

FAQs: TASO WP Questionnaire and supporting guidance

Last updated November 2022

1. What age groups can I survey using the WP questionnaire?

The [Widening Participation \(WP\) Questionnaire](#) is made up of questionnaire scales, each of which aims to measure intermediate outcomes associated with higher education access and success. The suitable age group for the questionnaire scale will depend on the scale you would like to use in your evaluation.

‘Access’ scales suitable for use with learners in Year 7 through to Year 13

Four of the scales are suitable for use with learners in schools, sixth-forms, colleges, or young people not in education.

1. Sense of belonging (prospective)
2. Academic self-efficacy
3. Study strategies (note, this is also suitable for use with students in higher education)
4. University expectations and knowledge

‘Success’ scales suitable for use with students in higher education (of any age)

Four of the scales are only suitable for use with students in higher education and can be used to measure on-course student success interventions:

1. Sense of belonging
2. Metacognitive strategies
3. Study strategies (also a metacognitive process)
4. Critical engagement with information

Please note: the WP Questionnaire is still being validated. TASO has asked higher education providers and sector organisations to pilot the scales and share the anonymous student data back with TASO so that we can finish the validation process. It is possible that the scales will change as a result of the final steps in the validation process. TASO will update the WP Questionnaire and accompanying guidance once the validation process has been completed. We hope to publish the final scales by summer 2023.

2. Can I use the WP Questionnaire to evaluate interventions delivered to pre-16 learners?

Following the launch webinar, and based on feedback from the sector, we have conducted exploratory analysis to see whether the scales can viably be used with younger year groups in their current format. This additional validation work has included the analysis of existing data from pre-16 learners but has not engaged directly with pre-16 learners as to their exact understanding of the scales and each respective item within. This is work that will happen

during the upcoming phase of the project, and in parallel with the analysis of any data that HEPs, Uni Connect partnerships or any other outreach/WP providers share with us for pre-16 learners.

Based on this analysis, we recommend that *some* of the scales in the WP Questionnaire are suitable for use with learners in schools, sixth-forms, colleges, or young people not in education. This includes learners in Year 7 through to Year 13.

1. Sense of belonging (prospective)
2. Academic self-efficacy
3. Study strategies (note, this is also suitable for use with students in higher education)
4. University expectations and knowledge

The other scales on the WP Questionnaire are not suitable for use with younger learners. This is either because the intermediate outcome which the scale aims to measure is not relevant to young learners or because the items in the scale did not perform well in cognitive testing or analysis of data collected with young learners.

3. Is there a reason why the metacognition scale can only be asked of higher education students and not learners in schools, sixth-forms, or colleges?

Metacognition is a multi-faceted construct, and it covers two broad components: metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive regulation. Metacognitive knowledge includes knowledge about study strategies and when and why to use these strategies. Metacognitive regulation involves awareness of task performance and evaluation of learning processes and strategies. Metacognition is a developmental process, meaning that as learners get older their range of metacognitive processes usually increases – therefore, a staged approach to its measurement is also needed. You can read more about this in section one of the [rapid review of intermediate outcomes for higher education access and success](#).

In the WP Questionnaire, there is a cognitive scale that can be used with learners in schools, sixth forms, or colleges – the study strategies scale. Using effective study strategies is a key part of developing metacognition (e.g., metacognitive knowledge about study strategies) and therefore study strategies can be considered as a metacognitive outcome. Using this scale would be an appropriate part of a staged approach to measuring metacognitive outcomes.

The scale in the WP Questionnaire labelled as ‘metacognitive strategies’, which relates to monitoring and planning approaches to learning, did not perform well when tested with younger learners and is therefore only suitable for use with students in higher education. It should be noted that measuring metacognition at different ages, given its complexity, continues to be a challenge not just for widening participation but for the education sector more widely. The study strategies and metacognitive study strategies scales that we are validating in this project marks a significant step forward for measuring metacognition.

4. What’s the difference between the study strategies scale and metacognitive strategies scale?

From a theoretical perspective, study strategies and metacognitive strategies overlap (as does critical engagement with information), so you may notice similarities in the definitions and items used for the two scales. The study strategies scale is about the extent to which a learner uses effective study strategies. Whereas the metacognitive strategies scale focuses more on how a learner monitors and evaluates their own learning – see question 3 for further details. Metacognition is a developmental and multi-faceted process and therefore learners would need to achieve high levels of both study strategies and metacognitive strategies to be considered as having achieved high levels of metacognition.¹ But each of the two scales on their own provide robust insight into the strategies used by learners.

5. Why have higher education students been prioritised in the development of this WP Questionnaire, rather than students taking part in access interventions?

Higher education students have not been prioritised: the development of the WP Questionnaire has taken a multi-phase approach with stakeholders and existing evidence informing the process. As part of that process, outlined below, the WP Questionnaire follows the evidence emerging from a wide range of analyses that suggests that some scales don't perform well with younger learners.

- First, we consulted the research literature to identify which outcomes to focus on. The [rapid evidence review](#) is a research summary about intermediate outcomes: how they are measured and the extent to which they are associated with higher education access and success outcomes.
- Then we surveyed 44 practitioners and evaluators working in both access and student success to help us identify which outcomes were important to the sector by asking them to rank the outcomes emerging from the rapid review according to how important they were for university access and success in their own contexts.
- Following on from the survey, we also spoke to 21 access and student success practitioners in a series of focus groups, to find out what outcomes they would like to see in the questionnaire, and to further understand their and their institutions' focus on specific intermediate outcomes.
- Next we conducted [cognitive testing](#), which involved speaking directly to twelve individual learners with similar characteristics as those who would eventually engage with these questionnaire scales.
- Finally, we piloted the questionnaire items with learners in schools, sixth-forms, colleges, young people not in education and students in higher education. The data collected was then analysed to test the [internal consistency](#) and [internal validity](#) of each scale.

The scales in the WP Questionnaire have been prioritised and developed as a result of this process. You can read about the process in much more detail in the [method note](#) on the validation process.

¹ EEF Metacognition and Self Regulation: Evidence Review
https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/documents/guidance/Metacognition_and_self-regulation_review.pdf?v=1642679296

6. Raising attainment is a key long-term outcome for me and other higher education providers working in the pre-entry access space. How does the WP Questionnaire help me to measure the impact of attainment-raising activities?

This WP Questionnaire should be useful for measuring the impact of attainment-raising activities but it's certainly not the only tool you'll need. This project has focused on a range of cognitive, social, and motivational outcomes that are considered important by WP practitioners as well as those that are strongly correlated with access and student success outcomes - principally attainment-raising.

This means that the intermediate outcomes measured by the scales in the WP Questionnaire are closely related to attainment and, if the outcomes are relevant to your work, using the scales in your evaluation can provide you with a proxy measure for attainment. Further information about the extent to which the intermediate outcomes are associated with attainment can be found in the [rapid review](#).

7. What should I do if the programme or work I'm evaluating isn't looking to affect any of the outcomes captured in the WP Questionnaire?

The WP Questionnaire covers a range of intermediate outcomes which the wider literature, summarised in the rapid review has shown to be associated with student access and/or success.

It may be, however, that the programme or work you're evaluating isn't looking to affect any of these intermediate outcomes.

Remember that the outcomes you measure and how you measure them depends on your institutional approach to evaluation and the programmes that you deliver. To measure outcomes that are not included in the WP Questionnaire, TASO recommends:

- Using other pre-existing validated scales
- Make modest changes to the wording and structure of existing scales to improve their usability in your context
- Consider developing bespoke, validated, scales specifically for the constructs you are interested in (TASO will be publishing further guidance on how to design and validate your own scales in 2023 - for now you can read about the [steps we've taken](#) to validate this WP questionnaire).

To find other pre-existing validated scales, there are a couple of resources you might find helpful:

- The Education Endowment Foundation's [SPECTRUM Database](#) is a very useful systematic tool review with an accompanying online database of measures and an associated guide for their selection, deployment and interpretation
- The summary table in TASO's [rapid review of intermediate outcomes for higher education access and success](#) outlines relevant scales.

8. When do TASO need the data to be returned from higher education providers or sector organisations piloting the WP Questionnaire scales?

We need a relatively large sample of providers to pilot the questionnaire scales in order to collect the data required to continue the validation process. The exact cut-off date for sharing data back with TASO will depend on how quickly we compile a big enough dataset, however, it is likely to be **no later than March 2023**, to allow us to finish the validation process and publish the final version of the WP Questionnaire in time for the new Academic Year in September 2023.

9. What data do I need to share back with TASO once I've piloted the WP Questionnaire during my evaluation?

If you have [accessed the questionnaire scales](#) and given permission for TASO to contact you about sharing anonymised student data then we will contact you at the beginning of 2023 with further information.

The data we will request will be anonymous and includes:

- Learner/student responses to the Likert scale items in the WP Questionnaire scales
- Respondent's year group
- Respondent's sex
- Respondent's ethnicity
- Whether the respondent has a disability
- Whether English is a second language for the respondent
- Whether the respondent is eligible for Free School Meals (FSM)
- Whether the respondent attends a school, sixth form, college or university
- Any attainment data that the school, sixth form, college, or university holds on for the learner (e.g., KS4, any specific assessment, including popular assessments routinely used by schools; mock or full exam scores)

Please do not share any data with TASO until we have provided you with clear instructions about how to conduct a balance test to ensure student data is anonymous and safely transfer the dataset.

10. Can I change the word 'university' to 'higher education'?

To maintain the validity of the questionnaire scales, we recommend that individual practitioners and evaluators do not change the wording or punctuation of the items within the scales.

However, if you feel the word 'university' is not relevant in the context you're working in then you may alter the wording of items for this scale (and this scale only), to replace 'university' with 'higher education'. Use 'in higher education' instead of 'at university'

If you decide to use the 'higher education' version, you will have to use an additional prompt to provide sufficient information for learners so that you ensure that they do not revert to a simplistic understanding of higher education as just university when they answer.

The additional prompt is:

"Higher education includes university, higher education in a further education college or other provider, or degree apprenticeships."

11. Why aren't there more questionnaire scales about aspirations?

From the consultation, raising aspirations came out as very important, but the evidence shows that young people from all backgrounds have high aspirations for themselves, but those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have lower expectations that these will be achievable. This suggests that there is not an aspirations gap, but an expectations gap for progression to higher education. The continued use of the term aspirations is often due to differences in semantics – for example, often the WP sector talks about aspirations when they are using a definition that more closely aligns with expectations. We hope the WP Questionnaire will help clarify the definitions around certain key intermediate outcomes.

12. Do I have to use all the items in a scale even if they aren't all relevant to my programme?

Yes, to ensure the validity and reliability of the scale, all items of each scale you decide to use must be administered. You can choose, though, which *scales* you want to use in your evaluation, based on the outcomes that you are interested in – you do not need to administer all of the scales if they are not relevant to your WP work.

13. These statements are very similar to what I am using already, can I just keep doing what I am doing?

Yes, there may be overlap with the questionnaire statements that you are already using to measure specific outcomes. However, even small differences in the statements can impact how the statement is understood by an individual.

It is important that we are confident that we are using questionnaire statements that measure the outcome that we intended it to measure – this is what the validation process achieves. We would always recommend using validated scales which have been tested in a WP context rather than using unvalidated scales (even if the wording is similar).

14. The NERUPI framework has also developed scales. Can I use these?

We are aware of the work conducted by NERUPI and the development of their scales. We also know there are a range of existing questionnaires used by WP practitioners – so there are many measures that the sector can choose from for their evaluation work.

We would always recommend practitioners using scales that are, where possible, validated; that is, the questionnaires measure the outcome they are designed to measure, they do so

consistently, and they are good predictors of related long-term outcomes (e.g. attainment, HE progression). This is what we are trying to achieve through this project.

TASO prioritised this evaluation project in 2022 due to demand from the sector for a more consistent and reliable way to measure intermediate outcomes. If this questionnaire is used consistently, there will be a greater opportunity to compile data from across the sector and compare outcomes across different types of programmes and activities.

15. How big should my sample be to use these scales?

Questions about sample size usually relate to [statistical power](#). Different research designs need different size samples to be viable and robust. For example, you can't use some types of quantitative designs with really small sample sizes. The correct sample size depends on the type of evaluation and the planned analysis; we'll be developing some guidance on power and sample sizes in 2023.

16. What was the demographic representation of the learners who tested the scales with?

The scales in the WP Questionnaire have been tested with learners and students from a range of backgrounds, including those eligible for Free School Meals, with English as a second language, and from low participation neighbourhoods (as measured by POLAR), or first in family to (potentially) attend higher education. We also made sure to include learners in a variety of settings, e.g., schools, sixth forms, further education colleges, and universities.

17. Can these items be used as qualitative measurement tools in focus groups and interviews?

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.

18. How did you conduct your rapid review – what was your inclusion / exclusion criteria?

The research review focused on key terms that would help us to identify measurement studies related to attainment and higher education progression. We wanted to understand what measures already existed and what outcomes mattered for widening participation access and student success.

We searched for a broad range of outcomes that covered cognitive, social, and emotional factors.

This was not a systematic review, and we prioritised recent empirical studies, published since 2010, that had been conducted in the UK, US and Europe – e.g., studies that were going to be similar to the context in which UK WP work is carried out.

We were primarily interested in quantitative studies that demonstrated Type 2 (correlational) or Type 3 (causal) evidence that would return psychometric studies about measuring intermediate outcomes.

Databases we searched included: Google Scholar, Taylor and Francis, EEF, RAND database and research known and / or conducted by the project team.