**Open call to join the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes’ (TASO) Panel of Evaluators.**

September 2021

**Introduction to TASO**

The Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) aims to improve lives through evidence-based practice in higher education (HE). Our vision is to eliminate equality gaps for disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, allowing all students to have the same chance to enter HE, get a good degree and progress into further study or employment.

TASO was set up in 2019, by a consortium of King’s College London, Nottingham Trent University and the Behavioural Insights Team.

We are an independent hub for HE professionals to access research, toolkits and evaluation guidance to eliminate equality gaps. We inform practitioners of the best available evidence and produce new evidence on the most effective approaches.

TASO is an affiliate ‘What Works’ centre and is part of the [UK Government’s What Works Movement.](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-works-network) This means that TASO is committed to the generation, synthesis and dissemination of high-quality evidence about effective practice in Widening Participation (WP) and Student Success. Our role is to help the sector produce more [Type 3 evidence](https://taso.org.uk/evidence/toolkit/what-is-causal-evidence/) as this provides us with the best possible understanding of which activities and approaches are most effective.

More information about TASO can be found at <https://taso.org.uk/>.

**Establishing a panel of evaluators**

TASO is seeking to recruit a diverse set of organisations to join our new panel of evaluators which, we anticipate, will demonstrate a wide range of interests and expertise in the evaluation of access and student success programmes and interventions. We look to appoint independent evaluators to provide rigorous evaluation of the implementation, process, cost and impact of interventions and programmes. Individual organisations will not be expected to work in all of these methodologies, however our expectation is that the panel will collectively offer the following expertise:

* Randomised controlled trial design and analysis
* Quasi-experimental methods, including difference in differences
* Small-n impact evaluation (such as, process tracing, contribution analysis, qualitative comparative analysis, and realist evaluation)
* Implementation and process evaluation
* Qualitative research methods
* Cost-benefit analysis/value for money assessments
* Pilot evaluation (including studies to test the feasibility interventions, or pilot randomised-controlled trials)
* Primary data collection
* Measurement, instrument development and validation, and psychometrics

The rationale for setting-up this panel is to ensure information on our commissioning opportunities reaches a pool of specialist organisations to partner with us. This panel will streamline the commissioning process for evaluation, by allowing us to develop an understanding of the organisations on our panel prior to each commissioning round.

**How the panel will work for evaluators**

TASO plans to continue research and evaluation with HE providers, WP teams and other sector organisations to deliver interventions that aim to improve student outcomes. In a typical commissioning round TASO will run two parallel Invitation to Tender (ITT) processes:

* One for research partner(s) that will generally be running the activity which we are seeking to evaluate (for example, providers running summer schools).
* One for evaluation partner(s) to provide independent, rigorous evaluation of the implementation, process, cost and impact of the activity being run.

For each evaluation partner ITT process, TASO will run a short competition and evaluators on the panel will be expected to complete a proposal to apply. TASO will develop guidance documents and application forms which clearly specify the parameters of the work to be undertaken and how applications will be scored. The ITT for evaluation partners will only be open to our evaluation panel.

It is important to note that TASO is also seeking to develop evaluation expertise and capability within the sector. Therefore, while we will continue to appoint independent evaluators to our projects, they may be encouraged to collaboratively work on elements of impact evaluation and process evaluation with research partners. The exact scope of the evaluation will be determined on a case-by-case basis with input from TASO’s advisory groups and will take into account the need for independent evaluation versus the drive to build capability in the sector.

With this in mind, evaluators will need to be prepared to be responsible for leading on all activities evaluation, including protocolisation (consistent with TASO’s approach), seeking research ethics approval, data collection, randomisation (where appropriate), coordinating and conducting qualitative research and field work, quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

We anticipate reviewing membership of the panel every two years and inviting new organisations to apply, as well as reviewing the participation and performance of panel members at this stage.

**Timeline**

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| **Date** | **Activity** |
| 22 September 2021 | Launch open call |
| 20 October 2021 | Deadline for questions |
| 3 November 2021 | Deadline for applications |
| w/c November 15 2021 | Calls with shortlist - if required |
| w/c November 22 2021 | Outcomes of applications communicated |
| Early December | Panel set-up and induction |

**Funding**

Once a panel member has been successful in the ITT process, funding will be allocated for their role as an independent evaluator for an individual project. Payments will be made in line with agreed milestones, provided they have been met in time and to standard.

**How to apply**

To apply, please complete the expression of interest form in Annex 1. Your entire application, including any supporting documentation should be emailed to [**research@taso.org.uk**](mailto:research@taso.org.uk) by **12:00 midday on 3 November 2021** with the subject line **‘panel of evaluators application’.**

If you have any questions about the application process, please email [**research@taso.org.uk**](mailto:research@taso.org.uk) by **20 October 2021** with the subject line **‘panel of evaluators query’.**

**Annex 1**

**Assessment of proposals**

The strength of applications will be assessed on the below criteria.

**Expression of Interest Form**

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| **Lead organisation** |  |
| **Contact name** |  |
| **Contact email** |  |
| **Contact telephone** |  |
| **Where did you hear about this open call?** |  |
| **SECTION A: Relevant experience of the organisation**  *Please complete the table below to provide details of your organisation’s experience of delivering projects with the relevant methodologies.*  *Please note, while we would generally favour those with experience across multiple areas, if you have a specific area of expertise but have other gaps, we may still consider you for our panel.*  *You may also attach an example of a report from one of your projects.* | |
| |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | **Methodology** | **Approximately how many projects have you delivered using this methodology?** | **Additional detail of your organisation’s relevant experience of using this methodology - e.g., a case study of a project.** | | **Randomised controlled trial design and analysis** | *1 - 10 projects*  *11- 20 projects*  *21 - 30 projects*  *Over 30 projects* | *Type of evaluation, project size and length of contract.* | | **Quasi-experimental methods, including difference in differences** | *1 - 10 projects*  *11- 20 projects*  *21 - 30 projects*  *Over 30 projects* | *Type of evaluation, project size and length of contract.* | | **Small-n impact evaluation** | *1 - 10 projects*  *11- 20 projects*  *21 - 30 projects*  *Over 30 projects* | *Type of evaluation, project size and length of contract.* | | **Implementation and process evaluation** | *1 - 10 projects*  *11- 20 projects*  *21 - 30 projects*  *Over 30 projects* | *Type of evaluation, project size and length of contract.* | | **Qualitative research methods** | *1 - 10 projects*  *11- 20 projects*  *21 - 30 projects*  *Over 30 projects* | *Type of evaluation, project size and length of contract.* | | **Cost-benefit analysis/value for money assessments** | *1 - 10 projects*  *11- 20 projects*  *21 - 30 projects*  *Over 30 projects* | *Type of evaluation, project size and length of contract.* | | **Pilot evaluation (including studies to test the feasibility interventions, or pilot randomised-controlled trials)** | *1 - 10 projects*  *11- 20 projects*  *21 - 30 projects*  *Over 30 projects* | *Type of evaluation, project size and length of contract.* | | **Primary data collection** | *1 - 10 projects*  *11- 20 projects*  *21 - 30 projects*  *Over 30 projects* | *Type of evaluation, project size and length of contract.* | | **Measurement, instrument development and validation, and psychometrics** | *1 - 10 projects*  *11- 20 projects*  *21 - 30 projects*  *Over 30 projects* | *Type of evaluation, project size and length of contract.* | | |
| **SECTION B: Capacity and expertise of the team**  *Please provide details of your organisation’s evaluation function e.g. size, specialisms, and the roles that would typically be included in delivering and quality assuring an evaluation project - e.g., Principle Investigator, Project Manager, Research Advisor, Research Assistant, Analyst etc. This section will help us understand your capacity, expertise and resource.*  *[1,200 words max]* | |
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| **SECTION C: Staff costs**  *Please provide a day rate card for work commissioned through this panel, with valid rates for the next two years specified. Rates specified on this card will be used for all subsequent evaluations commissioned by TASO, except in exceptional circumstances. Maximum (rather than minimum) rates should be specified. Value for money will be a guiding principle for decisions both on admission to the panel and subsequent competitive ITT processes.* | |
| |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | **Role/Grade** | **Day rate (2021/22)** | **Day rate (2022/23)** | |  |  |  | |  |  |  | | |
| **SECTION D: Research ethics**  *Please provide details of how you would ensure that the ethical standards in your research are being upheld, and if applicable, what processes do you have in place. This may be that you have your own research ethics committee, or are affiliated with a research ethics committee etc.*  *(500 words max)* | |
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| **SECTION E: Data protection**  *Any personal data collected as part of the research and evaluation must be managed in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and requirements of the funder with regards to data storage and management. When requested, external evaluators will be required to assist with writing project Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs). Careful consideration should also be given to how all data, particularly personal data, will be kept secure. What steps will be taken to ensure the security of data processed during the research, including any identifiable personal data.*  *Please attach your standard Data Sharing Agreement template and Data Privacy Notice as part of your proposal.*  *(500 words max)* | |
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| **Section F: Safeguarding**  *At times interventions will involve young people who would be classed as vulnerable. Please outline your safeguarding policy details or how you plan to evaluate and assess safeguarding risks to those for whom the intervention is aimed. This should include consideration of how consent will be gained from young people who may need support with understanding the nature of the intervention.*  *(500 words max)* | |
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| **Section G: Equality diversity and inclusion**  *At TASO, we work with young people and practitioners who experience multiple forms of discrimination. We are particularly keen to work with organisations that have experience of actively promoting equality, diversity and inclusion through research.*  *Please tell us about your experience of promoting equality, diversity and inclusion through research below. You can also include other experience and expertise you think is relevant.*  *(500 words max)* | |
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| **SECTION H: Conflict of interest**  *Please confirm if you are aware of any potential or actual conflicts of interest which may prevent you from working with TASO. If you consider a conflict may exist, please provide details in your response.*  *Where conflicts of interest are identified TASO reserves the right to exclude the organisation from further participation in this process.* | |
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| **SECTION I: Financial stability**  *Financial stability and long-term viability of the organisation is an essential criteria for this application. Please provide:*   * *Your organisation's last set of accounts* * *Your organisation's current year budget.*   ***You may also provide this as a pdf document alongside your completed application form.*** | |
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**Additional guidance**

* TASO reserves the right, acting reasonably, to:
  + Discontinue the award procedure in the absence of appropriate applications;
  + Change the timetable for the procurement, and in such circumstances TASO will notify all applicants of any change by the fastest means possible;
  + Terminate discussions with organisations which apply;
  + Discontinue the procedure leading to the award of the Contract;
  + Not to award any Contract at all as a result of this process
* Under no circumstances shall TASO incur any liability in respect of any of these actions.
* No publicity regarding the project will be permitted until TASO has given express written consent to the relevant communication. No statements may be made to any part of the media regarding the nature of this application, its contents or any proposals relating to it without the prior written consent of TASO.
* TASO will not reimburse any costs incurred by organisations in connection with preparation of their applications.
* If you are unsure of the meaning of a question or anything in this call for applications then it is your responsibility to ask TASO to clarify in writing via email.
* TASO will aim to answer clarification questions within five (5) working days, but does not undertake to do so. TASO may also decline to answer a question if it deems the question to be inappropriate. If TASO is unable to answer a question, this will be communicated.