**What works to reduce equality gaps in employment and employability in Higher Education: Invitation to Tender (ITT)**

September 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.

In July 2021 TASO published a [sector consultation report](https://taso.org.uk/news-item/taso-launches-two-new-themes-which-will-shape-future-research-projects/), which shows that understanding how to reduce equality gaps in employment and employability is a clear priority for the sector. We have therefore launched a new programme of work on employment and employability in HE.

**We are inviting suppliers to tender for a combined rapid evidence review and sector consultation on “What works to reduce equality gaps in employability and employment in HE (including progression to further study)”**. This work will inform which interventions we prioritise for impact evaluation in future.

**Scope**

This project will explore equality gaps in graduate employability, progression to further study and employment. This project aims to improve our understanding of how best to approach the topic given the complex interplay of factors which determine student destinations. It will contain two elements:

1. Evidence review of relevant literature and data;
2. Stakeholder consultation

**Evidence review**

In 2020, TASO commissioned a synthesis report titled [‘Gaps in the student experience: understanding the impact of approaches to boosting attainment, retention, wellbeing and employment’](https://taso.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Full-report-Understanding-gaps-in-the-student-experience-Bridge-Group-and-Coventry-University.pdf). This report contains a section on employment and employability, which indicated that the evidence on interventions to address employment outcomes is limited.

The purpose of this project is not to duplicate this piece of work but to extend its scope - by identifying relevant literature and datasets (e.g. LEO) - to support the following objectives:

* Identify equality gaps in progression and employment outcomes - and variations by demographic, subject-area or profession, and region - using available datasets. This should reflect a range of metrics for ‘good employment’ (e.g. wellbeing);
* Collate evidence on:
  + Effective measures to support employment and progression through HE (e.g. to postgraduate study), particularly those targeted at disadvantaged and under-represented student subgroups (including mature students, disabled students, part-time students, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds);
  + Uptake and engagement with progression and employment support, particularly among disadvantaged and underrepresented student groups, as above;
  + Interventions introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic to improve graduate employment and employability (acknowledging that little evidence has already been published);
* Reflect on the challenges regarding the delay in outcome data for employability, looking at the current practices and potential alternatives.

The focus should be on reliable evidence of the impact of HE interventions on employment and employability, prioritising robust data analysis and, where possible, reports that draw on quantifiable evidence and demonstrate causal evidence. The review should prioritise UK evidence. But where this does not exist, suppliers should cast the net more widely and look at the international evidence.

**Consultation**

TASO is hoping to engage a wide range of stakeholders from different parts of the sector. This means targeting different types of institutions: FE colleges, small and specialist providers, Russell Group universities, post-92 universities, and metropolitan universities. If there is scope, we would also like to include stakeholders outside of universities (i.e., relevant charities, WWCs, TASO Advisory Groups) as well as students.

We anticipate that the consultation will include a survey with 30-50 stakeholders. However, we invite suppliers to suggest other approaches to conducting the consultation phase.

Our research objectives for the consultation are to understand:

* What interventions are used to address employment/employability gaps, and their prevalence;
* How existing interventions are targeted and what uptake is like amongst target groups;
* How providers measure employment/employability outcomes, and how they use this information;
* How evaluators address the data challenges associated with these measurement, notably the delay in outcome data;
* What challenges providers would like TASO to prioritise for future research.

**Requirements**

**Project deliverables**

1. An interim update to TASO on project progress, including an overview of interventions that demonstrate efficacy, and outline of the final report.
2. A final report combining both elements of the project. This report should include:

* Executive Summary – outlining the key findings from the report.
* Introduction – outlining the format and content of the report.
* Methodology:
* Outlining the scope of the review; approach used to identify and select literature; rationale for evidence inclusion and exclusion; and any methodological limitations.
* Outlining the format and methodology used for the consultation.
* Results of consultation - thematically map and summarise responses to the key areas (outlined in previous section).
* Evaluation of the literature
* Conclusion – summarising the findings, key evidence gaps and recommendations.
* Harvard style references provided for the evidence cited.

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.

**Project timeline**

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| **Activity** |  |  |  |  |
| Inception meeting & kick-off | **11/21** | **12/21** | **1/22** | **2/22** |
| Conduct consultation |  |  |  |  |
| Conduct evidence review |  |  |  |  |
| Bi-weekly catch-ups with TASO |  |  |  |  |
| Present progress to TASO (interim report) |  |  |  |  |
| Carry out any amendments |  |  |  |  |
| Final report due |  |  |  |  |
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**Project implementation**

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

* Risk management.
* Ensuring that the project is effectively managed in a timely way, with advance notice of any challenges in delivering the project to the timeline specified.
* Ensuring that the final report fulfils the methodological and pre-specified criteria in the tender document, and providing suitable quality assurance.
* Presenting a draft final report to, and collecting feedback from, TASO’s advisory groups.
* Reporting to, and engaging with, the TASO team. This will include bi-weekly catch-ups and a mid-point presentation on project progress.

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.

**Ethics and data protection**

The supplier will be responsible for seeking ethics approval (if necessary) and ensuring data protection standards are met.

**Funding**

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

**The budget for both the evidence review and consultation is £40,000 (inclusive of VAT).**

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 demonstrable ability to meet the brief, rather than the lowest cost, but value for money is a selection criterion.

**Application and timelines**

* We invite you to submit an application using the form below.
* Please save the form using the name of your organisation and add the project title to the subject line.
* Submit the completed form to research@taso.org.uk by **midday on 19th October 2021**.
* We anticipate the project will start **w/c 1st November 2021** with final reporting in February 2022.

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| Call for applications opens | | 22 September 2021 |
| Deadline for submitting questions | 12 October 2021 | |
| Deadline for applications | 19 October 2021 | |
| Clarification/negotiation with preferred suppliers and contracts signed | 29 October 2021 | |
| Project kick off | w/c 1 November 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 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.

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| --- | --- |
| **Lead organisation** |  |
| **Contact name** |  |
| **Contact email** |  |
| **Contact telephone** |  |
| **Where did you hear about this ITT?** |  |
| **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 £40,000 to deliver this project. Please provide a budget showing how you propose to use the funding provided.* | |
|  | |
| **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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