TASO Transforming Access
and Student Outcomes
in Higher Education

GUIDANCE FOR USING THE WIDENING PARTICIPATION QUESTIONNAIRE SCALES

This document will help you understand how to use the validated questionnaire scales when trying to evaluate a student access or success programme. It is important that the scales are implemented as suggested here, to help with consistency around the data.

BEFORE YOU START

What is a validated questionnaire scale?

A validated questionnaire scale is a set of questionnaire items (statements or questions), which together capture a specific outcome of interest. A validated scale has undertaken a multi-step process to ensure it captures the specific outcome it sets out to capture, does so reliably, and generates good quality data.

Validation is a complex process that requires a large number of steps. Read our method note to understand how we've gone about validating the scales in this widening participation questionnaire.

Why would I use a validated scale?

When trying to evaluate a student access or success programme, using a low-quality questionnaire scale can be a barrier to gaining meaningful insights from your work. While many questionnaire scales are available, information about their quality is not always forthcoming or complete, and a question mark remains over their applicability to the samples of learners you might be working with. Using a validated questionnaire scale in your evaluation will contribute to the quality of your data, and therefore to the quality of the insights you can draw about your programme from your evaluation.

When would I use one of these validated scales?

Use one of these validated scales when you are trying to evaluate a student access or success programme and the expected outcomes of that programme align with the outcomes which our scales cover. Instead of designing a new questionnaire, buying one, or using something about which you do not have a lot of information, choose the validated scale that aligns with your outcome(s) of interest, then include this measure in whichever survey data collection approach you take as part of your evaluation. Finally, analyse data and obtain your evaluation result feeling reassured that you have used a good-quality measure which has not negatively affected the ability of your evaluation to offer insights about your programme.

Are these the only scales I need?

Your student access or success programme may seek to affect a large number of outcomes. The validated scales provided here only capture *some* of those outcomes. We call these *intermediate outcomes*, because they are often thought of as precursors of later outcomes such as access to higher education, continuation, progression, or degree outcomes. There may be other outcomes that will be relevant to your programme, and as such, other questionnaire scales that you should use. Future guidance will focus on how you may go about validating scales yourself, for your own use. In the meantime, you can find guidance on survey design and validation on the TASO website.

Do I need to use all the scales, at the same time?

Not at all. You should only use the scale, or scales, that are relevant to the outcomes of the programme you are looking to evaluate. The scales are here to strengthen the quality of your evaluation, but it is your own programme that will be driving the focus of your student access and success work and the outcomes that you are most interested in.

THE PROCESS OF USING THE VALIDATED SCALES

STEP 1:
Identify the student access or success programme you are hoping to evaluate.
Match the appropriate outcome measure for the programme with the relevant validated questionnaire scale.

Remember, your programmes may be looking to affect outcomes outside of the set for which the validated scales in this guidance have been developed. In that case, do not use these scales!

If you want to know why these particular scales were chosen in the validation, see a review of relevant evidence here.

Wondering how to identify the best outcome measure for your programme? TASO has developed guidance to support you in the initial stages of an evaluation. Take a look at our evaluation guidance.

STEP 2:
Design your evaluation. Use the TASO guidance, or any other evaluation framework used by your institution to help you come up with a plan.

These validated scales are most useful for evaluation generating Type 2 (empirical) or Type 3 (causal) evidence, in line with Office for Students' (OfS) standards of evidence.

You may find the specific items from each respective validated scale useful prompts in evaluations generating Type 1 (narrative) evidence (e.g., in interviews) but they were designed for use in questionnaires, not in interviews.

STEP 3:
Specify your outcome measures and match them with the relevant validated scales.

Remember that it's your own (institutional) strategy and approach that shapes the programmes you implement, and therefore the outcomes that you are capturing. If these outcomes don't align with those that these scales refer to, do not use these scales.

STEP 4:
Carry out your evaluation and use the validated scale in a survey of participants
(and any comparison group if your evaluation design contains one).

Use whatever survey approach you would normally deploy. The scales will work as well online as on paper. Once you have collected that data, use the accompanying spreadsheet to generate overall scores for each of the scale(s) you have used.

Many higher education providers use the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) to track engagement with their student access or success provision. HEAT now includes a facility to collect and upload data from any of these validated scales you have chosen to use. See their guidance here.

STEP 5:
Analyse the data that you have collected.

This online evaluation webinar, and the accompanying guide, might be of use if you're just starting out with analysing survey data. The accompanying spreadsheet above will generate one overall score for each of the scales you have used. You can feed this directly into your analysis. If you are familiar with the process of analysing survey data, you can also use data emerging from the use of the validated scales in the same way you would have used other measures in the past.