**Invitation to tender:**

**A typology on approaches to reducing the race degree awarding gap in higher education**

29 September 2022

**Introduction**

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, gain a good degree and progress into further study or employment.

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 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.

**Background to the project**

The Office for Students (OfS) and the HE sector generally has committed to tackling the persistent race degree awarding gap.[[1]](#footnote-0) This gap refers to the significant difference in the proportions of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students being awarded a first or upper-second class undergraduate degree when compared to White students. However, there is relatively little evidence on what works in reducing this gap. TASO recently commissioned an evaluation of two curriculum reform projects to investigate whether and how diversified curricula address the degree awarding gap experienced by BAME students. The work also aimed to understand whether reforming the curriculum improves the experience of students from BAME backgrounds in terms of their engagement with module content and satisfaction with the module:

1. Intervention 1 was designed to include more BAME perspectives in the formal curriculum, such as through the implementation of more diverse and inclusive reading lists, and the representation of BAME people in imagery.
2. Intervention 2 was a toolkit with guidance on how staff could implement changes to their curriculum, to make module content, assessment and practice more racially inclusive and relatable for all students. It was also designed to help staff improve/develop their racial literacy irrespective of the teacher’s familiarity with decolonising work.

The impact of both interventions was tested through a matched difference-in-differences approach, comparing student attainment in reformed versus comparator modules. An implementation and process evaluation was also conducted.

We will be publishing the results of the evaluation in late October.

**Project background and scope**

Since TASO commissioned this work there have been a number of events, both globally and nationally, which have heightened awareness of racial inequality in HE and prompted further action in this area.

The purpose of this project is to produce a typology which maps the different approaches and interventions being undertaken by HE providers (HEPs) to reduce the race degree awarding gap, enabling us to better understand:

* The current landscape in terms of approaches to closing the race degree awarding gap;
* The specific interventions that HEPs are currently delivering to reduce the race degree awarding gap;
* Approaches to evaluation, including whether there is a Theory of Change to link interventions with reducing the degree awarding gap, the extent to which interventions have been evaluated, and the quality of this evaluation.

*Interventions:*

The interventions may include, but are not limited to:

* Assessment practices
* Teaching and learning
* Staff/student awareness and education
* Mentoring/tutoring schemes
* BAME student advocates
* Diversity of staff members
* Curriculum reform

*Methodology:*We expect the commissioned supplier to conduct thorough desk-based research on the different approaches to tackling the race degree awarding gap within HEPs, including via:

* Access and Participation Plans (APPs);
* Submissions and plans made in relation to the Race Equality Charter[[2]](#footnote-1)/Athena Swan Charter (intersectionality of gender and race)[[3]](#footnote-2);
* Commitments to closing the race degree awarding gap on HEP websites.

To support the findings from the desk-based research, this project will also involve consultation with key stakeholders in the HE sector to help further understand:

* Interventions implemented that aim to address the race degree awarding gap;
* How institutions measure (or plan to measure) outcomes and impact, including any intermediate outcomes alongside the degree awarding gap;
* Barriers that HEPs (and staff) may face in engaging effectively with approaches to reduce the race degree awarding gap.

TASO expects the supplier to engage a wide range of HEPs from across the sector, such as FE colleges, small and specialist providers, pre- and post-92 universities, and research-intensive universities.

*Considerations:*

When conducting this work, it will be important for the supplier to consider:

* A focus on the race degree awarding gap as the primary outcome, however, we are also keen to understand the intermediate outcomes that HEPs track and theorise are linked to degree awarding (e.g. retention, belonging, satisfaction);
* Disaggregation of individual interventions/initiatives which make up broader institutional approaches to closing race degree awarding gaps;
* Strategic approaches with institutional top-down buy-in versus grassroot initiatives being driven by individual champions;
* Approaches in different disciplines/faculties within HEPs;

**Requirements**

**Project deliverables**

1. An interim update to TASO on project progress, including an overview of interventions and approaches, and an outline of the final report.
2. A final report combining both elements of the project. This report should include:

* Executive Summary – outlining the key findings from the report.
* Introduction – outlining the format and content of the report.
* Methodology:
  + Outlining the scope of the desk-based research; approach used to identify interventions, and any methodological limitations.
  + Outlining the format and methodology used for the consultation.
* Findings:
  + A typology which maps the current interventions/approaches being implemented to close the race degree awarding gap;
  + Approaches to evaluation of interventions including a focus on intermediate outcomes;
  + Key considerations in terms of delivering and evaluating approaches effectively;
* Discussion of findings
* Conclusion – summarising the findings and providing recommendations.
* Harvard style references provided for any evidence cited.

The report will be provided in a format which is ready for external publication. A comprehensive outline of publication requirements will be distributed to the successful supplier, including our developed glossary of terms.

**Project timeline**

| **Activity** | **Nov** | **Dec** | **Jan** | **Feb** | **Mar** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Inception meeting & kick-off |  |  |  |  |  |
| Conduct desk-based research |  |  |  |  |  |
| Conduct consultation |  |  |  |  |  |
| Bi-weekly catch-ups with TASO |  |  |  |  |  |
| Present progress to TASO (interim report) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Carry out any amendments |  |  |  |  |  |
| Final report due |  |  |  |  |  |

**Project implementation**

The supplier will be responsible for end-to-end project management, including:

* Risk management.
* Ensuring that the project is effectively managed in a timely way, with advance notice of any challenges in delivering the project to the timeline specified.
* Ensuring that the final report fulfils the methodological and pre-specified criteria in the tender document, and providing suitable quality assurance.
* Presenting a draft final report to, and collecting feedback from, TASO’s advisory groups.
* Reporting to, and engaging with, the TASO team. This will include bi-weekly catch-ups and a mid-point presentation on project progress.

In addition to financial support, TASO will:

* Provide advice throughout the project where required.
* Meet (virtually for the foreseeable future) with the contractor as per the project timeline to offer insight and feedback on the project progress.

**Ethics and data protection**

The supplier will be responsible for seeking ethics approval (if necessary) and ensuring data protection standards are met.

**Funding**

This project is funded by the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO).

**The budget for both the desk-based research and consultation is £30,000 (inclusive of VAT).**

Responses to this invitation to tender should include accurate pricing, inclusive of expenses and VAT. Please note that assessment of responses to this tender invitation will be on perceived quality of service and demonstrable ability to meet the brief, rather than the lowest cost. However, value for money is a selection criterion.

**Application and timelines**

* We invite you to submit an application using the form below.
* Please save the form using the name of your organisation and add the project title to the subject line.
* Submit the completed form to *research@taso.org.uk* by **midday** **21st October.**
* We anticipate the project will start **early November** with final reporting at the end of **March 2023.**

| Call for applications opens | 29th September |
| --- | --- |
| Deadline for submitting questions | 14th October |
| Deadline for applications | 21st October |
| Clarification/negotiation with preferred suppliers and contracts signed | 31st October |
| Project kick off | 7th November |

**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):

* *The team (40%)*
  + The relevant experience of the project team.
  + Evidence of success on similar projects.
* *The application (40%)*
  + How well the application answers the brief.
  + How well it articulates the ability of the team to deliver all requirements and deliverables.
  + How well it articulates the ability of the team to be responsive and flexible in delivering the brief.
* *Budget (20%)*
  + Feasibility based on the budget submitted.
  + Value for money.
  + Financial stability and long-term viability of the organisation, including detail of the organisation’s last set of accounts and current year budget. Please note this criterion will receive a binary score of pass/fail and if not met the application will not be considered further.

**Expression of Interest Form**

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

| **Lead organisation** |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Contact name** |  |
| **Contact email** |  |
| **Contact telephone** |  |
| **Where did you hear about this ITT?** |  |
| **SECTION A: Relevant experience**  *Please provide details of the team who would be involved in this project. Describe their proposed roles and how their skills and experience are relevant to delivering the work.*  *[500 words max]* | |
|  | |
| **SECTION B: Meeting the project brief**  *Please provide an overview of how you would meet the project brief. Please cover:*   * *How you would approach each part of the project* * *A brief summary of key challenges/risks and you would address them* * *A project timeline*   *[2000 words max (but please do not feel you need to meet this limit)]* | |
|  | |
| **SECTION C: Project budget**  *You may apply for funding to the value of £30,000 incl. VAT to deliver this project. Please provide a budget showing how you propose to use the funding provided.* | |
|  | |
| **SECTION D: 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.*** | |
|  | |

**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. 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.

1. OfS (2019), p. 20: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/92d85140-2719-4af0-85c9-b28ee1038c5e/regulatory\_notice\_1\_access\_and\_participation\_plans.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/race-equality-charter> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan-charter> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)