

# Evaluation plan: Loughborough University – Referral Scheme

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*This is a comprehensive document that outlines the overall strategy and approach for evaluating an intervention. It is designed to align with and be linked to an Access and Participation Plan (APP) where relevant and appropriate and to give accountability to relevant staff and stakeholders within higher education providers (HEPs). The evaluation plan should be developed collaboratively to ensure relevant perspectives are considered and will therefore involve input from practitioners, evaluators, and faculty staff, and should be signed off by a senior lead. It has been designed to inform the development of a research protocol - a detailed and specific document outlining a step-by-step guide to how each aspect of the evaluation will be carried out, including an analytical strategy. An example research protocol (template in [TASO's resources](#)) can be found [here](#) which details an evaluation of a curriculum reform intervention to address the ethnicity degree awarding gap. Depending on the capacity of individual HEPs, this evaluation plan may be shared internally or externally to support the development of the research protocol and subsequently to conduct the evaluation.*

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## Section 1: Evaluation objectives

*This section covers the purpose of the evaluation and provides justification for its undertaking. The scope of the evaluation in terms of the causal pathways to be evaluated and the primary, secondary and exploratory research questions. This section states the evaluations specific objectives and hypotheses.*

### Evaluation objectives

#### Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation is to determine whether the Referral Scheme is effective in improving ethnically minoritised students' outcomes.

The Referral Scheme is a school-based intervention, centred around the early identification of students at risk of failing (end of semester 1 of year 1) and the provision of personal and personalised support (via staff directly reaching out to students via phone and/or email). The primary target of the intervention is ethnically minoritised students with low attendance and academic performance at the end of semester 1 of year 1.

The Referral Scheme is designed to proactively reach out to ethnically minoritised students to make student support more inclusive, accessible and personalised. Through targeted contact to priority groups and meeting 'students where they are', the initial barrier of reaching out to access support and self-referral to services and opportunities, such as those through the Student Success Academy (SSA), is lifted.

#### Scope

This pilot intervention will be evaluated to assess its effectiveness in improving the academic outcomes of at-risk students, particularly those from ethnically minoritised backgrounds. The evaluation will investigate the extent to which the Referral Scheme enhances:

- Student attainment
- Continuation
- Engagement
- Sense of belonging.

The evaluation will adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the scheme's impact, mechanisms, and areas for improvement. This includes analysing the intervention's delivery and the experiences of both the recipients and providers. The evaluation will contribute to understanding how targeted support can address disparities in educational outcomes and inform evidence-based improvements to student support services.

## Research questions

**Primary:** The main question addressed by this evaluation is whether the Referral Scheme addresses their Ethnicity Degree Awarding Gap (EDAG). This is explored through a series of sub-questions, outlined below:

- Does the Referral Scheme improve the attainment of ethnically minoritised students?
- Does the Referral Scheme improve the continuation of ethnically minoritised students?
- Does the Referral Scheme improve ethnically minoritised students' engagement in their courses?
- Does the Referral Scheme increase participants' sense of belonging to school and university community?

**Secondary:** The secondary questions seek to understand whether the intervention generated changes in staff and students' knowledge, awareness, and behaviours.

- Do staff have increased awareness of ethnically minoritised students' experiences, systemic barriers to their engagement, student support services available to them, how to effectively signpost and/or refer students to those via the Referral Scheme? (e.g. how effective was training?)
- Does identifying, contacting, and reaching out to support on behalf of ethnically minoritised students lead to building trusting relationships with staff?
- Does providing ethnically minoritised students with personalised contact and (signposting) support that meets their individual needs lead to increased engagement with support available to them e.g. SSA, Student Wellbeing and Inclusion (SWAI)?

### Exploratory:

- Does the increased engagement with SSA and SWAI lead to an increase in follow-up engagement with support mechanisms available to them?

## Section 2: Intervention

*This section describes the intervention being evaluated, to enable replication, and is taken from the associated Enhanced Theory of Change (EToC).*

### Intervention

#### Why was the intervention developed?

The Referral Scheme is a pilot, school-based intervention (currently implemented only in two Loughborough University schools, Wolfson School of Mechanical, Electrical and Manufacturing Engineering and the Schools of Science). The intervention centres around the early identification of students at risk of failing their degrees (i.e. uses data from the end of semester 1 of year 1 to identify target students) and the provision of personal and personalised support (with school staff directly reaching out to students via phone and/or email) as a means to help them get the support they need and perform the best they can. The primary target of the Scheme is ethnically minoritised students with low attendance and academic performance. The Referral Scheme provides the opportunity to students to meaningfully engage with staff and benefit from clarifications provided regarding support relevant to them and how to access it. This support might be as small as talking students through how to submit a Mitigating Circumstances claim or arranging a meeting with their personal tutor, or might involve referral to central student support services, like:

- a. the [Student Success Academy](#) (SSA) - an institutional student support service who seeks to identify and link students to tailored support and development opportunities at key transition points to help them unlock their full potential during their time at university.
- b. the Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity (SWAI) - an institutional student support services, comprising three specialist teams ([the Mental Wellbeing team](#), the [Student Advice and Support Service](#) and the [Disability Access and Learning team](#)) focusing to support students through their time at university.

The Referral Scheme is designed to proactively reach out to ethnically minoritised students to make student support more inclusive, accessible and personalised, for example, through 'finding students where they are' rather than requesting them to come and visit the school premises and staff to have a chat about their performance, and through lifting the barrier of having to identify how to access support services to get the support they need.

The Referral Scheme was initiated as institutional data evidence showing that ethnically minoritised students with low average marks and low attendance were not engaging with and benefitting from university support systems. By providing targeted support and

fostering a sense of belonging, the referral scheme strives to improve ethnically minoritised students' experience, increase their course engagement and attainment, with an ultimate goal to reduce the ethnicity degree awarding gap (EDAG) at Loughborough University.

### **What is the intervention?**

- Learner analytics are monitored by the Central Planning team to create student priority lists of students at risk of failing their degrees based on their attendance and performance data from Semester 1 in Year 1. Two priority lists are created in the form of online documents as follows:
  - Priority 1: Students with less than 30% attendance and an average of 40% or less in their first semester marks from minoritised ethnic backgrounds.
  - Priority 2: Students with less than 40% attendance and an average of 50% or less in their first semester marks of any ethnicity group.
- Priority list students are also flagged in the institutional Customer Relationship Management System Co-tutor.
- The lists prepared by the Central Planning team are reviewed by SSA staff, who cross-reference the details of the identified students with their records to highlight students who have already engaged with the SSA (providing information on when the students engaged with what type of SSA support offered), to provide context for school staff and further ensure that any support offered will be relevant and tailored. Once the lists have been updated, these are passed on to the relevant School Referral Scheme Heads by week 2 of Semester 2.
- The lists are received by the School Referral Scheme Heads. For the first pilot stage, staff acting as EDI champions or with a particular interest in race/ethnicity issues have volunteered for this role. The School Referral Scheme Heads, based on their capacity and number of students identified in the lists, divide the students to be contacted between themselves and other School staff who have self-selected for contributing to the referral scheme. For the first pilot, this staff included personal academic tutors, academic staff championing EDI and school administrators. This staff have undergone relevant training (e.g. empathetic listening) at the beginning of the 2023-24 academic year.
- School staff phone all Priority 1 list students, and email all those on Priority 2 and everyone who did not respond to the phone calls from the Priority 1 list, to check in with them by week 5-6 of Semester 2. Staff contact students at least twice to try and get through to and record any relevant outcomes on the online priority list documents. Students who staff do not manage to get through to form the control group for the intervention and no other action is taken for them as part of the Referral Scheme. A relevant entry is made in the students' Co-Tutor profile to indicate that.

- Students who are successfully contacted by school staff, have a conversation with school staff based on standardised online guidance (either phone or email script), which has been developed based on guidance from the SSA and SWAI teams. Through this conversation, staff provide a safe space to students to share their experiences and needs. Based on the experiences and needs expressed by the students through this initial contact, staff will outline to each student the support options available and relevant to them. Based on students' choice out of those, staff will refer student to the support option(s) that students request to access. Although the list is not exhaustive, this might involve:
  - Access to the SSA's support services. Most of the times, relevant services for referred students are a) the 'Get Ahead Together' – peer mentoring to support students from ethnic minority backgrounds and groups underrepresented in higher education as they transition to university, or b) 'Academic Success Coaching' – tailored one-to-one support, including sessions on time management, critical thinking and research skills.
  - Access to SWAI services
  - Access to school-relevant support, like demystifying the Mitigating Circumstances – MC – process, or a meeting to devise a support action plan with the students' personal academic tutor.
- Updated lists including all outcomes of the initial contacts with the priority students are shared with all relevant staff, based on the support that each student selected. Also, relevant entries are made on Co-Tutor, flagging the actions and support type to which each student was referred, to enable cross-team oversight and monitoring of subsequent actions taken.
- Subsequent actions are initiated from the appropriate support staff members identified, based on the type of support that the students chose to engage with (e.g. sending meeting invitations – can be either online or in-person - for the support initiative relevant to each one of the referred students)
- All subsequent engagement of students with the support services they were referred to, as well as further engagement with support services are monitored via Co-Tutor and/or the shared online priority lists.
- If students have agreed during their initial contact by school staff, follow-up calls are made by school staff or relevant support services staff to gauge students' progress after they engaged with the support type they were referred to, towards the end of Semester 2. Relevant feedback is recorded as an entry on the student profiles on Co-tutor and/or the shared priority lists.

## **Who is the intervention for?**

The main beneficiary groups are students at risk of failing their degrees, who are identified and organised into two priority lists, using the following institutional data:

- Priority 1: Students from minoritised ethnic backgrounds with less than 30% attendance and an average of 40% or less in their first semester marks.
- Priority 2: Students from minoritised ethnic backgrounds with less than 40% attendance and an average of 50% or less in their first semester marks.

Academic staff are indirect beneficiaries of the intervention through awareness-raising training that will empower them to better:

- Understand the challenges that ethnically minoritised students face in their teaching and learning as well as university experience. They can then use this knowledge to change the way they approach and interact with ethnically minoritised students so that they are more personalised and multi-culturally relevant.
- Understand how to approach and support ethnically minoritised students' needs in a personalised way.
- Understand the support services available across the institution and be able to effectively signpost ethnically minoritised students to those.

## **Who is delivering the intervention?**

- Student Success Academy (SSA) - providing training and resources to school-based staff contacting priority students, booking appointments for directly referred students, triaging students and signposting them to other activities they provide that might be relevant to them.
- EDI/Student Wellbeing and Inclusion (SWAI) - collaborate with SSA to develop the training and resources for school-based staff contacting priority students.
- Referral Scheme School Head – school staff member leading and managing the initiative at a school level (e.g. approaching the rest of school staff to partake in the referral scheme, dividing priority students to be contacted across the various school staff etc.) This might be staff with expertise in education and student experience, in EDI leadership roles, Learning and development Advisors etc.
- Academic Staff and School Admin – contacting priority students, signpost, and refer directly to range of support and wellbeing services (including Mitigating Circumstances (MC) information).
- Central data teams – Planning office provides a list of eligible students to schools and SSA.
- Enhanced Academic Practice Team – providing personal tutor training to school-based staff in order build trust and meet student needs.



- Referral Scheme project manager – appointment to be determined (TBD) by Access and Participation Sub-Committee (APSC).
- Referral Scheme Operations Working Group - Membership TBD by APSC. This could include:
  - Central planning data person
  - Student records office data person
  - SSA coordinators (one of each service offered)
  - SSA administrator
  - School-specific admin (making the calls etc)
  - School champion (education and student experience/EDI leadership role learning and development)
  - School Referral Scheme Head
  - Staff members supporting the Referral Scheme in each school
  - Staff from the central evaluation team.

### **How is the intervention delivered?**

The Referral Scheme School Heads and the rest of the staff supporting the Scheme at a school level receive mandatory online training to prepare them for meaningfully engaging with the Referral Scheme's priority students (particularly those from ethnically minoritised backgrounds). This training is developed and facilitated by EDI, SSA and SWAI staff members to ensure that colleagues are engaging in conversations with students effectively – embodying a supportive, appreciative and empathetic approach. Staff need to have completed their online training at least one Semester before their engagement with the Referral Scheme commences. This training involves modules on empathetic listening, how to manage difficult conversations, how to meaningfully engage with students from ethnically minoritised backgrounds, how to ensure confidentiality and safeguarding etc. As part of this training, staff are provided with online documents that will be used as resources to contact students as part of the Referral Scheme, like an email/phone script to use for their contact with students and a guide for signposting to all student support services available at Loughborough University.

Using learner analytics data, the Central Planning team identifies target students for the Scheme, dividing those into two priority groups. This list is compiled at least one week before Semester 2 starts.

The lists prepared by the Central Planning team are reviewed by SSA staff, who cross-reference the details of the identified students with their records to highlight students who have already engaged with the SSA (providing information on when the students engaged with what type of SSA support offered), to provide context for school staff and further ensure that any support offered will be relevant and tailored. Once the lists have

been updated, these are passed on to the relevant School Referral Scheme Heads by week 2 of Semester 2.

The School Referral Scheme Heads divide the students to be contacted between themselves and the rest of the school staff supporting the Referral Scheme in each school.

School staff phone all Priority 1 list students, and email all those on Priority 2 and everyone who did not respond to the phone calls from the Priority 1 list, to check in with them by week 5-6 of Semester 2. Staff contact students at least twice to try and get through to priority students and records any relevant outcomes on the online priority list documents. Students who staff do not manage to get through to form the control group for the intervention and no other action is taken for them as part of the Referral Scheme. A relevant entry is made in the students' Co-Tutor profile to indicate that.

Students who are successfully contacted by school staff, have a conversation with school staff based on standardised online guidance (either phone or email script), which has been developed based on guidance from the SSA and SWAI teams. Through this conversation, staff provide a safe space to students to share their experiences and needs. Based on the experiences and needs expressed by the students through this initial contact, staff will outline to each student the support options available and relevant to them. Based on students' choice out of those, staff will refer student to the support option(s) that students request to access. Although the list is not exhaustive, this might involve:

- Access to the SSA's support services. Most of the times, relevant services for referred students are a) the 'Get Ahead Together' – peer mentoring to support students from ethnic minority backgrounds and groups underrepresented in higher education as they transition to university, or b) 'Academic Success Coaching' – tailored one-to-one support, including sessions on time management, critical thinking and research skills.
- Access to SWAI services.
- Access to school-relevant support, like demystifying the Mitigating Circumstances – MC – process, or a meeting to devise a support action plan with the students' personal academic tutor.

Updated lists including all outcomes of the initial contacts with the priority students are shared with all relevant staff, based on the support that each student selected. Also, relevant entries are made on Co-Tutor, flagging the actions and support type to which each student was referred, to enable cross-team oversight and monitoring of subsequent actions taken.

Subsequent actions are initiated from the appropriate support staff members identified, based on the type of support that the students chose to engage with (e.g. sending

meeting invitations – can be either online or in-person - for the support initiative relevant to each one of the referred students).

All subsequent engagement of students with the support services they were referred to, as well as further engagement with support services are monitored via Co-Tutor and/or the shared online priority lists.

### **Where is the intervention delivered?**

This intervention is currently delivered in a pilot format at two of Loughborough University's Schools. However, the intervention is in essence cross-departmental, as it requires collaboration between central services (e.g. Central planning, EDI, SSA, other student support services) and school-based staff (academic staff, admin staff, professional and support services staff etc.) to work closely with each other, to ensure the smooth delivery of the initiative (e.g. target student data and engagement information are accessible by all relevant teams, student engagement can be tracked across all different contact points etc.).

Most of the resources required for the intervention are available online (e.g. training for Referral Scheme staff, priority student lists etc.). However, when it comes to how students engage with the support services they are referred to, this engagement can take either an online or face-to-face contact.

### **How long is/how many times will the intervention be delivered?**

The intervention is currently being piloted in the Wolfson School of Mechanical, Electrical and Manufacturing Engineering and School of Science with the aim for the scheme to be rolled out across the University. The Scheme will run on an additional pilot including more schools in the academic year 2024-2025, with the anticipation of a full roll-out with all nine schools involved in the academic year 2025-2026.

This intervention works by tailoring support to its participants. This means that the number of "sessions", the intensity of support and the period of time over which these are delivered depends on the student. Students are checked for eligibility and assigned to priority groups for contact by Week 2 of Semester 2 with attendance checks for all students happening weekly. Students on priority lists are then contacted by Week 5-6 of Semester 2.

Details of students who have been contacted and referred are passed to support services in real-time according to the student's needs. This is usually completed on a weekly basis. School of Science currently complete referral forms on the participant's behalf. For direct referrals to the SSA, students are referred/booked in on a weekly basis.

Delivery of staff training to be involved in the Referral Scheme will happen once a year at the beginning of the year unless the needs for further refresher sessions or 2<sup>nd</sup> intakes are identified through evaluation of the Scheme.

### **Will the intervention be tailored?**

The intervention will be tailored in the sense that it seeks to provide personalised support relevant to students' needs. In addition, timings of each activity might be shifted to fit with timings/schedule of each school.

### **How will the intervention be optimised?**

#### *Communication strategy*

- A communications strategy for both students and staff will be developed and implemented. This communication (particularly for students) will be staggered, targeted and timely (signposting to relevant services based on key points of the student lifecycle and journey). For example, it would be good to signpost to all academic support relevant to students on the lead-up to their first exam and assessment periods, instead of just providing all types of support available to students as a 'one-off' as part of the students' induction. Student and staff need to be aware that a Referral scheme is in operation, with the aim to provide timely academic support to students to unlock their potential and thrive in their studies.
- Although currently phone calls and emails are identified as contact strategies with the priority students, the possibility to use additional means (e.g. SMS texting or a designated Referral Scheme WhatsApp group) is currently explored for future iterations of the pilot, working in collaboration with central data teams, trying to solve GDPR issues.

#### *Schools participating in the scheme*

- Schools should ensure that staff's workload allows them to meaningfully engage with all aspects of the Referral Scheme. For this reason, engagement with the Referral Scheme should be recognised, protected and rewarded, so that there is a strong message that the institution shows a real commitment to work related with improving ethnic minoritised students' academic success and overall experience. Consequently, although the Referral Scheme Head and the school-based referral scheme staff are currently identified mostly on a voluntary basis, taking up these roles should become more formalised in future iterations of the intervention.
- Training using school- and university-specific data should be offered to all academic staff, to empower them in understanding the challenges and barriers different student groups face, working to break down stereotypes and how to embed this in their teaching practices and interactions with students.

- All academic staff, and particularly those with pastoral responsibilities (e.g. personal tutors) should be in place to offer personalised support to students, including signposting them to services available to them. They should also work in collaboration with the student support services and the Referral Scheme staff to monitor if students have engaged with support and how have they benefited from this. Relevant items included in guidelines documents used to facilitate meetings with personal tutees as well as the PDR processes could be utilised to embed staff accountability, for example.
- Proactive Personal Tutors and other staff who exemplify best practice can be used as champions (e.g., throughout training, as a link to schools, in comms, etc.)

SSA:

- Academic coaches and peer mentors set clear boundaries of what they can and cannot do/offer (early “contracting” with students).
- SSA staff should be encouraged to engage with both internal and external professional development opportunities related to how they can best support students from ethnically minoritised backgrounds.
- SSA staff should be signposted to relevant support services available to them and have manageable workloads, to mitigate for the heavy emotional labour the nature of their roles involves.

## Section 3: Evaluation design

*This section provides details on the recommended evaluation of the intervention, including the design of both impact evaluation and implementation and process evaluation, sample, outcome measures, and data collection.*

### Evaluation design

#### Methodological approach

A mixed-methods approach was selected to evaluate and capture a holistic picture of this intervention. Quantitative data will be collected to show if the intervention is or is not working, and qualitative data will be explored to show why/how the intervention is or is not working.

An important first step with all evaluation activity is to establish benchmarks for each outcome. This can be done using the evaluation methods detailed below.

#### *Impact evaluation*

To evaluate the impact of the Referral Scheme, the team will implement Type 2 comparisons of student outcomes, including: attainment, continuation, sense of belonging, and student engagement. Student engagement will be explored using indicators/proxy measures such as attendance, timely assessment submissions and successful MC claims. The evaluation's comparison priorities are listed below:

- Outcomes for participants and eligible non-participants at the beginning and end of the academic year, checked annually.
- Outcomes between participants, eligible non-participants and white students.
- Outcomes for eligible participants pre- and post- academic year.

As the Referral Scheme grows, the team will work towards a soft quasi-experimental design (QED) comparing key outcomes (e.g. attainment, engagement in course and/or support available) of Referral Scheme participants who engaged with the support mechanisms that they were referred to (experimental group) with those who did not engage (comparator group). At this stage, small participant numbers, data availability and data quality would hinder the feasibility and reliability of conducting a QED. However, this is the current scope for evaluation as the Referral Scheme grows.

The comparator groups comprise of the following populations:

- Comparator Group 1 – Eligible non-participants: matched according to year, course, ethnicity, previous attainment, socio-economic background (IMD). These items are in priority order.
- Comparator Group 2 – White students: in the same year, on the same course

Alternatively, students from previous years of study with similar background characteristics could be used as comparator. Please refer to [Table 1](#) for further impact evaluation information.

### *Implementation and process evaluation (IPE)*

The IPE for the Referral Scheme will be carried out using the following approaches:

- Focus groups with student participants.
- Surveys with student participants - TASO Access & Success Questionnaire (ASQ) or NERUPI, National Student Survey (NSS).
- Town Hall with staff participants – open forum style focus group.

These approaches allow for a greater understanding of *why* the Referral Scheme works, exploring both student and staff perspectives. Please refer to [Table 2](#) for further details.

## **Data collection**

### *Student focus groups*

We will conduct focus groups with ethnically minoritised student participants to explore their experiences, perceptions, and the perceived impact of the Referral Scheme. This will provide insights into the effectiveness of the scheme's communication, the relevance of the support offered, and the degree to which it meets their needs. Recordings and transcripts of the sessions will be analysed thematically to identify common patterns, themes and insights.

### *Staff focus groups (town hall/open forum style)*

An open forum style focus group will be used to engage staff in meaningful dialogue about the experiences ethnically minoritised students face. This format will provide an interactive platform for staff to openly discuss and gain a deeper understanding of the systemic barriers that affect student engagement. This focus group allows us to engage with staff involved in the scheme to explore:

- staff understanding of the challenges ethnically minoritised students face,
- staff experiences (including any challenges faced),
- and the support staff require for effective implementation.

This will help in assessing the scheme's operational aspects and identifying areas for buy-in and improvement. The open nature of the discussion aims to create an inclusive, safe environment where staff feel comfortable voicing their thoughts.

### *Surveys*

We will administer pre- and post-intervention surveys to students to quantitatively measure changes in key outcome indicators such as engagement, academic performance and sense of belonging. At this stage, this data will provide a baseline for comparison and measure the scheme's impact over time.

### *Administrative data*

Existing institutional data will be used to identify, prioritise and track students that are part of the Referral Scheme and comparator student groups. This data tracking includes attendance, academic performance and engagement with support services.

### **Sample selection**

In this evaluation, the target student sample is split into two priority groups:

- Priority 1: Students with less than 30% attendance and average 40% mark in their first semester attendance from minoritised ethnic backgrounds.
- Priority 2: Students with less than 40% attendance and less than 50% average mark in their first semester attendance of any ethnicity group.

Matching criteria for comparator groups is detailed above.

Staff and Student Sample sizes are expected to initially be relatively small making statistical or experimental evaluation methods infeasible and unreliable. More qualitative and small  $n$  methods will be necessary. The evaluation team has determined the minimum threshold required for their aspirational QED would initially be  $n = 50$ . This participant threshold has been informed by pilot engagement rates, which indicate that out of 103 prioritised students, 52 were reached by phone. Over time, as the Referral Scheme grows, the team is driven to use more reliable methods of evaluation and conduct QEDs.

In addition to reaching the sample, students will be invited into the process of co-creating the scheme, giving them agency in the process and a stake in its success. This will elicit engagement in the evaluation and hopefully participation in evaluation activity.

### **Outcome measures and data collection**

Tables [1](#) and [2](#) summarise the outcome measures, data sources and points of collection for each of the research questions addressed in impact evaluation and the IPE respectively.



**Table 1. Research questions encompassed by the impact evaluation, methodological approach, and target sample.**

Type of Research question	Research question	Outcome measure / data source	Sample	Point of collection
Primary	Does the Referral Scheme improve the attainment of ethnically minoritised students?	Mean attainment scores between participants and comparator groups at the following stages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Y1 – S2 grades (benchmark)</li> <li>• Y2 – Part Grade</li> <li>• Y3 – S1 grades,</li> <li>• Degree awards in pilot school – the Wolfson School and School of Science.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants</li> <li>• Eligible non-participants</li> <li>• White students</li> </ul>	Pre- and post-intervention
Primary	Does the Referral Scheme improve continuation rates for ethnically minoritised students?	Continuation rates between participants and comparator groups in Wolfson School and School of Science.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants</li> <li>• Eligible non-participants</li> <li>• White students</li> </ul>	Pre- and post-intervention
Primary	Does the Referral Scheme improve ethnically minoritised students' engagement in their courses?	Attendance at lectures, tutorials and lab sessions between participants and comparator groups in School of Science and Wolfson School. Data will be pulled from Co-Tutor and LUSI via academic admin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants</li> <li>• Eligible non-participants</li> <li>• White students</li> </ul>	Pre- and post-intervention

		<p>staff.</p> <p>Academic school data tracking could encompass the following proxy measures for engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average course attendance percentage track attendance to lectures, tutorials, labs for participants and eligible non-participants</li> <li>• Number of timely assessment submissions/reduction in resubmissions for participants and both comparator groups</li> <li>• Number of successful MC claims each exam period for participants and eligible non-participants</li> <li>• Decrease in upheld claims for participants and eligible non-participants</li> </ul>		
Primary	Does the Referral Scheme increase ethnically minoritised students' sense of belonging to the institution?	<p>Likert scale data from validated student surveys measuring sense of belonging using:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imperial College London</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethnically minoritised Referral Scheme participants</li> </ul>	Pre- and post-intervention

		<p>Sense of Belonging validated scale</p> <p>Other options include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NSS Questions, e.g. B12.<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• TASO ASQ: Scale 11.<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>		
Secondary	<p>Do staff have increased awareness of ethnically minoritised students' experiences, systemic barriers to their engagement, student support services available to them, how to effectively signpost and/or refer students to those via the Referral Scheme? (how effective was the training?)</p>	<p>Staff survey – Likert scales incorporated in existing end of year staff survey.</p> <p>Open focus group(s) (Town hall concept) in staff meeting – advised as best way to reach staff.</p> <p>Use current module evaluation if appropriate or using NERUPI scale.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey: student-facing staff.</li> <li>• Open focus group(s): student-facing staff.</li> <li>• Module evaluations: students.</li> </ul>	Pre- and post-academic year

**Table 2. Research questions addressed in the IPE, methodological approach, and target sample.**

Type of Research question	Research question	Outcome measure	Sample	Point of collection
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<sup>1</sup> Office for Students. (2023). NSS 2023 Questionnaire. Retrieved from <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/c2ddb4c1-34cf-4df4-8c26-b6469412768f/nss-2023-questionnaire.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> TASO. (n.d.) Access and Success Questionnaire (ASQ). Retrieved from <https://taso.org.uk/access-and-success-questionnaire-asq>

Secondary	Does the identifying and contacting, and reaching out to support on behalf of ethnically minoritised students lead to trusting relationships with staff?	Focus group with participants covering themes such as the value of student-staff contact on building relationships. <sup>3</sup>	Ethnically minoritised Referral Scheme participants	Post-intervention
Secondary	Does providing ethnically minoritised students with personalised contact and (signposting) support that meets their individual needs lead to increased engagement with support available to them e.g. SSA, SWAI, etc?	<p>Focus groups with participants.</p> <p>Engagement tracking data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of students that engages with SSA/SWAI after being referred from school (potentially track how many of the referred students are engaging with the SSA for the first time)</li> <li>• % of students who will continue to engage with the entire series of 1:1 SSA coaching</li> <li>• Compare number of unique referrals to SSA and number of unique engagements with SSA</li> </ul> <p>This will be collected from Target</p>	Ethnically minoritised Referral Scheme participants	<p>Engagement data: Pre and post intervention</p> <p>Unique referrals: Post Intervention – end of the year</p>

<sup>3</sup> Jarvis, S. (2015). Exploring the value of staff-student relationships in developing student engagement. *Link*, 1(1). Retrieved from <https://www.herts.ac.uk/link/volume-1-issue-1/exploring-the-value-of-staff-student-relationships-in-developing-student-engagement>

		Connect, the student services attendance system and the case management system on Co-Tutor.		
Exploratory	Does the increased engagement with SSA, SWAI etc. lead to an increase in follow-up engagement with support mechanisms available to them?	Focus Group and engagement data tracking, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Percentage of referred students who engage more than once with additional support activities</li> <li>Number of students involved in MC claims for participants and eligible non-participants</li> </ul>	Ethnically minoritised Referral Scheme participants	Pre- and post-intervention for participants and eligible non-participants
Primary	Does the Referral Scheme improve the attainment of ethnically minoritised students by providing them with personalised support and contact that helps them to understand how to perform better academically, including submitting successful MC claims, submitting assessments timely etc.?	Focus group with participants and data tracking.	Ethnically minoritised Referral Scheme participants	Pre- and post-intervention for participants and eligible non-participants
Primary	Does the Referral Scheme improve the continuation of ethnically minoritised students by providing them with personalised support and contact that helps them to understand how to perform better academically, including submitting successful MC claims, submitting	Focus group with participants and data tracking.	Ethnically minoritised Referral Scheme participants	Pre- and post-intervention for participants and eligible non-participants  Focus groups - Second half of academic year.

	assessments timely etc.? (primary)			
Primary	Does an increase in engagement in their courses lead to improved continuation rates for ethnically minoritised students?	Focus group after 1st December (end of year) – including questions such as how likely are you to continue with your studies? Why? How did the Referral Scheme, if at all, impact your decision.  Potential to use elements from Culturally Sensitive Curricula Scale. <sup>4</sup>	Ethnically minoritised Referral Scheme participants	Second half of academic year.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas, D. S., & Quinlan, K. M. (2023). Reimagining curricula: effects of cultural (in) sensitivity of curricula on racially minoritised students' engagement. *Studies in Higher Education*, 48(2), 283-298. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/03075079.2022.2134332?needAccess=true>

## Section 4: Project management

*This section is designed to ensure relevant staff and stakeholders are held accountable for their involvement in the evaluation and that findings from the evaluation are disseminated internally (and externally) as appropriate. It should be used internally for HEPs to address issues such as buy-in and accountability and allows HEPs to provide a breakdown on the budget and resources needed to secure sign-off from senior stakeholders.*

### Project management of the evaluation

#### Evaluation stakeholders

*List the key stakeholders the evaluation is designed for and how they will use the findings*

<b>Audience</b> <i>(Who are the audiences for the information from the evaluation? e.g., students, teachers, management, staff, partners, etc.)</i>	<b>How evaluation findings will be used</b> <i>(How can they apply new knowledge from the evaluation study?)</i>
Students from ethnic minorities	To increase student awareness of the university's support systems and to close the feedback loop for students in terms of enhancements to support being made through the Referral Scheme. This aims to increase students' confidence in the support provided, increase sense of belonging, and increase their sense of autonomy in asking for support.
Student Success Academy Staff	To inform which students Student Success Academic targets and what resourcing and recruitment is needed to best support those students. This includes recruitment of staff with appropriate skills and lived experience.
Student-facing staff (e.g. academic staff, schools' student programme and admin teams etc.)	To help staff understand what works and why in terms of providing relevant support to ethnically minoritised students so that they can improve their academic attainment and outcomes. Based on this informed understanding, staff's practice is evidence-informed, which helps deliver overall and sustainable culture change. Evaluation findings could also help secure further buy-in from implementation/delivery staff.
Learning and Teaching Committee	To operationalise and implement the findings to systemise the support of students and raise outcomes across the university.
Access and Participation Sub-committee	To provide a deeper understanding of how to support students and initiatives to fund. Evaluation findings will be used to monitor progress (making sure we are doing the right things for students) and identify whether any alterations are required.
Academic Registry	To inform of data gathering needs for these types of targeted initiatives. This will ensure the data systems and processes that are implemented and procured support the data access needs of initiatives like the Referral Scheme.

Executive/management team	To leverage to inform return on investment conversations. For example, having positive evaluation findings will provide assurance that things are working well and are worth additional investment. Similarly, findings can point towards what more could be done if more resources were allocated to the evaluation of this initiative. Sharing findings will be useful for managing expectations in terms of timelines, deliverables and impact.
Wider HE Sector	To support the sector in addressing persistent educational inequities like the ethnicity degree awarding gaps. It is important that findings are disseminated to the entire sector to achieve social justice and equity. It is equally important to disseminate findings about initiatives that worked well as it is those that did not. The former helps the sector identify good-practice and the latter to avoid making the same mistakes through benefiting from lessons learnt.

### Reporting requirements

*Specify any outputs that will be developed as part of the evaluation, such as interim and final reports, and the stakeholders who will review the findings.*

Date	Report type	Writer/s	Audience
Monthly	Informal data check-ins	Rebecca Newberry and Sheryl Williams	School staff teams
Bimonthly	Data check-in against APP targets	Rebecca Newberry and Sheryl Williams	APSC
Annual November (after SAP)	Interim report	Rebecca Newberry and Sheryl Williams	APSC, LTC, SSA, school staff teams, APP team
Monthly	Check-in with personal tutors/callers	Rebecca Newberry and Sheryl Williams	School staff teams
November 2028 (after SAP)	Final Report	Rebecca Newberry and Sheryl Williams	APSC, LTC, SSA, School staff teams, APP team

### Budget and staff resources

*Specify the funding and resource capacity for the evaluation. Include materials, travel, external evaluators etc.*

Budget for the evaluation study (What is the budget allocated to the evaluation?)		
Internal staff resources (List the staff resources in the Evaluation Team)	Position	Approximate time and / costs required



Sheryl Williams	Professor of Engineering Education Technology and Lecturer - Wolfson School of Engineering	0.05 FTE
Rebecca Newberry	Learning and Teaching Manager – School of Science	0.05 FTE
Not yet appointed	Graduate Management trainee	0.2 FTE
Emma Dodd	Academic Success Coordinator - Student Success Academy	0.1 FTE
Natasha Stoyce	Academic Success Coach - Student Success Academy	0.1 FTE
Lynn Kirk	Academic Success Coach - Student Success Academy	0.1 FTE
Bradie McDaid	Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Coordinator– EDI Services	0.05 FTE
Marta Ulanicka	Evaluation and Impact Officer – Access and Participation Team	0.05 FTE
<b>External human resources</b> ( <i>If applicable. External consultants to be managed by the Evaluation Team to undertake data analysis, focus groups etc.</i> )		<b>Approximate time and cost required</b>
N/A		N/A
<b>Other resources required</b> ( <i>E.g. materials, travel etc.</i> )		<b>Cost estimates</b>
Student focus groups x 2		Student payment £11.89 per hour each ~ £180

## Time schedule

*This section supports accountability and formulating a plan. What are the key timelines, key activities and milestones for the evaluation?*

### Pilot Timeline (for this evaluation) – 2023-2024 academic year

Key milestones	Due date
Programme Enhanced Theory of Change (EToC) generated	22 December 2023
Draft evaluation plan presented to team for feedback	January 2024
Evaluation plan approved	January 2024
Consultation with APSC regarding support and approval	26 January 2024

process for the evaluation	
Interim monitoring check-in – a point to check in re: available data (e.g; attendance? Calls made? Students engaged after referral? MC claims?)	June-July 2024 (differing data available depending on June/July)
Data gathering and analysis is complete	December 2024
Draft evaluation report	January 2025 – with final attainment after SAP
Consultation with APSC regarding support and approval process for the evaluation	March 2025

**Business as Usual Timeline (for future cohort evaluations)**

Key milestones	Due date
Consultation with APSC regarding support and approval process for the evaluation	March 2024
Programme EToC reviewed	May 2024
Draft and explore research protocol for evaluation plan	May 2024
Draft evaluation plan presented to team for feedback	May 2024
Evaluation plan approved – (by Referral Scheme Working Group)	June 2024
Intervention starts (tracking)	September 2024
Initial data gathering and analysis completed	July 2025
Interim evaluation report	July 2025
Final data gathering and analysis is complete	December 2025
Draft evaluation report	January 2026 – with final attainment after SAP
Feedback to and consultation with APSC regarding evaluation results, further support and approval process for the evaluation	March 2026