

FAQs: Invitations to tender June 2024

- **What is the HEP £5k budget for – will you be looking at only new interventions or existing ones?**

We are open to receiving applications that consider both new and existing interventions. The key thing to ensure that the participants that the evaluation is looking to engage will have had a chance to participate in the intervention and there is some time for some benefits to materialise that the evaluation will be able to pick up.

Whether the HEP has been delivering the intervention for a number of years or not, is less key, although we have a slight preference for existing interventions. If you're thinking of implementing a completely new intervention in the coming academic year you are welcome to submit an application, but you will need to provide reassurances that there will be sufficient time for participants to be exposed to the intervention and then enough time for the evaluator to collect evaluation data.

- **Is it possible to add links to the application paperwork?**

<https://taso.org.uk/research/contribute-to-our-research/invitation-to-tender-evaluation-of-mental-health-and-wellbeing-interventions-with-small-cohorts-ref-taso-36/>

- **Are you looking for evaluations of group interventions only?**

The purpose of the evaluation is to evaluate interventions with small cohorts. So we're looking for interventions in larger HEPs that are targeted at specific groups of students. Or interventions from small and specialist providers that might take a whole provider approach to supporting student mental health.

- **Are you considering universities who may be partnering with a charity for example who are supporting the intervention delivery?**

If the intervention is focused on small cohorts, yes.

- **Will the RCT and QED HEPs be different to the small-n selection?**

[This question refers to TASO's other ITTs that have been live until recently, with one inviting HEPs to apply for funding to support RCT evaluations and another one focusing on QED methodologies.]

Yes. Eligibility criteria are different given that RCTs and QEDs require large sample sizes to be able to run, while here (for this small-n ITT) we are looking for HEPs with interventions that target small numbers of student participants.

However a key criterion for all submissions (for this small-n ITT) is that the lead applicant must be a registered English higher education provider in the approved (fee cap) category.

We welcome applications that involve interventions that are delivered with other organisations or across multiple HEPs.

- **Does the focus of the intervention need to be mental health? Or overall wellbeing and improving student outcomes for small groups?**

The focus can be either. We're definitely interested in wellbeing, and we're also keen to hear about interventions focus on improving mental health and wellbeing that also seek to improve student outcomes such as attainment and progression.

- **There was a differentiation between large and small scale. Do you have an idea of size and scale that you are looking for?**

This is a hard question to answer. Not hundreds or thousands of students. An intervention of that size would not suit an evaluation employing theory-based evaluation methods. But if you have a peer-support group, for example, working with 30/40/60 students, that would be in scope. This type of evaluation method employs qualitative data collection methods and may require a sample of around 30 participants to interview. This means that the number of participants in the intervention needs to be larger than 30 as not all students who have received the intervention will want to be interviewed. This only an indication.

- **What outcomes of interest should interventions be measuring?**

We're looking for interventions that are targeted at improving wellbeing but we're also interested in those that might improve, for example, attainment through a wellbeing intervention..

- **So this funding is not applicable for Scottish HEPs?**

No. Only English HEPs in the approved (fee cap) category are eligible.

- **Does the £5,000 cover the cost of staff time involved or is it for consumables. Does it cover overheads?**

This our estimate for how much HEPs would need to participate in the evaluation: Inception and scoping time, which would include staff time, for HEPs to source and securely share contact details of participating students with the evaluator, so that primary data collection can be carried out, and to collaborate with the evaluator on certain aspects of the project. For example finding ways of encouraging students to engage with the evaluation, and also

sharing outcome data that the evaluator might be able to use such as attainment or attendance, and participating in some inception phase activities e.g. working up a Theory of Change in collaboration with the evaluator.

A maximum overhead rate of 25% on staff costs will be considered. Please note that value for money forms part of the assessment criteria for applications.

- **Would the type of outcome data available form part of the selection criteria for universities?**

We're looking for feasibility for being able to carry out the work within the timeframe, and whether the intervention is appropriate for the evaluation method we're planning to use.

- **Would institutions have to have monitored or done any formal evaluation on the intervention to participate? We have the intervention, but just not an established evaluation process.**

No. You don't have to have done any formal evaluation in order to participate. We're not precluding new interventions but the intervention must be feasible. It would be helpful to indicate why you are working with this particular group of students, what your rationale is and why you think it is an effective intervention. Your evidence might be anecdotal, it might be based on experience, or you might have carried out some internal evaluation of the intervention.

- **I was wondering if TASO are looking for proposals from HEP/s and evaluator/s separately or together?**

Separately. In principle we are flexible, but the way this procurement exercise has been set up is for HEPs and evaluators to submit their respective proposals independently, and for TASO to then select and match HEPs with the appointed evaluator.

- **Will the evaluation focus only on those students who have mental health issues, rather than expand to those who suffer with low wellbeing? If so, is there sufficient data available from the universities to differentiate these students, and do their programmes differentiate between them in terms of provision?**

If a provider is running two interventions, one on mental health and one on wellbeing it should be possible to distinguish between diagnosed mental health interventions and wellbeing interventions. However, this is a question that the HEP running an intervention will be able to provide the answer to.

- **We have an intervention that supports care experienced students from access to graduation - our intervention supports on three strands - would it be**

possible to use these methodologies to evaluate the wellbeing and belonging strand of this intervention?

Yes. It's a small cohort, so yes.

- **Can you offer any guidance as I think our ethics team are currently looking at whether we can gain retrospective ethical approval i.e. gaining approval from students in a cohort from last year who experienced an intervention to be included in this evaluation project.**

In this case we would need reassurance that the data would be available, and that we would be able to conduct the evaluation.

- Question clarification: We'd have to talk to ethics team about retrospective approval - is that right?
- A: Yes. This is a link to TASO ethics guidance to find out more <https://taso.org.uk/evidence/research-ethics-guidance/>
- **The timeline is quite tight. Is there any flexibility on this, or would it depend if the intervention being evaluated is a transition programme delivered over the summer?**

Yes there is flexibility. The timeline that is outlined is indicative and this is to be decided collaboratively with TASO and the HEP. The aim is for the inception meeting before summer holidays to get as much admin and project set up done as possible before the autumn term starts. Unless the intervention is, for example, an early induction programme that starts in August or early September, in which case contracts and ethics could need to be put in place very quickly .

- **What about a targeted intervention that is broken down by strands and streams across three years. Would that be too broad a scope for this particular evaluation? Would we need to pick a year group?**

We are unlikely to be able to provide a full evaluation of the whole programme but it should be possible to pick out certain aspects or timeframes within the longer term programme and focus the evaluation on that, perhaps on one of the strands and a specific intervention within that strand.

- **Would an Easter School for care experienced for mixed year groups be appropriate for this tender? It is also offered collaboratively by multiple HEs**

Unfortunately this will be too late to fit into the project timeline.

- **Larger institutions will be more concerned with cohorts based on student characteristics, as opposed to, for example, all the students on a small course, is that correct?**

Yes, we would like to hear from larger institutions working with particular groups of students, for example a student mental health intervention that is targeted at disabled students; or interventions in small and specialist providers that might adopt a whole institution approach to supporting student mental health, as well as interventions targeted at certain groups of students across the student lifecycle.