**Ethnicity degree awarding gaps: Theory of Change development**

June 2023

# Open call for higher education (HE) providers

The Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) is calling for higher education providers (HEPs) interested in receiving evaluation support to develop Theories of Change (ToCs) for interventions aimed at addressing the ethnicity degree awarding gap. HEPs will be matched up with an independent evaluator to receive funded independent evaluation support.

TASO will publish these ToCs as prototypes for the sector to use. It is an opportunity for participating HEPs to build internal evaluation expertise specifically in relation to designing high-quality ToCs, and contribute towards TASO’s ambition to support better evaluation of interventions addressing the ethnicity degree awarding gap.

**Introduction to TASO**

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 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 and student success.

**Background**

TASO recently commissioned Staffordshire University to produce a typology of approaches being delivered in the HE sector to tackle the ethnicity degree awarding gap. This gap refers to the significant difference in the proportions of students from marginalised ethnic backgrounds being awarded a first or upper-second class undergraduate degree when compared to White students. The project involved analysis of Access and Participation Plans (APPs) to understand what is being delivered and evaluated, in addition to interviews with sector stakeholders to provide important context to the activities that have been undertaken. Findings from this project have been published in a [report](https://s33320.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/Approaches-to-addressing-the-ethnicity-degree-awarding-gap.pdf), which also details key recommendations.

Of APPs which had targets to reduce the ethnicity degree awarding gap, approximately two thirds (N=43) did not include a ToC within their APP. Of those that did, a large proportion (N=30) were inadequately detailed - it was unclear how the intervention would ultimately lead to a reduction in the gap. Consequently, a key recommendation from the report is that providers develop robust ToCs with clearly articulated mechanisms of change linking activities to desired outcomes.

**Scope**

TASO will fund an independent evaluator from the [Panel of Evaluators](https://taso.org.uk/get-involved/panelofevaluators/) to work with HEPs and develop [Core and Enhanced ToCs](https://taso.org.uk/evidence/evaluation-guidance-resources/toc/) for interventions to address the ethnicity degree awarding gap. Once developed, these ToCs will be published and accessible for the wider sector to use. The independent evaluator will also build a concrete evaluation plan for each intervention, including recommendations on design, methodology, and data indicators that map onto the ToC.

The aforementioned report identified 16 broad approach types addressing the ethnicity degree awarding gap, as outlined in the table below. We welcome submissions for interventions that are not mentioned but will prioritise widely used interventions and ensure that a range of approaches are chosen.

*Table 1. Approaches identified which aim to address the ethnicity degree awarding gap.*

| **Approach** | **Description** |
| --- | --- |
| Adapting assessment practice | Reforming the assessment format or assessment processes. |
| Raising awareness | Workshops and sessions to develop staff understanding of the awarding gaps and/or aspects of inequality faced by students. |
| Developing curricula | Reforming the curriculum, including inclusive curricula and decolonising reading lists. |
| Running events | Extra-curricular events for students. |
| Modifying leadership practice | Senior leadership teams adapting leadership structures and/or culture. |
| Using and developing learning analytics | Collecting, interrogating, and/or presenting quantitative data on the nature and extent of the awarding gap. |
| Providing peer learning and mentoring | Students supporting students as mentors, or learning from each other. |
| Incorporating personalised support | Staff supporting students through one-to-one activities, including coaching, mentoring, or tutoring. |
| Recruiting staff | Staff recruitment drives, typically to recruit staff from more ethnically diverse backgrounds. |
| Building knowledge | Undertaking research, evaluation, or other activities to build providers’ knowledge and understanding around the ethnicity degree awarding gap (are distinct from learning analytics). |
| Producing resources | Developing guides for staff and/or students. |
| Developing staff skills | Events and activities to support staff skill development. |
| Adapting structural processes | Developing the physical and policy structure of the provider. |
| Supporting students | Specific sessions or staff made available to support students (e.g. workshops, tutorials). These are distinct from personalised support as they are not tailored to specific students. |
| Training students as allies | Awareness raising in the student population, including training. |
| Harnessing student voice | Seeking and using student feedback in organisational discussions and/or decisions. |

**Expectations for participating HEPs**

* TASO will select up to six proposals.
* We are simultaneously issuing a call to our independent Panel of Evaluators who will be invited to bid for the provision of evaluation support (funded by TASO).
* Evaluation support from independent evaluators will take place over a three-month period from September to November 2023.
* Successful HEPs will work directly with TASO and an independent evaluator from the panel to develop the ToC.
* Successful HEPs will be expected to commit time and resourcing to the ToC development, including through meetings, workshops and reviewing of outputs. Table 2 details how project activities and responsibilities will be split across the three organisations involved in the project.

*Table 2. Partner responsibilities*

|  | **HEP** | **Independent evaluator** | **TASO** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Contract management |  |  | Lead |
| Project management | Lead | Lead | Advise |
| Expert, technical advice |  | Lead | Support |
| Conduct ToC workshops | Participate | Lead | Support |
| Review and QA ToC | Review | Lead | Review |

**Project timeline**

The project timeline is outlined in Table 3 below.

*Table 3. Project milestones and key dates*

| **Milestone** | **Date** |
| --- | --- |
| Call for applications opens (HEPs and Panel of Evaluators) | Monday 12 June 2023 |
| ‘ITT information session’ webinar | Wednesday 5 July 2023 |
| Deadline for applications | Friday 4 August 2023 (5pm) |
| Project kick off | w/c 4 September 2023 |
| ToC workshops | September - October 2023 |
| Final outputs | Friday 15 December 2023 |

Using the expression of interest form below, please submit your examples of interventions by **5pm on Friday 4 August 2023**. If you have any questions regarding the open call, please join us on 5 July 2023 for an information session ([sign-up here](https://taso.org.uk/event/exploring-tasos-new-invitations-to-tender-in-higher-education/)) dedicated to unpacking TASO’s open invitations to tender. You can also get in touch over email via research@taso.org.uk. You will be informed of the outcome of your submission in the **w/c 14 August 2023**.

### **Eligibility**

* The lead applicant must be a registered English higher education provider in the approved (fee cap) category.
* The primary focus of the intervention must be to reduce the ethnicity degree awarding gap.
* The applicant must commit time and resourcing to the ToC development, including through meetings, workshops and reviewing of outputs

**Assessment of applications**

Your application will be assessed by the TASO Research and Evaluation team. The strength of applications will be assessed on the below criteria (please note the weighting of each section):

* *Intervention/activity (40%)*
  + How the intervention maps onto the typology of approaches to address the ethnicity degree awarding gap.
  + Background information of how the intervention has been designed/delivered previously.
  + How the intervention aims to reduce the ethnicity degree awarding gap including any suggested intermediate outcomes (e.g., sense of belonging).
* *Relevance/impact of the project (20%)*
  + Relevance of the intervention that the ToC would be developed for.
  + The HEP’s plan to use and implement the ToC beyond the lifecycle of this project.
* Team (*40*%)
  + The relevant experience of the project team.
  + The team’s commitment to evidence-informed practice.
  + The team’s approach to transparency and accountability.

**Expression of Interest Form**

Please note that hyperlinks to web-based information will not be accepted, and, if included, will not be evaluated.

| **Data Protection Notice** | Please read TASO’s [Data Protection Notice](https://taso.org.uk/taso-privacy-notice/) before submitting your application. |
| --- | --- |
| **Data Protection Notice** | Do you confirm that you have read and understood the [Data Protection Notice](https://taso.org.uk/taso-privacy-notice/)?  Yes  No |
| **Organisation/**  **provider name** |  |
| **Contact name** |  |
| **Contact email** |  |
| **Contact telephone** |  |
| **Where did you hear about this open call?** |  |
| **SECTION A: Intervention/activity**  *Please provide details on the intervention/activity that you would like to develop the ToC for:*   * *Intervention name/description* * *How the intervention maps onto the typology of approaches (*[*see Table 1*](#bookmark=id.exb9ipaiy026)*) to address the ethnicity degree awarding gap* * *Background information of how the intervention has been designed/delivered previously* * *How the intervention aims to reduce the ethnicity degree awarding gap including any suggested intermediate outcomes (e.g., sense of belonging)* * *Target group (broadly addressing the ethnicity degree awarding gap or specific marginalised ethnic groups)*   *[700 words max]* | |
|  | |
| **SECTION B: Relevance/impact**  *Please provide details on:*   * *The relevance of the intervention/activity for your provider and the wider sector* * *Future plans for use/implementation of the ToC*   *[500 words max]* | |
|  | |
| **SECTION C: Team**  *Please provide details of the team who will be involved in delivering / supporting the development of the TOC:*   * *Details of key staff who will be involved with the ToC development and working with the evaluation panel member* * *Relevant knowledge and skills (of both the topic area and evaluation)* * *The team’s commitment to evidence-informed practice* * *The team’s approach to transparency and accountability when working with independent evaluators* * *Capacity to meet key responsibilities in* [*Table 2*](#bookmark=id.i5gxoba75ncp)   *[500 words max]* | |
|  | |

*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 of the Contract, 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.