**What works to support student Mental Health in Higher Education (HE): 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.

TASO recently conducted a sector consultation exercise to help us identify possible future research priorities. The results of this exercise show that mental health is a clear priority area for the sector. Consequently, TASO has launched a new work programme to help us better understand how to support learners with mental health concerns succeed in HE.

To kick off this programme of work, **we are inviting suppliers to tender for a combined rapid evidence review and sector consultation**. The purpose of this work will be to better our understanding on what works for improving and maintaining students’ mental health, and inform which interventions we prioritise for impact evaluation.

**Scope**

**Evidence Review**

The purpose of this review is to build on evidence of the impact of different interventions to improve mental health in educational settings (e.g., What Works Centre for Wellbeing: ‘[What interventions improve college and university students’ mental health and wellbeing? A review of review-level evidence](https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Student-mental-health-full-review.pdf)’).

For the purpose of this work, we will be using the [World Health Organization](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/42940/9241591595.pdf) definition of mental health as a “state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”. We are therefore looking for suppliers to use a continuum approach to the theme, which incorporates mental well-being in addition to mental health from a clinical perspective.

Our overarching aim is to summarise and triangulate evidence to understand how mental health is driving or perpetuating equality gaps in HE outcomes.

We would expect this review to touch on a range of issues, including:

* The availability and uptake of different mental health interventions in HE, with a focus on any gaps in service provision (this should include in-house provision, online / virtual support, and statutory mental health services, e.g. NHS);
* Any variation in intervention efficacy / uptake among specific groups (including differences in gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity);
* The impact of interventions on different aspects of student success (including access, well-being, retention/continuation, attainment and progression) and at different stages of the student life cycle (including pre-entry and the transition to HE);
* Factors specific to HE that can trigger or exacerbate mental health issues, and the role / impact of preventative measures;
* How the sector can foster an environment of positive disclosure, including in pre-entry to HE (e.g., mental health declarations in UCAS applications);
* How student mental health has been impacted by COVID-19, with a particular interest in any live projects and interventions aimed at improving student mental health in response to the ongoing pandemic.

The focus of the review should be on reliable evidence, prioritising robust data analysis and reports that demonstrate [**causal evidence**](https://taso.org.uk/evidence/toolkit/what-is-causal-evidence/).

**Consultation**

To support the findings of the evidence review, this project will also involve a consultation with key stakeholders in the HE sector to understand:

* How HE providers support students in managing their mental health and well-being, including online services. Where do providers focus their attention given their budget?
* The availability and uptake of different mental health interventions / services in HE, including:
* How widely services are used,
* Any gaps in service provision,
* How HE providers support at-risk/disadvantaged students in accessing these services;
* How the HE sector collect data to evaluate the use and efficacy of mental health interventions;
* How the HE sector have made attempts to foster an environment of positive disclosure specific to mental health disorders (including pre- and post-entry declarations);
* Live projects and interventions aimed at improving student mental health in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

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.

**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**

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

**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.

| 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.

| **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.*** | |
|  | |

**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.