outreach activities. In response to this, CFE are developing an

impact evaluation of NCOP in order to:

- Work collaboratively with HEFCE and consortia to devise and implement a range of experimental methods including Randomised-Control Trials (RCTs) and Quasi-Experimental methods to demonstrate a more robust evidence base of what outreach activities work; the degree to which different outreach activities work; under what circumstances outreach works;
- Understand in more detail the cost-effectiveness of different outreach initiatives.

### What approach will the impact evaluation take?

Our proposed approach to develop the impact evaluation will be collaborative, flexible and iterative ensuring that consortia are consulted with and supported in planning and implementing experimental methods to evaluate the impact of their outreach activity.

CFE is also leading HEFCE's formative evaluation of NCOP. The two evaluation teams will plan our activities together to avoid overburdening and duplicating our engagement with consortia.

Our suggested approach comprises 3 stages detailed in the table overleaf:

Planning phase	
Scoping interviews with a subset of consortia leads into the feasibility of undertaking experimental methods and to understand your data monitoring and planned outreach activities	February to March 2017
Review of consortia implementation plans, data and monitoring plans to inform our understanding of planned outreach activities and local evaluation plans	February to June 2017
Consortia workshop to disseminate the evaluation plan and method options. This will include the main research questions and range of experimental methods to be tested	End March 2017
Preparatory and testing phase	
Design of the evaluation fieldwork tools and exploration of sampling techniques (control/comparator groups)	March 2017 onwards
Participatory action research approach for the testing of experimental methods	March to July 2017
Consortia workshop to introduce and disseminate the results of the testing phase	June 2017
Main evaluation implementation	
Implementation of experimental methods and determination of control groups with a subset of consortia	March 2017 onwards
Surveys to determine impact of outreach activities for both NCOP beneficiaries and control groups	Sept to Nov 2017
Depth interviews with NCOP participants and consortia staff	Nov 2017
Consortia workshop to disseminate and update evaluation progress	Dec 2017

## What happens next and what do we need from you?

We will be interviewing a subset of consortia during February and March to explore planned activity and the feasibility of undertaking experimental work.

If your consortia is interested in participating in our experimental work or has any questions or concerns, we would love to hear from you to organise an interview to find out more about you and your planned outreach activities and overall approach. Please contact us on [NCOP@cfe.org.uk](mailto:NCOP@cfe.org.uk)

We will be consulting with HEFCE analysts and the NCOP tracking providers (HEAT, EMWPREP and Aimhigher West Midlands) to develop a summary plan detailing the range of datasets that will be received, the nature of the data and the frequency of analysis. We hope that this will provide useful insights for consortia monitoring and evaluation purposes and will ensure a collaborative, joined up approach to evaluation activity.

We will be hosting the first impact evaluation workshop towards the end of March 2017. This event will provide an opportunity for consortia to find out more about randomised-control trials and experimental methodologies within the context of outreach activity.

## Where can I find further information?

Please contact: Dr Sarah Tazzyman the assigned project manager with any questions or queries related to the NCOP impact evaluation on: [NCOP@cfe.org.uk](mailto:NCOP@cfe.org.uk) Tel: 0116 229 3300.

