

Impact assessment for the National Collaborative Outreach Programme

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Key impacts identified

1. The aim of the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) is to create locally based consortia, made up of higher education (HE) providers, schools, colleges, third sector bodies, employers, local enterprise partnerships (LEPs), and others, to deliver programmes of collaborative outreach in specific local areas where HE participation is low overall and lower than expected given GCSE attainment levels.
2. The NCOP will support the Government's ambitions to double the proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in HE by 2020, to increase by 20 per cent the number of students from ethnic minority groups, and to address the under-representation of young men from disadvantaged backgrounds in HE.
3. The most significant impacts of this review are in terms of:
 - equality
 - privacy
 - The student interest
 - economic impact.

Links to other policies or impact assessments

4. The NCOP is closely linked to the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach scheme, which finished at the end of December 2016 prior to the commencement of the NCOP in January 2017.

At what stage of the development process was this assessment undertaken?

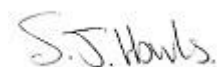
5. This updated impact assessment was developed 10 months into the programme.

Further information

6. For future information please contact Jenny Ann, email j.ann@hefce.ac.uk, tel 0117 931 7252 or Gemma Cadogan, email g.cadogan@hefce.ac.uk, tel 0117 931 7410.

7. Further information on the NCOP is available on the HEFCE website at www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/ncop/.

Approval



Signed by: Sarah Howls, Head of Student Opportunity

Date: 1 December 2017

Background

8. The NCOP is a four-year programme, running in calendar years from January 2017 to December 2020. The programme funds consortia to deliver sustained, progressive, intensive outreach, with the aim of increasing participation in HE in areas where HE participation rates are low overall and are lower than expected given Key Stage 4 GCSE (and equivalent) attainment levels.

9. HEFCE developed the NCOP in response to the Government's ambition to double the proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in HE by 2020 (from a 2009 baseline) and to increase by 20 per cent the number of young people from ethnic minority groups entering HE. There has also been an increased focus on the low achievement and HE progression rates of working-class boys and this will be reflected in many of the activities offered by consortia.

10. Funding for the programme was agreed at £60 million per calendar year for the first two years of the four-year programme. The remainder of the funding will need to be approved by the Office for Students (OfS) during 2018. The programme funds 29 consortia.

11. The lead institution in each consortium is accountable for the HEFCE funding. Consortium partners collectively agree how best to allocate the funding awarded to their particular consortium, using their local knowledge and understanding of how best to reach students in the target wards. Consortia decide which partners to engage with and the activities that work best in their local areas. Their outreach programmes are expected to be intensive, sustained and progressive, and to include some innovative approaches.

12. HEFCE and the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) are clear that the NCOP should add value to the existing long-term progressive outreach activity already delivered by institutions. Consortia must therefore demonstrate how their approaches for the programme align with and complement existing activity, particularly outreach that is included as part of their access agreements. Consortium partners were required to articulate how they would ensure that their individual capacity to continue their institutional outreach programmes would be maintained.

13. Evaluation is a critical element of the NCOP programme and is predominantly concerned with evidencing outcomes and impact. It will therefore need to consider the key factors that have influenced whether consortia are successful, and to ascertain the immediate and potential longer-term economic, social and cultural benefits. The overall aim of the national evaluation of NCOP is to assess how successfully the programme is driving rapid progress towards the overall programme objectives, in light of the changing context in which it operates.

14. Further information about the NCOP can be found at www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/ncop/.

Equality impact assessment

15. We expect there to be high impact in terms of equality and diversity, as the programme is highly targeted, in terms of students coming from particular (identified) areas and of year groups covered (years 9 to 13 only).

16. One of the government aims of the programme is to increase the proportion of students from ethnic minority groups by 20 per cent by 2020 and this focus on ethnicity has been considered in the data used to identify ward areas. The model ensures that wards with higher levels of black and minority ethnic (BME) students were not excluded from the programme because of the differing rates of progression observed for different ethnic groups.

17. We are aware that some of the wards identified will have high proportions of BME students choosing to enter higher education and that, in some areas, there will be disproportionate under-representation of young white males going into higher education. Consortia will be looking at this as part of their offering to students, and will make decisions on activities and approaches based on their knowledge of the local area and what works in target wards.

18. We recognise that the targeted nature of the programme means that many groups will not be included in its remit. In particular, this includes primary school children and younger age groups at secondary school, mature students (a significant under-represented group who have been included in previous funded collaborative outreach work) and students from deprived neighbourhoods that may not be identified as NCOP priority wards. Consortia have reported that they have been questioned by local partners about why they are not working in particular areas that are deprived but not included in NCOP. However, as stated in paragraph 12, NCOP should complement other outreach activity undertaken by individual HE providers which will may focus on these other groups.

19. Information captured through evaluation, tracking and, to a lesser extent, monitoring, will help us understand how consortia are engaging with students, how successful interventions (activities) have been and what happens to students who engage through the programme. For the first time, the evaluation of this outreach work will also include quasi-experimental and experimental approaches, including Randomised Control Trials (RCTs). This will provide valuable information in the long term, and has implications for future collaborative outreach covered by the programme as well as outreach in the wider HE sector.

Privacy impact assessment

20. A privacy impact assessment has been conducted. Given the age of the learners, and the multiple channels through which individualised data may be stored and shared, it is considered that the impact is high. The reasons for this are as follows.

a. Consortia will be using personal data to target and track particular groups of under-represented students (under-18s). This data will often include sensitive characteristics such as whether they are disabled and their ethnic background.

b. NCOP will also involve the sharing of data between institutions to provide a larger evidence base for local and national research and evaluation. This requires a sensitive and joined-up approach to handling the data.

c. HEFCE will not be collecting any additional personal data. However consortia will be using HE tracking services to report on learners as a condition of

funding. Each consortium will be responsible for agreeing its own data-sharing arrangements, between partners and with the relevant tracking service.

d. HEFCE has commissioned CFE Research to undertake a national formative and impact evaluation of the NCOP. This includes a baseline participant survey, a number of RCTs and the matching of multiple data sets (for instance data in Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) with data in the National Pupil database). CFE has worked with the Information Commissioner's Office to design and develop a methodology and consent arrangements that meet legislative requirements. There are likely to be some challenges in managing the requirements with schools.

e. The General Data Protection Regulations come into force on 25 May 2018 and contain more stringent provisions around consent and privacy notices. The new regulations require careful design and monitoring of the procedures for collecting and processing data to ensure that appropriate safeguards and notifications are in place. Ultimately it is the responsibility of providers to speak to their data protection and legal advisers to ensure that all relevant provisions are in place to allow the relevant consortium to use personal data for the purposes required by NCOP. HEFCE has signposted relevant support available through HEAT and the Information Commissioner's Office.

f. We anticipate a reduction in the number of individuals who explicitly consent for their data to be used and shared (compared with previous opt-out arrangements). This may have an impact on local and national evaluation.

g. Any NCOP consortium subscribing to HEAT has agreed to the sharing of data with HEFCE and other agencies for research purposes. HEFCE and HEAT have put in place a separate data agreement to enable NCOP-related individualised data in HEAT to be processed by CFE Research on HEFCE's behalf. This follows due diligence procedures to mitigate against any risk of data breaches.

Impact assessment on other areas

Regulation impact assessment

21. The NCOP has been assessed as having a **low** regulatory impact. Consortia will make decisions on how best to support NCOP learners, in terms of what activities are offered, how these are managed and what external support they might need (for example, local charities, LEPs and so on).

22. We will be carrying out a quarterly monitoring process to ensure that funding is being spent appropriately (according to the award letter terms and conditions) and to gauge impact. This is, perhaps, more burdensome than the annual monitoring of previous schemes. However, we set out our requirements for quarterly monitoring from the outset of the programme and it enables us to address any issues as they arise rather than having to unpick issues at a later stage.

23. There is a strong focus in the NCOP on evidence and impact and therefore we require consortia to work with the national evaluation, ensuring that they engage throughout the programme as requested by the evaluators.

24. The nature of the consortia arrangements might also increase burden, as institutions will need to:

- request and work through specific advice from their legal teams on partnership and data-sharing information
- manage their evaluation work
- coordinate or have oversight of outreach activities across the consortium
- work with the consortium chair (briefing and then responding to strategic steer)
- successfully manage relationships between consortium partners, where there might be tensions, to reach agreement or consensus.

25. There is a level of uncertainty relating to the transition to the OfS and what it will mean for the future direction and regulation of the programme.

Student interest impact assessment

26. Having reviewed the criteria, we consider there to be medium-to-high student interest impact.

27. The programme will focus on wards where HE participation rates are low overall and are lower than expected given attainment levels at Key Stage 4. The students who will be targeted will be those who might not choose to progress to HE despite having the potential to do so. We would expect the programme to increase the numbers going to into HE, although we will only have evidence of this after the programme has finished.

28. The programme is also expected to have a positive impact on student choice through aspiration-raising, and by more clearly articulating the range of opportunities available to NCOP students. Many young people will be introduced to higher education through NCOP outreach activities which might not have happened otherwise and, as consortia are offering support through information, advice and guidance, these young people should be better informed about a variety of options available to them. In many respects, if a young person, having taken part in NCOP activities, chooses not to enter higher education but chooses an alternative option, it could still be viewed as a positive and informed choice.

29. As part of the formative evaluation, the CFE Research case studies will look to evaluate the 'learner voice' in both the design and delivery of NCOP. We already know from the first consortium partner survey that every consortium is making use of student ambassadors in the delivery of outreach.

30. Consortia will also identify and work with specific groups of young people in wards who might not otherwise be included in broader outreach work. For example, some are choosing to work with looked-after children, refugee children, estranged children, young carers and other groups who are especially under-represented in higher education.

31. By working in a more intense way with specific target groups, the programme should demonstrate through the evidence collected in evaluation and monitoring, which interventions and approaches have (or have not) worked.

32. We would highlight two particular risks associated with student impact:

- potential reduction of broader outreach in light of the removal of the HEFCE widening access funding
- potential reluctance to target particular young people in a cohort for 'special treatment'.

33. With regard to the removal of HEFCE widening access funding, HEFCE and OFFA have been clear that NCOP is intended to complement the broader outreach offered by partner institutions¹. However, the removal of HEFCE funding will impact differently on different types of provider. A large multi-faculty university may be able to maintain its levels of outreach activity through an increased investment through its access agreement commitments, for example, whereas this would be less likely for a further education college with much lower levels of additional fee income. While we cannot mitigate against reductions in activity caused by the reduction in funding, we will work closely with HEFCE and OFFA colleagues where concerns are being raised.

34. Potential reluctance to target particular groups or individuals may result from concerns that others in the cohort, who may be equally disadvantaged, are denied activity that may be helpful to them and that they will not receive from other sources. It may also result from concerns about being seen to label some young people as 'disadvantaged'. In their work with schools, consortia are mindful about identifying specific young people, and we have agreed that there can and should be initial work across whole cohorts in a school, but that more intensive activity should be focused on those who live in the target wards. This does require sensitive handling by both the consortia and schools.

35. As the programme progresses, we will gain a greater understanding of how consortia are dealing with challenges around student interest. We have actively encouraged consortia to share good practice through Jiscmail, face-to-face opportunities (such as the NCOP conference) or the HEFCE resource pool. The evaluation will provide evidence of how the programme has impacted on students and young people.

Economic impact assessment

36. We consider the NCOP programme to have a medium economic impact. The targeted nature of the programme means that funding is directed towards areas of the country that would most benefit from investment in outreach and raising aspirations. Increasing the number of HE entrants from low-participation wards will deliver a positive impact socially and economically through increased educational attainment and better employment opportunities.

37. Many consortia are working with local agencies, such as LEPs, to whose roles economic interests are pivotal, and we are aware that many have some focus on opportunities offered through degree apprenticeship routes. HEFCE ensures that its staff involved in different policy areas (such as skills) work together to ensure that there is coherence. For example, in the recent call for degree apprenticeship development funding, bidders were invited to set out how their work connected to NCOP and wider student opportunity policy drivers.

¹ See 'Strategic guidance: developing for 18-19 access agreement', OFFA (February 2017) <https://www.offa.org.uk/universities-and-colleges/guidance/annual-guidance/>.

38. The principal aim of the impact evaluation by CFE Research is to demonstrate a more robust evidence base concerning which outreach activities work, the degree of impact and under what circumstances it occurs, and the cost-effectiveness of different outreach initiatives. The cost-effectiveness analysis (CEA) will compare the relative costs of delivering NCOP activities and the outcomes of different NCOP interventions. A potential weakness of the CEA is the 'interim/proxy outcome' measure, which is how the NCOP-funded activity has raised aspirations. Ultimately, this is a subjective measure and it is not possible to assign a monetary value to this to conduct a full cost-benefit analysis. However, when coupled with the RCT work, it can be used to construct a strong narrative that can be used to support the sector in developing cost-effective outreach with confidence. Further, the CEA should be effective for comparing types of outreach activity.