**Ethics for field research on widening participation and student success**

January 2021

**Introduction**

The Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) aims to improve lives through evidence-based practice in higher education (HE). Our vision is to eliminate equality gaps for disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, allowing all students to have the same chance to enter HE, get a good degree and progress into further study or employment. TASO was set up in 2019, by a consortium of King’s College London, Nottingham Trent University and the Behavioural Insights Team.

We are an independent hub for HE professionals to access research, toolkits and evaluation guidance to eliminate equality gaps. We inform practitioners of the best available evidence and produce new evidence on the most effective approaches. TASO is an affiliate ‘What Works’ centre and is part of the [UK Government’s What Works Movement.](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-works-network) This means that TASO is committed to the generation, synthesis and dissemination of high-quality evidence about effective practice in widening participation and student success. Our role is to help the sector produce more [Type 3 evidence](https://taso.org.uk/evidence/toolkit/what-is-causal-evidence/) as this provides us with the best possible understanding of which activities and approaches are most effective.

As the use of experimental and quasi-experimental methods, such as randomised controlled trials (RCTs), is novel for many HE providers, practitioners and evaluators in the HE sector, there is a lack of familiarity with the ethical considerations surrounding these large-scale quantitative methods. Therefore, this project aims to provide standardised guidance on common ethical considerations and best practice relating to such methods.

**Scope**

TASO recognises the importance of ensuring a straightforward and uniform approach to ethics across the sector, including teams focussed on both pre-entry (widening participation) and post-entry (student success) activities. Currently, widening participation (WP) and student success teams within the HE sector display varied approaches to seeking ethical approval and not all teams have experience of applying to social science ethics committees. As TASO works to support the sector with the use of large-scale quantitative methods, including experimental and quasi-experimental research, we feel it is equally important to support the sector to navigate the ethics and data compliance that comes with using these methods.

So that this guidance can be put in the context other types of research and evaluation, we will also seek to consolidate guidance on ethics for more qualitative research and evaluation methods, which may be more familiar to the HE sector.

Although we expect the scope of this project to be further refined as part of the consultation phase, the initial project objectives are:

* To provide guidance to support widening participation (WP)/student success ethics applications involving: large-scale quantitative data collection and analysis; experimental and quasi-experimental research methods; administrative data set analysis; qualitative interviews; focus groups; and observations.
* To support social science ethics committees to become more familiar with large-scale quantitative research and evaluation in WP and student success, including experimental and quasi-experimental research methods.
* Through the provision of guidance, to encourage consistency in how ethics committees review applications involving large-scale quantitative research and evaluation in WP and student success.
* To provide clarity on the distinction between data protection and ethics.

We are commissioning a supplier to help us achieve these objectives and develop ethics guidance to be disseminated across WP teams within the HE sector. There are several activities that we expect to be included within the scope of this project:

* **Consultation** with other What Works Centres, WP/student success practitioners and evaluators, and TASO advisory groups to support the research and seek consensus for the approach and type of guidance they require. We welcome ideas for how to conduct the consultation phase as part of the application process.
* **Review** existing literature, knowledge, guidance and policies concerned with the ethics of implementing large-scale quantitative data collection and analysis; experimental and quasi-experimental research methods; administrative data set analysis; qualitative interviews; focus groups; and observations.
* **Establish** the remit and target audience of the ethics guidance produced as a result of this project, outlining how WP teams should follow the guide.

**Requirements**

This section outlines the requirements expected from the chosen supplier.

**Project deliverables**

* Final report:
	+ The report must be accessible for social science ethics committees and WP practitioners and evaluators.
	+ Executive Summary - outlining the key findings from the review.
	+ Introduction - outlining the format and content of the report.
	+ Methodology – outlining the methodology used.
	+ The report to contain a section on practical guidance and recommendations, addressing the project objectives (outlined above).
	+ Conclusion - summarising the findings and recommendations.
	+ Harvard style references provided for the evidence cited.
	+ The final report will reflect TASO’s strong commitment to, and support for, the What Works movement and use of causal impact evaluation.
	+ The report will be provided in a format which is ready for external publication. A comprehensive outline of publication requirements will be distributed to the successful supplier.
	+ Presentation to TASO’s advisory groups.
* Summary report:
	+ Intended for a wider audience who may not engage with the full report.
	+ Provide a concise overview of the methodology and guidance.
* A user guide, referencing the full report to demonstrate how, and when, to apply the ethics guidance produced as a result of this project.
* Case studies covering a range of ethics applications using different methodologies. These case studies will be designed as a practical resource for WP teams to use.

**Project timeline**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Activity  | Apr21 | May21 | Jun21 | Jul 21 | Aug21 | Sep21 | Oct21 |
| Inception meeting & kick-off  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Consultation |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Present progress to TASO |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Literature review |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Present progress to TASO |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Report writing  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Designing practical resources  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Report to TASO’s advisory groups  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Final deliverables due  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Project implementation**

The supplier will be responsible for end-to-end project management, including:

* Risk management.
* Managing the consultation phase and stakeholder engagement. Please note, we will provide input and facilitate introductions to TASO’s advisory groups and other What Works centres but expect the successful supplier to manage the consultation process.
* Presenting a draft report to, and collecting feedback from, TASO’s advisory groups.
* Reporting to, and engaging, the TASO team.

In addition to financial support, TASO will:

* Provide advice throughout the project where required.
* Meet (virtually for the foreseeable future) with the contractor as per the project timeline to offer insight and feedback on the project progress.
* Support the partner in shaping outputs and framing the final report and resources. Please note, TASO will maintain final editorial control of the content and final outputs.
* Manage the contract.

**Funding**

This project is funded by the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO).

We anticipate bids of £30,000- £40,000 (inclusive of VAT and expenses). Responses to this invitation to tender should include accurate pricing, inclusive of expenses and VAT. Please note that assessment of responses to this tender invitation will be on perceived quality of service and demonstratable ability to meet the brief, rather than the lowest cost, but value for money is a selection criterion.

**Applications and timelines**

* We invite you to submit an application using the form below.
* Please save the form using the name of your organisation.
* Submit the completed form to **info@taso-he.org** by **1 March 2021**. You will be informed of the outcome of your application in the w/c 22 March 2021.
* We anticipate the project will start on the 26th April 2021 with final reporting in October 2021.

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| --- | --- |
| Call for applications opens | w/c 1 February 2021 |
| Deadline for applications | w/c 1 March 2021 |
| Clarification/negotiation with preferred suppliers and contracts signed | 15 March 2021 – 12 April 2021 |
| Project kick off  | w/c 26 April 2021 |

**Assessment of applications**

Your application will be assessed by the TASO Research and Evaluation team. The strength of applications will be assessed on the below criteria (please note the weighting of each section):

* *The team (40%)*
	+ The relevant experience of the project team.
	+ Evidence of success on similar projects.
	+ The team’s approach to transparency and accountability.
* *The application (40%)*
	+ How well the application answers the brief.
	+ How well it articulates the ability of the team to deliver all requirements and deliverables.
	+ How well it articulates the ability of the team to be responsive and flexible in delivering the brief.
* *Budget (20%)*
	+ Feasibility based on the budget submitted.
	+ Value for money.
	+ Financial stability and long-term viability of the organisation, including detail of the organisations last set of accounts and current year budget. Please note this criterion will receive a binary score of pass/fail and if not met the application will not be considered further.

**Expression of Interest Form**

Please note that hyperlinks to web-based information will not be accepted, and, if included, will not be evaluated.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Lead organisation** |  |
| **Contact name** |  |
| **Contact email** |  |
| **Contact telephone** |  |
| **SECTION A: Relevant experience***Please provide details of the team who would be involved in this project. Describe their proposed roles and how their skills and experience are relevant to delivering the work.**[500 words max]* |
|  |
| **SECTION B: Meeting the project brief***Please provide an overview of how you would meet the project brief. Please cover:** *How you would approach each part of the project*
* *A brief summary of key challenges/risks and you would address them*
* *A project timeline*

*[2000 words max (but please do not feel you need to meet this limit)]* |
|  |
| **SECTION C: Project budget** *You may apply for funding to the value of £30,000 to £40,000 to deliver this project. Provide a budget showing how you propose to use the funding provided.*  |
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| **SECTION D: Financial stability** *Financial stability and long-term viability of the organisation is an essential criteria for this application. Please provide:** *Your organisation's last set of accounts*
* *Your organisation's current year budget.*

***You may also provide this as a pdf document alongside your completed application form.*** |
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*Additional guidance*

* TASO reserves the right, acting reasonably, to:
	+ Discontinue the award procedure in the absence of appropriate applications;
	+ Change the timetable for the procurement of the Contract, and in such circumstances TASO will notify all applicants of any change by the fastest means possible;
	+ Terminate discussions with organisations which apply;
	+ Discontinue the procedure leading to the award of the Contract;
	+ Not to award any Contract at all as a result of this process
* Under no circumstances shall TASO incur any liability in respect of any of these actions.
* No publicity regarding the project will be permitted until TASO has given express written consent to the relevant communication. No statements may be made to any part of the media regarding the nature of this application, its contents or any proposals relating to it without the prior written consent of TASO.
* TASO will not reimburse any costs incurred by organisations in connection with preparation of their applications.
* If you are unsure of the meaning of a question or anything in this call for applications, then it is your responsibility to ask TASO to clarify in writing via email.
* TASO will aim to answer clarification questions within five (5) working days, but does not undertake to do so. TASO may also decline to answer a question if it deems the question to be inappropriate. If TASO is unable to answer a question, this will be communicated.