Free evaluation support for interventions relating to disability and/or employability

**May 2022**

# Open call for HEPs

TASO is offering to match HE providers (HEPs) with members of our evaluation panel and fund independent evaluation support for interventions or initiatives that are designed to either:

* Improve employment outcomes for disadvantaged or underrepresented students or;
* Improve outcomes for disabled students in HE throughout the student lifecycle (enrollment, progression, awarding, employment).

The aim of this project is to build [type 2](https://taso.org.uk/evidence/toolkit/what-is-causal-evidence/) evidence (at a minimum) for interventions that support the above objectives and scope out the feasibility of [type 3](https://taso.org.uk/evidence/toolkit/what-is-causal-evidence/) evaluation. It is an opportunity for participating HEPs to build internal evaluation expertise and learn about the efficacy of current practices to support disadvantaged and underrepresented students. It may also be an opportunity for student service teams and WP evaluators to collaborate on a specific project.

**Introduction to TASO**

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 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.

**Background**

In July 2021, TASO published a report summarising a consultation we conducted with the sector to identify possible future research priorities. Off the back of this report we launched two new programmes of work focused on learning what works to improve:

* Employment and employability outcomes for disadvantaged and underrepresented students ([TASO theme 3](https://taso.org.uk/research/what-works-for-employment-employability/))
* Outcomes for disabled students and those with mental health concerns ([TASO theme 4](https://taso.org.uk/research/what-works-for-mental-health-disability/))

We have recently concluded “Gaps Analysis” projects on these themes. These combine rapid evidence reviews and qualitative research, to build evidence of practices that show promise in supporting these outcomes, as well as insight of current evaluation practice in these areas.

The project outlined in this ITT is designed to build on these gaps analyses by supporting / enhancing the evaluation of interventions applied by HEPs to support these outcomes.

**Project scope**

TASO will fund members of our independent panel of evaluators to design and deliver pilot studies for HEPs. We are inviting HEPs to submit case studies of interventions they are delivering - that could be evaluated between August 2022 and March 2023 - to support the following outcomes:

* Improve employment outcomes for disadvantaged or underrepresented students or;
* Improve outcomes for disabled students in HE throughout the student lifecycle (enrollment, progression, awarding, employment).

We are particularly interested in supporting the evaluation of interventions that:

* Are specifically designed to reduce equality gaps, whether delivered as part of a universal offer or through more targeted support to disadvantaged or underrepresented students (this is particularly important for employment related interventions).
* Have been subject to an initial evaluation and show evidence of promise.
* Are aimed at supporting disabled students with specific types of disabilities (specific to disability projects).

Drawing on the findings from the Gaps Analysis reports, some examples of projects this might include are set out in the table below. These are intended to be illustrative examples, we would welcome submissions for interventions that are not mentioned.

| **Theme 3 (Employment)** | **Theme 4 (Disability)** |
| --- | --- |
| * Any career programmes or activities targeted at disadvantaged / underrepresented students * Interventions to support employer / student interactions * Alumni or peer-led career support * Curriculum level interventions (thought to benefit disadvantaged / under-represented students) * Interventions to promote uptake of career support among disadvantaged or underrepresented students. | * Disability inclusion training * Approaches supporting disclosure * Inclusive pedagogical approaches * Universal design for teaching and learning * Assistive technologies * Interventions that provide transition support (from school to HE; from HE into Employment or Postgraduate study) * Interventions that help develop and support student self-advocacy |

**Expectations for participating HEPs**

* TASO will select up to 4 interventions to prioritise for evaluation. Our expectation is that these will be split across the topics of disability and employability, but may merge the two.
* Selected interventions will be shared with our independent panel of evaluators who we will be invited to bid for the provision of evaluation support (funded by TASO).
* Evaluation support from independent evaluators will take place over an eight month period (August 2022 - March 2023) and involve the following:

1. **Evaluation plan and theory of change development.** Evaluators will work with HEPs to develop an evaluation plan and theory of change for the programme/activity being evaluated. We anticipate that evaluations will be in the form of pilot studies and will - at a minimum - support the development of type 2 evidence. This stage will include developing a series of research questions, data collection methods and processes that can be used to assess “evidence of promise” within the project timelines. A key aim of this work will also be to explore how type 3 evaluation methods might be used to assess intervention impact in the longer term, if not at the pilot stage. HEPs will be responsible for ethical approval.
2. **Data collection and analysis.** In line with the pilot methodology, HEPs will lead on collecting data to help answer the research questions. The evaluator will play an advisory role throughout this process. Our expectation is that data will then be shared with the evaluator who will lead on the analysis and produce an analysis report. HEPs will be responsible for ensuring that the appropriate data protection processes are established.
3. **Reflection and reporting.** HEPs will produce a summary report, discussing the findings of the evaluation, the experience of using the chosen evaluation methodology, and how the findings will inform intervention development and further evaluation.

* Participating HEPs will receive up to £20k to support the resourcing of the project and should set out in the application how this will be allocated (e.g. to funding a dedicated research assistant).

**Ethics and data protection**

The HEP will be responsible for seeking ethics approval and ensuring data protection standards are met.

**Timeline**

Using the template below, please submit your examples of interventions by **midday on 22nd June**. If you have any questions regarding the open call, please get in touch and we can arrange an informal conversation - research@taso.org.uk. You will be informed of the outcome of your submission in the **w/c 11th July**.

**Assessment of submissions**

Your application will be assessed by the TASO Research and Evaluation team. The strength of applications will be assessed on the below criteria:

* *The intervention* 
  + The relevance of the intervention for impacting:
    - Employment and employability outcomes for disadvantaged and underrepresented students ([TASO theme 3](https://taso.org.uk/research/what-works-for-employment-employability/)).
    - Outcomes for disabled students ([TASO theme 4](https://taso.org.uk/research/what-works-for-mental-health-disability/)).
  + Ability to demonstrate why / how the intervention is expected to impact these outcomes. This might include current data or evaluation findings.
* *The team* 
  + The relevant experience of the project team to assist with data collection and help deliver the project.
  + The team’s approach to transparency and accountability when working with independent evaluators.
* *Value for money* 
  + Your approach to allocating the £20k grant and the extent to which this offers value for money.

| Data Protection Notice | Please read the [Data Protection Notice](https://taso.org.uk/taso-privacy-notice/) for this project before submitting your evidence. |
| --- | --- |
| **Data Protection Notice** | Do you confirm that you have read and understood the [Data Protection Notice](https://taso.org.uk/taso-privacy-notice/)?  Yes  No |
| **Lead organisation** |  |
| **Contact name** |  |
| **Contact job role** |  |
| **Contact email** |  |
| **Contact telephone** |  |
| **Where did you hear of this ITT?** |  |
| **SECTION A: Intervention**  *Please provide details of your intervention:*   * Intervention name / description * Aim of intervention (including the key outcomes for students) * Who is the intervention is aimed at * Previous data collected / evaluations conducted and an overview of findings * Number of students likely to be included in pilot running August ‘22 - March ‘23 * Future plans for delivering / scaling intervention   *[750 words max]* | |
|  | |
| **SECTION B: Team**  *Please provide details of the team who will be involved in delivering / supporting the evaluation of the intervention:*   * Details of key staff who will be involved with the evaluation, including relevant knowledge and skills (of both the topic area and evaluation) * The team’s approach to transparency and accountability when working with independent evaluators * Capacity to meet key deliverables (ethics, data collection, summary report)   *[500 words max]* | |
|  | |
| **SECTION C: Budget**  Please set out the level of grant funding you are seeking from TASO (up to £20,000) and details of how this will be allocated.  *[500 words max]* | |
|  | |

*Additional guidance*

* TASO reserves the right, acting reasonably, to:
  + Discontinue the open call in the absence of appropriate submissions;
  + Change the timetable for the delivery of the project, and in such circumstances TASO will notify all applicants of any change by the fastest means possible;
  + Terminate discussions with organisations which apply;
  + Not to accept submissions 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 open call, 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 submissions.
* If you are unsure of the meaning of a question or anything in this call for submissions 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.